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The National Afterschool Association and The Genius of Play™ are excited to welcome you to the Play Ambassadors Program, a unique leadership opportunity designed for select NAA members to share the message about the value of play with other afterschool professionals, families and communities.

As a Play Ambassador, you will receive access to the latest research, expert tips, and more about how play helps youth develop social, emotional, cognitive, physical, communicative and creative skills used throughout their lives. You have been chosen to help us share the information, educate others and influence afterschool programs, communities and kids through play!

**AS A GENIUS OF PLAY AMBASSADOR, YOU WILL BE REQUIRED TO:**

1. host three events
2. post to social media
3. write a reflection report of your Ambassador year

You will find details on these requirements throughout the kit.
MISSION STATEMENTS

THE GENIUS OF PLAY MISSION

*The Genius of Play* is a movement to raise awareness of play’s developmental benefits and encourage families to play more.

The Genius of Play’s website and social media channels provide families with the information and inspiration they need to make play an important part of their child’s day. They help parents, teachers, and caregivers to keep playtime fun and fresh!

The Genius of Play’s resources include facts, tips, play ideas, expert advice and more on how toys and play can help kids build confidence, creativity, critical thinking and other skills that will serve them throughout their lives.

THE NATIONAL AFTERSCHOOL ASSOCIATION MISSION

The National AfterSchool Association is the voice of the afterschool profession. We are the national membership organization for professionals who work with and on behalf of children and youth during out-of-school time.

NAA’s mission is to promote development, provide education and encourage advocacy for the out-of-school-time community to further the afterschool profession.

We exist to inspire, connect and equip afterschool professionals.
WHY DO WE NEED TO SPREAD THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY?
Today’s kids play 8 hours less per week than the kids two decades ago.

SOME ALARMING STATS ON WHAT HAPPENS WHEN KIDS ARE DEPRIVED OF THEIR PLAYTIME...

- Lower academic performance
- Higher incidence of behavioral problems
- Too much time in front of a screen
- Higher levels of stress
- Higher levels of obesity
- Less mental agility
- Lower ability to cope
- Missing opportunities to learn how to share and be a team player

*The Genius of Play encourages Play Ambassadors to use the information above in presentations during Ambassador events.*
WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF INCORPORATING PLAY INTO A CHILD’S DAY?

• Children with access to a variety of toys were found to reach higher levels of intellectual achievement, regardless of a child’s gender, race or socio-economic status.

• Young children that played with building bricks had significantly higher language scores 6 month later, compared to a control group.

• 4 and 6-year old kids who were asked to perform boring tasks while dressed up as a superhero stayed on task longer.

• The more time children spend talking during pretend and imaginary play, the stronger their vocabulary is later in life.

• A study showed that 3rd graders who have 15+ minutes of recess every day behaved better in school than those with less.

HUNGRY FOR MORE RESEARCH?
Get shareable facts & infographics, play research and more at TheGeniusofPlay.org/assets.

*The Genius of Play encourages Play Ambassadors to use the information above in presentations during Ambassador events.*
Although playing may seem simple, there are highly sophisticated scientific and evolutionary processes taking place as a result. **When play happens, significant neurological changes occur—creating new pathways within the brain.**

The absence of play may lead to the inability to properly cope with pain, fear, anxiety, and to cooperate with others. It may also cause a general lack of confidence.

**Toys are the tools of play.** Toys can enhance play value, guide learning, and engage a child in a stimulating, active way.

The Genius of Play has identified **6 KEY BENEFITS OF PLAY** that are crucial to healthy child development:

- Improve Cognitive Abilities
- Hone Communication Skills
- Increase Creativity
- Process & Express Emotions
- Develop Physical Skills
- Enhance Social Skills

*The Genius of Play encourages Play Ambassadors to use the information above in presentations during Ambassador events.*
Through play, children **learn and practice a host of fundamental skills** they need for optimal development.

**Recess time is important** in many ways. (Schools with more recess show stronger academic performance.)

Children need a “**balanced diet of play.**” The mix of play—which should include active, free, imaginative, team, game, solitary, passive play and more—helps to build a well-rounded child.

Screen time can complement play if done correctly... It’s important to point out that tech toys play a role in the well-rounded development of children and teach many important concepts and skills. **Finding a balance between online and offline play is key.**

No matter how much time you can spare—5 minutes, 10 or 15, play is important to fit in every day. Facilitating free, open, unstructured play is a parent’s duty. They should provide kids with the time, space, and implements—then get totally out of the way.

The **TheGeniusofPlay.org** is a resource that everyone can use to get information on the **benefits of play, expert tips on playtime**, and hundreds of free, fun and simple play ideas.

*The Genius of Play encourages Play Ambassadors to use the information above in presentations during Ambassador events.*
COMMUNITY PLAY EVENT

Audience:
Families

Goal of the event:
To host a playdate for kids and their families.

Why we need it:
Being playful, whether for a kid, a teen, or an adult, can involve any number of activities that allow to relax, laugh, de-stress, use imagination, learn new concepts, and build shared experiences and memories with friends and loved ones.

Tips for success:
• Be sure to promote your community play event and get RSVP’s so you have enough playthings for all!
• Use a variety of types of play at the event, whether it be jump ropes, coloring sheets, puppets or board games, so kids can socialize and play in many different ways.
• Distribute the Genius of Play handout and play idea sheet at your community play event so everyone remembers to keep playing when the event ends.

EVENTS

FLAG IN A SNOW STACK
Tie a white piece of fabric to the end of a stick. Players can hide the “flag” within the agreed upon boundaries. Once it is well hidden, the search is on! Keep track of how long it takes from the group to find it. Whoever hid the flag that was the hardest to find wins!

FREEZE TAG
A winterized version of tag. One player is chosen to be the “freezer” and two others are named “melters.” Players must freeze in place when they are tagged by the freezer. The melters can unfreeze people by tagging them. Melters can’t be frozen.

JUMPING SNOW HURDLES
Build several mounds of snow to make an obstacle course of hurdles that you can jump over while you play follow the leader! The higher you build the hurdles, the more challenging the game gets.

SNOW PAINTING
Give your kids spray bottles filled with water tinted with food coloring, and let them loose to paint the “white canvas” outside!

TIC-TAC-SNOW
Trace the tic-tac-toe board in the snow, and use crisscrossed sticks and pinecones as game pieces!

Ambassadors must send all participant email addresses from the event to info@thegeniusofplay.org no later than three days after the event.

*From Spoonful.com

*From HealthUnit.com
COMMUNITY SEMINAR FOR ADULTS

**Audience:**
Parents, Caregivers

**Goal of the event:**
To educate caregivers about the importance of playtime for child development.

**Why we need it:**
Today's kids play 8 hours less per week than the kids two decades ago. This seminar is an important tool to remind adults who care for children of the necessity to give kids the opportunity to play.

**Tips for success:**

- During the seminar, let adults know about the facts and stats about play.
- Distribute the Genius of Play handout and play idea sheet at your seminar.
- Point the audience to TheGeniusofPlay.org so they can get expert tips and ideas on how to play with the children in their lives.

Ambassadors must send all participant email addresses from the event to info@thegeniusofplay.org no later than three days after the event.

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**EVENTS**

- Kids who play with literacy materials have better language skills in kindergarten.
- Pretend play is key for kids to develop a sense of curiosity and learn how to respond in different situations.
- An IBM survey says CEOs value employees with creativity, which is fostered via childhood play.
- Studies show make-believe games help kids learn to self-regulate their emotions.
- Active kids are more likely to be active adults, lowering the risk of heart disease.
- Third graders who have 15–30 minutes of recess a day are better behaved in school.

Learn More About The Benefits of Play at THEGENIUSOFPLAY.ORG
MEETING FOR AFTERSCHOOL FAMILIES

Audience:
Parents, Caregivers

Goal of the event:
To educate families about the importance of playtime for child development.

Why we need it:
Families want to spend quality time with their children, and children want their parents to play with them, but we know families are finding it difficult to find time.

Tips for success:
• At this meeting, remind parents of the importance of playtime and the benefits that it provides for children.

• Make sure to have playthings at the meeting for the kids in the room to be able to enjoy as the parents learn.

• Ending the meeting with a fun play game for the whole group is an enlightening way to get everyone in the room to laugh and remember to play.

• Don’t forget to stress that TheGeniusofPlay.org is a website full of information to encourage and help guide families to play. The website includes play tips and ideas, expert advice, cool toy picks, and much more.

Ambassadors must send all participant email addresses from the event to info@thegeniusofplay.org no later than three days after the event.
WORKSHOP FOR COLLEAGUES

Audience:
Afterschool Professionals, Teachers & other School Staff

Goal of the event:
To educate colleagues about your Play Ambassadorship and provide them with resources to spread the information about the importance of play.

Why we need it:
Sharing the message about the value of play with other afterschool professionals and educators cannot be more important!

Tips for success:
• Touching on the facts about the importance of play is a great way to start the workshop.
• Make sure to provide your colleagues with Genius of Play resources, including playful lesson plans, easy play ideas, expert tips and more, so that they can implement playtime within their environments.
• Point the audience to TheGeniusofPlay.org/Teachers for even more resources.

EVENTS

Ambassadors must send all participant email addresses from the event to info@thegeniusofplay.org no later than three days after the event.

EMOJI BINGO
Make telling about your feelings fun by playing Emoji Bingo!

1. Cut out the emoji pictures on the previous page, and make copies. This is what you’ll give to make your Bingo boards.
2. Place the emojis onto old things, like popsicle sticks, or even cut things out from online. You can have your students help and be sure to play the emojis randomly anywhere.
3. Cut a random set of all the emojis. Make everyone guessing which emoji will be next. Then draw the emojis one at a time from the jar.
4. Hand out the emojis to your students, and guess their state or mood. Draw a heart to their left if they are feeling happy.

Examples:
• Love
• Sad
• Worried

NATURE SCIENCE SCAVENGER HUNT
Kids love scavenger hunts. This one comes with a couple of twists because it gets students to focus on nature and the outdoors while also incorporating some play!

• Find a flower, butterfly, or another item from nature
• Look for signs of water
• Look for a small, beautiful object from nature

ACTIVITY #6:
Benefit: Process & Express Emotions
Focus Skills: Social-Emotional Learning

ACTIVITY #5:
Benefit: Develop Physical Skills
Focus Skills: Observation, Natural Science, Recording

Herb’s brain works. Divide your class into groups, and then give them the list below. Upon discovery of each item, invite kids to take a picture of the item using a camera at first. Then they can bring it back to class and describe the picture. For example, if you say pages 3, 4, and 5 then your students will look for pages 3, 4, and 5 in the classroom. If you say pages 3, 4, and 5, they should make their own pages. They then later identify the items they discover, and discuss how they relate to your natural sciences unit. Invite students to share the new concepts they learned and how they relate to the creation, too.
During the course of your Play Ambassadorship, we ask that you actively engage with The Genius of Play’s Facebook and Instagram from your social media channels and highlight the various events that you put on during the year.

To share the importance of play with an even greater audience, Play Ambassadors will be required to post imagery from each event on social media. Each event image should be posted with #GeniusofPlay.

We also ask that you visit TheGeniusofPlay.org/assets and share any 10 images with #GeniusofPlay.

**EXAMPLE POSTS**

**SOCIAL MEDIA**

Not only does it help kids focus, playtime is just more fun inside a tent! Get more play tips at TheGeniusofPlay.org! #GeniusofPlay

By having kids sit all day, are we hindering their potential? Learn about the benefits at TheGeniusofPlay.org! #GeniusofPlay

It’s the one thing that everyone 1-100 benefits from. Learn more at TheGeniusofPlay.org! #GeniusofPlay
Recap the 3 Play Ambassador events that you did during the 2019–2020 school year. For each event, please note what you learned from the experience and what your attendees learned. Recaps should include a copy of the presentation given, handouts distributed, attendee count, and images from the event.

Do you feel that being a Play Ambassador helped encourage others to play more?

If you were to be a 2020–2021 Play Ambassador, what other tools or tips would be useful for you to reach and engage with your community?
READY TO USE TOOLS

PLAY AMBASSADOR BADGE

EVENT INVITATION

PRESENTATION TEMPLATE FOR EVENTS

SUGGESTED PRESENTATION SLIDES

PLAY IDEA HANDOUT

THE GENIUS OF PLAY HANDOUT