

# ExchangeEveryDay

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## **Giving Children Less**

Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it.  
William Arthur Ward

"Today's designed world doesn't leave much room for kids to explore," write Cas Holman in "The Case for Letting Kids Design Their Own Play," in [Fast Company](#).

"I've spent time with Penny Wilson, an influential playworker in adventure playgrounds in the U.K., observing children playing. She taught me the important difference between asking kids 'What are you building?' and saying to them, 'Tell me about what you're doing.' When we ask, 'What are you building?' it implies that: a) You should have a goal and be working toward a finished thing, i.e., play is linear; b) you are supposed to be building something (children's understanding of the built world is often limited to houses, so they are confronted with either having done it wrong, or they change their vision to fit their perception of your expectation); c) you should be doing something that you can explain to me.

"We want to avoid all of these rules. So by saying 'tell me about this' we leave the door open to stories about what children are imagining, and they can share challenges, discoveries about putting things together, or any number of things about their experience with their peers and school.

"...Giving children less leaves room for them to contribute more. By allowing them to direct their own play they develop habits of agency, independence, and self-determination. Armed with these skills, they jump in to figure out who they are and will be in the world, rather than waiting for someone to hand them a model to follow."