

Play Has Been Replaced by Play Dates

Ever wonder what it must have been like to be a kid in the 1930s, '40s, or '50s? The kids from those eras were always coming up with some new creative show or form of play. Life was simple, but they used their imaginations and unstructured freedom to have a whole lot of fun.

They never would have survived a modern play date – particularly the ones I just read about in my [local newspaper](#).

“To combat the decline in children’s freedom to play and explore on their own, and to counteract the effects of being overscheduled and inundated with electronics and media, the play date has been adopted as an accepted – and expected – part of childhood.

Childhood get-togethers are a whole lot more complicated today thanks to busier schedules, less connected neighborhoods, increased fear of our children’s safety and technology. ...[M]any parents call the modern play date a ‘necessary evil.’”

Apparently, play dates today are like the birthday parties of yester-year: home affairs with adult-directed activities and a kid-friendly menu. And in some cases they are even more elaborate, as is the case in NYC, where “wealthy parents hire ‘experts’ for \$400 an hour to organize play dates for their children.”

Sure, organized parties are fun sometimes, but do we really think our children are going to be happier and better adjusted if we control and schedule every aspect of their lives, even their playtime?

Going off my own experience I would have to say no. Some of my happiest playtime memories stem from the impromptu get-togethers my sister and I had with our neighbor girl. We never would have played with such creative abandon (i.e. runaway orphans living in a pine tree fort, Olympic gymnasts jumping on the picnic table balance beam, or editors creating our own newspapers in the attic) if we had an adult peering over our shoulders and being the brain behind our playtime.

Judging from the article on play dates, it seems that experts agree with me:

*“‘Overscheduling or micromanaging your child’s free time may not be in his or her best interest. **There is a risk that if all play activities are orchestrated by parents, self-reliance and creativity could suffer,**’ said Dr. Thomas Stealey, a pediatrician at Metropolitan Pediatrics in Edina. ‘We are losing the ability to truly relax. When kids have simple, unorganized play, they have a better chance to relax and enjoy.’”*

[Image Credit](#)