

Rough-and-tumble play (1-6 years)

What is rough-and-tumble play?

Rough-and-tumble play is when children do things like climb over each other, wrestle, roll around and even pretend to fight. It is usually pretty high energy – chasing, wrestling, spinning and play fighting. The key thing is that everyone is having fun. Sometimes children can get hurt, but no-one is actually trying to hurt anyone else.

Why is rough-and-tumble play important?

Rough-and-tumble play helps children develop many skills. For example, it helps young children:

- . test and practice physical skills.
- . learn about their bodies, including how strong they are.
- . take some safe risks.
- . explore their changing positions in space.
- . test and practice social skills – for example, as they play roles, take turns and find out what other children will and won't let them do.

Rough-and-tumble play and fighting: what's the difference?

You might worry that your child is being aggressive, but you can usually tell rough-and-tumble play or play fighting from the real thing.

In rough play, children smile and laugh. You might see excitement and pleasure on their faces. No-one gets bullied, hurt or forced to do anything. Once children are finished with rough-and-tumble play, they keep playing together.

If you see frowning, crying, fear or anger, it isn't play. And children who are really fighting move away from each other once the fight is over.

Rough play can sometimes lead to real fighting, so try to set some rules about what is and isn't OK during play. You can get children involved in working out what the rules should be.

Tips to help your child rough-and-tumble play

Rough-and-tumble play can start early as long as it is gentle, to avoid any accidental injury. Never shake your baby or child, because it can cause bleeding inside the brain and permanent brain damage.

Most children will get involved in rough-and-tumble play occasionally. All you need to do is give your child the opportunity to play with other children and monitor them so you can intervene if the play gets out of hand.

Try these ideas for active play at various ages:

- . **Babies** enjoy exciting movement, as long as they feel safe. Try bouncing them gently on your knees or lifting them slowly into the air.
- . **Toddlers** love chasing, spinning around and dancing. This kind of active play works best when children are wide awake and not expected to go to bed or sit quietly any time soon.
- . **Primary school children** are the biggest rough-and-tumblers. Wrestling or play fighting is often part of their imaginary games. It is a good idea to make sure everybody knows to stop if it is no longer fun.



Recommended Reads by the National Library Board

Recommended Reads

- [Balanced and barefoot: how unrestricted outdoor play makes for strong, confident, and capable children](#)
- [It's ok to go up the slide: renegade rules for raising confident and creative kids](#)
- [The fitness fun busy book](#)