

## Understanding PDF

|                    | <b><i>What is it?</i></b>  | <b><i>Why is it important?</i></b>   |
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| <b>Playtime</b>    | <p>Opportunities for our brains to be active, alert, but non-stressed — moments that are defined by our motivation and mental attitude, not with the overt form of the activity.</p> <p>Generally, play activities embody one or more of the following: (1) Play is self-chosen and self-directed; (2) Play is activity in which means are more valued than ends; (3) Play is done for its own sake; (4) Play has structure, or rules, which either emanate from the minds of the players or already exist; (5) Play is activity that contain potential for improvisation; and (6) Play is imaginative, non-literal, mentally removed in some way from “real” or “serious” life.</p> | <p>Research has found that playing alone or with other children, away from adults, is how children learn to make their own decisions, control their emotions and impulses, see from others’ perspectives, negotiate differences with others, and make friends. In short, play is how children learn to take control of their lives. The ability to play is not only critical to being happy, but also to sustaining social relationships and being a creative, innovative person.</p>  |
| <b>Downtime</b>    | <p>Opportunities for our brains to disengage from active use — moments that allow us to “turn off.”</p>  | <p>Research has found that when individuals are given opportunities for their minds to turn off, the brain enters a resting state. Activities that distract the conscious mind without taxing the brain allow us to process our experiences, consolidate memories, reinforce learning, regulate our attention and emotions, keep us productive and effective in our work and judgment, and more.</p> <p>When provided with consistent opportunities for downtime, students are able to reboot, reenergize, and approach complex problems with greater insight.</p> |
| <b>Family Time</b> | <p>Opportunities to be present with those who are important to us — moments to build bonds and nurture relationships.</p>  | <p>Research has found that there are significant benefits to children in families that spend time together. These include increased vocabulary, greater academic achievement, improved resilience when facing peer pressure, stronger sense of identity and belonging, higher emotional contentment, and a decreased likeliness for substance abuse.</p>   |

## Ready for PDF? How to Maximize Your Impact!

### THE CHOICE IS THEIRS

The critical thinking work of PDF (Playtime, Downtime, and Family Time) homework begins when your child reviews their menu of options. This is when children might first reflect upon their interests and needs, and then name and set goals for themselves and their time. It is imperative that children choose and plan their own work in order to receive the full benefit of PDF homework; after all, even playing a game becomes a taxing chore if it is played merely to comply with an adult's directive. Ultimately, the child must lead the way in order to prevent frustration and disengagement from learning. When PDF at home protects and promotes their spirit of joy, curiosity, and love of learning, children return to school prepared to learn.

When children self-monitor their selections and are able to carry out their plan, their independence and sense of responsibility are strengthened, which will ultimately support them in the classroom. Perhaps they pause and decide they would like to stretch themselves as writers — children might choose to write a letter to a relative or create a poem as a birthday gift. It is possible that they might think back to the new game they learned in math workshop earlier that morning, and decide that teaching the game to a sibling might help both children deepen their understanding of a mathematical concept. A child excited by playing with Legos might plan to create a structure even taller than the one they built the day before. Children who are self-monitoring their emotions might recognize that they are feeling tightly wound after the school day, and determine that a downtime option would be helpful.

### WHAT SHOULD I SAY?

As your child begins PDF each day, encourage conversation that is open-ended. Try to understand their plan. You might ask, **“Why have you chosen this activity?”** **“What are your goals for your time today?”** or **“What might you try that you haven't tried before?”** Let things unfold naturally, asking questions that explore their choices and encourage them to explain their thinking. You might say, **“Can you show me how you did that?”** **“What made you think that block would fit?”** or, **“How did you decide to move that piece?”** If working on a project or looking at their class work together, in place of demonstrating your own method, you might say, **“That's different than the way I had in mind. Can you tell me about how you're figuring that out?”** Where appropriate, offer options of other avenues to pursue rather than redirecting their aims. **“I wonder what might happen if we...”** is an inviting way to encourage children to consider a new variation. What if children ask for help? Before providing a solution, invite them to reflect on what they have already attempted and offer encouragement to come up with solutions they have not yet explored.

### THE POWER OF REFLECTION

When PDF time is winding down, support your child in reflecting on their struggles and successes. Highlighting challenges that they overcame or ways in which they were resourceful develops children who see themselves as active, competent agents in their own learning. Observations such as, **“It seemed like you got distracted there for a few minutes but you brought yourself back. How did you do that?”** or **“What was the trickiest part for you? How did you navigate it?”** reinforce the important idea that struggle is to be expected, not avoided, and helps children recognize ways in which they can persist (often without the help of an adult) when it inevitably arises.

### MOVING FORWARD

Above all, PDF should be fun and restorative! Research clearly indicates what prepares children to do their best learning during school each day and beyond. Change is difficult. It may be hard to let go of traditional ideas about homework, yet we owe it to our children to do so. In order to develop learners who embrace intellectual pursuits, engage in debate, and who are creative and inquisitive, we must honor and provide ample time devoted to self-directed exploration, relaxation, and the opportunity to connect with loved ones.