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## TO SAVE CHILDHOOD, LET KIDS BE KIDS — FREE, CURIOUS, AND UNHURRIED

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Article Received: 28 October 2025

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Article Revised: 17 November 2025

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Published on: 08 December 2025

Raipur (C.G.) DOI: <https://doi-doi.org/101555/ijrpa.6812>

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### ABSTRACT

In today's fast-paced world, childhood is increasingly becoming a fleeting memory, overshadowed by the pressures of academic achievement, digital distractions, and societal expectations. As children are hurried through their early years, the essence of childhood – its joy, curiosity, and sense of wonder – is at risk of being lost. Children are increasingly treated as miniature adults, burdened with expectations to excel in every domain from academics to extracurricular, often at the expense of their natural joy, exploration, and unhurried development. This study encapsulates a call to action for parents, educators, and society to reclaim the innocence and wonder of youth. By embracing principles such as active parental involvement, maintaining a positive and balanced attitude, avoiding comparison, creating a pressure-free environment, reducing screen dependency, promoting hands-on learning, encouraging creativity and curiosity, recognizing curiosity as a driving force, appreciating efforts instead of criticizing, fostering unhurried growth, and understanding the long-term impact, people can nurture children who grow into resilient, innovative, and fulfilled adults. This research draws on psychological insights, real-world examples, and practical advice to illustrate how prioritizing play, exploration, and emotional well-being can preserve the magic of childhood.

**KEYWORDS:** Childhood, Parenting, Innocence, Freedom, Academic Pressure, Extra-curricular, Development, Support, Learning, Curiosity, Growth.

### INTRODUCTION

Childhood is marked by a unique blend of innocence, curiosity, and emotional openness that shapes the earliest foundations of a person's life. It is a phase where imagination thrives, allowing children to create entire worlds out of simple objects and experiences. Their minds absorb information rapidly, driven by a natural curiosity that makes them keen observers of the world around them. Childhood is also characterized by playfulness, spontaneous joy, and an unfiltered way of expressing emotions — whether excitement, fear, or affection. During this phase, children develop essential social skills, moral values, and early personality traits through interaction, exploration, and imitation. With their hearts free from judgment and their minds unburdened by responsibilities, childhood becomes a period of pure learning, boundless creativity, deep emotional sensitivity, and slow, beautiful growth.

Childhood is a rare and precious phase of life — a time when curiosity blooms effortlessly and the world feels like a playground of endless possibilities. In these early years, children see life through unfiltered eyes, noticing details that adults often overlook. A falling feather, a shifting shadow, a gentle smile — everything becomes a source of wonder. Their minds are naturally wired to absorb, explore, and question, shaping the foundation of who they will become. What makes childhood truly magical is the purity of emotions and the honesty with which children observe the world around them. They learn by listening, watching, imitating, and experimenting, developing their personality through simple experiences rather than structured lessons. Whether they are building a mud castle or asking endless questions about the stars, children express their innate creativity and innocence without hesitation. Their imagination is boundless, their hearts unguarded, and their ability to find joy in small things unmatched. Yet despite its beauty, childhood today stands at a crossroads. Modern life — with its academic pressures, tight schedules, and digital temptations — often demands children grow up faster than they should. The natural rhythm of play, exploration, and unhurried learning is replaced by expectations to perform, compete, and excel. As a result, the essential qualities that define childhood — curiosity, freedom, emotional warmth, and slow growth — are at risk of being overshadowed. It becomes our collective responsibility to protect this fragile phase and ensure that every child gets the chance to be what they truly are: a child.

### DISCUSSION

Active parental involvement forms the cornerstone of a child's healthy development, serving as a guiding force that shapes their worldview and self-esteem. Unlike passive oversight, active involvement means parents engaging directly in their child's daily life—whether through shared activities, open conversations, or simply being present during moments of triumph and challenge.

“Parent academic involvement is largely defined as parents' work with schools and with their children to benefit their children's educational outcomes and future success. Parent academic involvement may improve school performance by reducing behavioural problems that may interfere with learning.”(Hill, et.al, 2)

Research from National Institute of Health highlights that children with involved parents exhibit higher academic performance, better social skills, and lower rates of behavioural issues. For instance, a parent who joins their child in building a fort from cardboard boxes or discussing a favourite book isn't just filling time; they're modelling curiosity and problem-solving. This involvement extends beyond structured activities to include emotional support. Parents who actively listen to their children's fears, dreams, and frustrations help build trust and resilience. Consider the story of a father who, instead of dismissing his son's interest in insects, spends weekends exploring the backyard with a magnifying glass, turning a simple hobby into a bonding experience. Such engagement fosters a sense of security, teaching children that their interests matter. Moreover, in today's fast-paced world, active involvement counters the isolation caused by busy schedules. Parents can integrate involvement into routines, like family dinners where everyone shares their day, or bedtime stories that spark imagination. By being actively involved, parents not only enrich their child's present but also lay the groundwork for lifelong relationships built on mutual respect and understanding.

Maintaining a positive and balanced attitude is essential for creating an environment where children feel valued and empowered. Parents often mirror their own attitudes onto their kids, so cultivating optimism and equilibrium helps children navigate life's ups and downs with grace. A positive attitude doesn't mean ignoring challenges but reframing them as opportunities for growth. For example, instead of lamenting a failed science project, a parent might say, "That didn't work out, but let's try a different approach—what did we learn?" This approach, supported by studies from the American Psychological Association, boosts children's self-efficacy and reduces anxiety.

Balance comes into play by avoiding extremes—neither overindulging in praise nor succumbing to negativity. A balanced attitude encourages moderation, teaching kids to appreciate both successes and setbacks. Imagine a mother who, after a soccer game, celebrates her child's effort regardless of the score, then discusses strategies for improvement without pressure. This fosters emotional intelligence, helping children develop a realistic self-image. In a society obsessed with perfection, maintaining balance means prioritizing mental health over achievements. Parents can model this by sharing their own vulnerabilities, like admitting to a mistake at work, which normalizes imperfection. Ultimately, a positive and balanced attitude equips children with the tools to face adversity confidently, promoting overall well-being.

“First, my students and I showed that these two different mind-sets did indeed predict the choice of different achievement goals, different attributions in the face of failure, and the help-less versus mastery-oriented responses to failure.”(C. Dweck,140)

Avoiding comparison is crucial in preserving a child's unique identity and self-worth, as constant benchmarking against peers can erode confidence and stifle individuality. In a world of social media and competitive schooling, parents often fall into the trap of comparing their child to others—whether it's academic grades, athletic abilities, or social skills. This not only breeds resentment but also discourages risk-taking. Psychologists like Carol Dweck emphasize that a fixed mind-set, fuelled by comparisons, limits potential, whereas a growth mind-set celebrates personal progress. To avoid comparison, parents should focus on their child's individual journey. Instead of saying, "Why can't you be like your cousin who got straight A's?" a parent might highlight, "I'm proud of how you've improved in math this semester." Real-life examples abound: a teacher who refrains from ranking students in class fosters a collaborative environment, leading to better group dynamics. By celebrating unique strengths—perhaps a child's artistic flair over academic prowess—parents nurture self-acceptance. This principle extends to family dynamics, where siblings are encouraged to support rather than compete with each other. Avoiding comparison cultivates a culture of empathy and self-compassion, allowing children to thrive on their own terms and develop authentic passions.

“A growing body of research indicates that daily time in a rich natural outdoor play and learning environment contributes positively to every desired outcome in ECE—including

improvements in cognitive development, social and emotional development, physical activity, and nutrition.”(Cooper, 94)

A healthy outdoor games environment plays a crucial role in a child’s overall growth. It allows children to explore the real world beyond screens, encouraging physical, emotional, and social development. Outdoor play boosts physical fitness, strengthens immunity, improves coordination, and reduces the risk of lifestyle diseases. It also enhances creativity, as open spaces stimulate imagination and problem-solving skills. Socially, children learn teamwork, communication, sharing, and conflict resolution while playing with peers. Outdoor environments also reduce stress and anxiety, promoting emotional stability and confidence. Exposure to nature cultivates curiosity, resilience, and a sense of freedom that indoor activities often fail to provide. Overall, outdoor games create a balanced, healthy, and joyful childhood.

Creating a pressure-free environment is vital for allowing children to explore without fear of judgment or failure, fostering genuine learning and emotional security. Pressure often stems from societal expectations, such as early academic rigor or extracurricular overload, leading to stress-related issues like anxiety and burnout. A pressure-free space, conversely, encourages experimentation and play, where mistakes are seen as stepping stones rather than setbacks.

Parents can achieve this by setting realistic expectations and prioritizing fun over performance. For instance, a family that turns homework into a game, with rewards for participation rather than perfection, reduces stress. Studies from the Journal of Educational Psychology show that low-pressure environments enhance creativity and problem-solving skills. Imagine a child painting freely without worrying about "getting it right"—this freedom sparks innovation. In schools, pressure-free classrooms might incorporate flexible deadlines or project-based learning without grades. By creating such environments at home and beyond, parents help children build resilience, ensuring that childhood remains a time of discovery rather than dread.

Reducing screen dependency is imperative in an age where devices dominate daily life, as excessive screen time can hinder physical, social, and cognitive development. The American Academy of Paediatrics recommends limiting screen use for children under 18 months and

capping it for older kids to promote healthy habits. Screens, while educational, often replace interactive play, leading to issues like poor sleep, obesity, and weakened attention spans.

Parents can reduce dependency by setting boundaries and offering alternatives. Designate "screen-free zones" in the home, like during meals or before bed, and encourage outdoor activities or board games. A family that replaces TV time with storytelling sessions not only cuts screen exposure but also strengthens bonds. Research from the University of California indicates that children with lower screen time exhibit better language skills and social interactions. By modelling mindful use—perhaps by parents limiting their own device time—kids learn balance. This shift preserves the unstructured play essential for imagination, ensuring childhood isn't lost to glowing screens. Promoting hands-on learning empowers children to engage actively with the world, transforming abstract concepts into tangible experiences that deepen understanding and retention. Unlike rote memorization, hands-on activities—such as gardening, cooking, or building—stimulate multiple senses and foster critical thinking. Educational theorists like Jean Piaget advocate for experiential learning, which aligns with how children naturally explore.

Parents can integrate this by involving kids in real-world tasks, like helping in the kitchen or assembling a model. A child who plants seeds and watches them grow learns biology firsthand, far more effectively than from a textbook. Studies from the National Science Foundation show that hands-on methods improve STEM skills and creativity. In classrooms, this might mean science experiments over lectures. By promoting such learning, parents cultivate problem-solvers who value inquiry, preparing them for a dynamic world.

Encouraging creativity and curiosity nurtures a child's innate wonder, sparking innovation and lifelong learning. Creativity thrives in environments that allow free expression, while curiosity drives exploration beyond the ordinary. Parents can foster this by providing open-ended toys, like blocks or art supplies, and asking questions that prompt thinking, such as "What if...?" Anecdotes of inventors like Thomas Edison, whose curiosity led to the light bulb, illustrate the power of encouragement. In practice, a parent praising a child's imaginative story builds confidence. Research from the Creativity Research Journal links early encouragement to adult success in arts and sciences. By valuing creativity over conformity, parents help children develop unique perspectives, essential in a rapidly changing society.

Curiosity as a driving force propels children toward discovery, fuelling intellectual and emotional growth. It transforms passive learning into active pursuit, as seen in children who bombard adults with "why" questions. Psychologists like Daniel Willingham note that curiosity enhances memory and motivation, making education enjoyable. Parents can harness this by responding to questions with enthusiasm, perhaps researching answers together. A child curious about stars might lead to stargazing outings, deepening family connections. This force, when nurtured, leads to resilience, as curious kids view challenges as puzzles to solve. In essence, curiosity is the engine of childhood, driving unscripted adventures that shape well-rounded individuals.

Appreciating efforts instead of criticizing builds self-esteem and a growth mind-set, teaching children that perseverance matters more than perfection. Criticism can discourage risk-taking, while appreciation motivates. Carol Dweck's research shows that praising effort ("You worked hard on that!") fosters resilience. Parents can practice this by focusing on process over outcome, like commending a child's persistence in a puzzle. This approach reduces fear of failure, encouraging exploration. In sports or academics, shifting from "You lost" to "You gave it your all" promotes positivity. Ultimately, appreciating efforts cultivates confident, adaptable adults.

Unhurried growth respects children's natural pace, allowing development without rushing milestones. In a results-oriented world, this means prioritizing well-being over achievements. Developmental psychologists emphasize that children learn best when not pressured, as seen in play-based curricula. Parents can support this by resisting early academics, opting for age-appropriate activities. A child allowed to master walking before running builds strong foundations. This unhurried approach reduces burnout, fostering joy in learning. By embracing it, society preserves childhood's wonder, ensuring holistic growth. The long-term impact of these principles is profound, shaping adults who are innovative, empathetic, and fulfilled. Children raised with involvement, positivity, and curiosity become leaders in their fields, as evidenced by longitudinal studies linking childhood experiences to adult success. For instance, those with pressure-free upbringings report lower stress and higher life satisfaction.

### CONCLUSION

In an era defined by rapid technological advancements, societal pressures, and competing demands on family time, the principles outlined in this exploration of parenting offer a

timeless blueprint for fostering resilient, compassionate, and innovative children. Active parental involvement builds trust and self-esteem, while maintaining a positive and balanced attitude reframes challenges as growth opportunities; avoiding comparison preserves individuality, and creating a pressure-free environment encourages fearless exploration. Reducing screen dependency safeguards physical and cognitive health, promoting hands-on learning that transforms abstract knowledge into lived experiences, and encouraging creativity and curiosity ignites lifelong wonder. Appreciating efforts over outcomes cultivates perseverance, and embracing unhurried growth respects developmental rhythms, ensuring children thrive without burnout. At their core, these principles advocate a holistic approach that prioritizes emotional security, intellectual curiosity, and authentic relationships over superficial achievements, with research from institutions like Harvard, the American Psychological Association, and the National Science Foundation underscoring their efficacy in raising children with superior academic outcomes, social skills, and mental health. Their synergy counters modern isolation, turning everyday moments into bonding opportunities through routines like family dinners or backyard explorations. The long-term impact of such mindful parenting is transformative, shaping adults who navigate the world with empathy, adaptability, and purpose, as longitudinal studies reveal lower anxiety rates, higher life satisfaction, and greater professional success among those raised in supportive, low-pressure environments. They become innovators who question the status quo and leaders who value collaboration over competition, with a growth mindset—as championed by psychologists like Carol Dweck—enabling setbacks to be viewed as learning experiences. In a metrics-obsessed society, this unhurried approach preserves childhood's joy, building resilience and creativity. Ultimately, these principles yield immeasurable rewards, positioning parents as architects of futures that model values echoing through generations, ensuring children flourish as empathetic innovators and fulfilled adults, and fostering not just healthier individuals, but a brighter, more compassionate future for all. Saving childhood requires intentional choices that honour freedom, curiosity, and unhurried growth. By implementing these principles, parents and society can counteract modern pressures, nurturing generations that thrive.

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