

# Rough and Tumble Play of Infants and Toddlers

Rough and tumble play is one of many types of play that children will engage in as toddlers. Children who engage in rough and tumble play typically display acts involving running, climbing, chasing, play fighting, fleeing, wrestling, falling and open-handed slaps<sup>1</sup>.

In infancy, physical touching, laughing, holding and a reflex grip are classified as rough and tumble play while in the toddler years, it involves climbing on furniture and people, tossing toddlers in the air, running, jumping, chasing, wrestling, crashing piles of blocks, lifting friends, kicking balls and throwing everything.

Rough and tumble play is a normal part of childhood and there are many benefits:

- Emotional - enjoyment, fun, love of life; release of energy, tension reduction; self-expression
- Social - cooperation, sharing, turn-taking, conflict resolution, leadership skill development, control of impulses and aggressive behaviour
- Educational - experimentation and risk taking, practice of skills, self-confidence, self-esteem, communication skills, attention regulation and persistence.

Research from Michelle Tannock and Nancy Sileo at the University of Nevada shows rough and tumble play occurs both indoors (38 per cent) and outdoors (62 per cent), is predominantly a peer form of play and varies between boys and girls (more boys engage in rough and tumble play than girls). It mimics intentionally aggressive actions and is more symbolic of aggression rather than being true aggression. Players do not intend to hurt partners.

Originally created for Talk to Your Baby. This research was drawn from a presentation by Michelle Tannock and Nancy Sileo of the University of Nevada at the 2008 Zero to Three Conference.

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<sup>1</sup> Hughes, F. P. (2003). Spontaneous play in the 21st century. *Contemporary perspectives on play in early childhood education*, 21-40.

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