



Press release

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Älmhult, Sweden

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Real Play: New exhibition at IKEA Museum encourages more play

On 12 May, IKEA Museum presents *Real Play* – an exhibition that challenges our ideas about what play is, and shows how important playfulness is at all ages. Based on research and with five intuitive rooms where visitors can experience different ways to play and activate their senses, IKEA Museum wants to help more people find their "play flow". And it's no coincidence that the exhibition is at IKEA Museum: since the very beginning, IKEA has been all about playfulness, curiosity, creativity, and the courage to challenge the status quo.

Real Play is not just a visual exhibition – it's about feeling and experiencing. Visitors are invited to move, create, compete, explore and daydream in five interactive rooms, each based on a type of play identified by IKEA: Create, Explore, Imagine, Move, and Compete.

"We want to encourage visitors to play – but this is not a playground. There's an important distinction. Playfulness is a mindset, an attitude towards life. Play can be yoga, cooking or just letting your thoughts run wild. It's very much about finding a flow," says Anna Sandberg Falk, Curator at IKEA Museum.

The exhibition is intended both for already convinced play enthusiasts, and for those who may have lost touch with play – people who only associate play with bright colours and childish things, without considering that the same feeling can arise in a kitchen, on a yoga mat or in a video game. The rooms are intuitive: visitors should immediately realise the possibilities. From the meditative to the physically challenging, the exhibition spans a wide range.

Real Play does not stop with feelings, however. The exhibition puts play into a scientific context too, and shows what happens in the brain when we play: enhanced cognitive, emotional and social abilities, release of dopamine and endorphins, and reduced stress. The historical role of play is also highlighted – even in the ancient world, play was used to overcome difficulties and develop societies.

"If you didn't believe in the power of play before, it's hard not to once you learn about all the research and the historical significance of play. Add the experiences in the rooms and it's a powerful combination," says Anna Sandberg Falk.

Panel discussion with Professor Micael Dahlen

At the exhibition opening on 12 May at 12:00, there will be a panel discussion with Professor Micael Dahlen from the Stockholm School of Economics. It will focus on what happens in the brain when we play, and how play can be more than just fun entertainment. The discussion will also include curator Anna Sandberg Falk and Marta Krupinska, a designer at IKEA of Sweden.

IKEA Play Reports

The exhibition builds on years of research into play conducted by IKEA, including the series of Play Reports published since 2010. The latest report, published in 2024, was based on interviews with 7,000

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Museum

children and parents in seven countries. One clear result emerged: more and more parents feel that their children's happiness and well-being are more important than their performance. Since its inception, IKEA has been characterised by a playful and entrepreneurial culture – a drive to innovate, be creative and challenge the status quo.

Real Play opens at IKEA Museum in Älmhult, Sweden, on 12 May 2026 and runs until 4 April 2027.

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