

WHY IS PLAY IMPORTANT?

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1

BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO “GROW” A FULLY FUNCTIONING HUMAN BRAIN?

**AT LEAST
25 YEARS – IF ALL GOES WELL**

**MUCH LONGER, ESPECIALLY IF EXPERIENCING
STRESS AND TRAUMA**

2

**GROWING A GOOD BRAIN IS LIKE
GROWING A DELICIOUS TOMATO –
IT TAKES TIME IF YOU WANT A GOOD
ONE.**

3

LEFT HEMISPHERE	RIGHT HEMISPHERE	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> learns facts focus is on details and rules wants the answer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> looks at the whole picture makes sense of a lot of details considers the context 	
<p>RIGHT HEMISPHERE REQUIRES EXPERIENCES NOT INFORMATION TO DEVELOP</p>		
<div style="display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 0 10px;"> <p>AND SO THE NEED FOR PLAY- LOTS OF PLAY</p> </div> </div>		

4

Play and the Brain

SELF REGULATION – Pre-Frontal Cortex

Self-regulation skills were better in those children who were allowed to play without interruption.

When children are engaged in a play activity they stay selectively focused on the situation at present, tune out distractions, and hold the information in their heads.

This then allows children to develop the capacity to: **reflect, look, listen, and feel** before acting on primary emotional urges.

Rough and tumble play – where children “play fight” builds the capacity to read social signals and manage one’s behaviour and urges.

5

Losing the Space to Play

David Elkind in the *Power of Play*

- over the past two decades, children have lost twelve hours of free time a week, including eight hours of unstructured play and outdoor activities.
- free unstructured play, spontaneous pickup games, and self-initiated dramatic play, are replaced by digital devices

Stuart Brown on the *Status of Play* (Encyclopedia of Play Science)

- outdoor play has decreased by 71% in one generation in both the US and the UK.

**ESCALATING DIAGNOSES OF
CHILDHOOD DEPRESSION AND ADHD
HAS PARALLELED THE LOSS OF PLAY**

6

Implications for Educators

- Despite early literacy programmes for preschoolers in the UK, children's reading skills are some of the lowest in Europe. Clouder 2003
- Young children who attended academic preschools displayed more test anxiety, less creativity and viewed school more negatively than did kids who attended play-base preschools. Elkind 2007

7

PLAY PROGRAMS THE BRAIN'S PROBLEM-SOLVING NETWORKS

- it is playful activity, not stimulation or instruction, that makes a positive difference in brain development
- PLAY BUILDS THE BRAIN THAT CAN THEN BE USED TO RECEIVE INSTRUCTION OR SOLVE PROBLEMS
- the most impressive brain growth happens when play is in the context of WARM HUMAN CONNECTION

8

What does it take to build all the connections in a growing brain?

PLAY

left hemisphere

prefrontal cortex

corpus callosum

right hemisphere

cerebellum

PLAY

PLAY

PLAY

IN THE CONTEXT OF WARM HUMAN CONNECTION

9

PLAY and EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

Play preserves PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH and EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING by allowing EMOTIONS to be expressed and worked through.

10

EMOTION needs to be EXPRESSED to preserve healthy functioning and well-being

EMOTIONS ARE SUPPOSED TO RISE UP AND FLOW THROUGH OUR CHILDREN.

THEIR EXISTENCE IS NOT A PROBLEM, THOUGH THEY MAY BE THE CAUSE OF MANY PROBLEMS.

11

THREE PRIMARY EMOTIONS EXPERIENCED IN THE FACE OF SEPARATION

THESE EMOTIONS ARE INTENSE AND USUALLY FELT ONE AT A TIME

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    graph TD
      SEPARATION[facing SEPARATION] --> PURSUIT[PURSUIT]
      SEPARATION --> ALARM[ALARM]
      SEPARATION --> FRUSTRATION[FRUSTRATION]
  
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THESE EMOTIONS CAN DISPLACE ONE ANOTHER, BUT THEY ARE STILL EXPERIENCED. AND SO THEY WILL BE EXPRESSED, BUT AT ANOTHER TIME AND PLACE

12


SYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM ACTIVATION

Cortisol – increase blood sugar – suppress immune system

Adrenaline – increases heart and respiratory rate

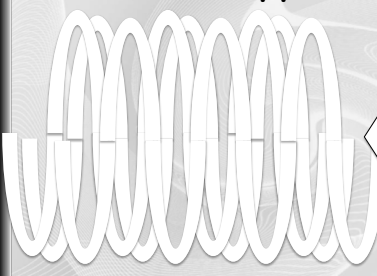
Norepinephrine – responsible for vigilant concentration

Growth Hormone – increases glucose




13

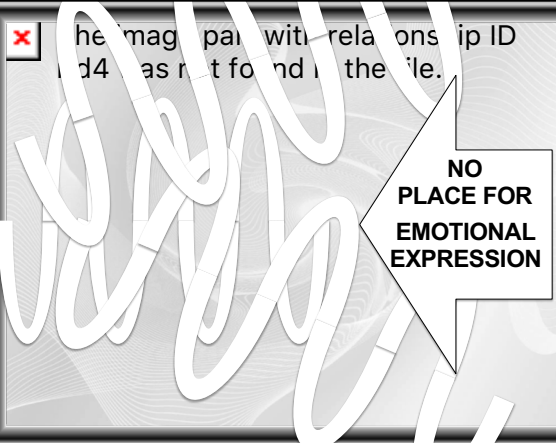
what happens when emotions are suppressed



NO PLACE FOR EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION

14

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NO PLACE FOR EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION

15

PLAY and EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

When children are “stirred up” emotionally, their play can reflect themes they are struggling with.

It is how they can make sense of all the emotions they are experiencing.

In Play, pictures are drawn, structures are made, and games are engaged in to allow **EMOTIONS TO COME OUT** in a way that feels “safer”.

16

EMOTION-BASED PLAY

Play is like a release valve – the emotion can move through.

ALARM at play

- ❖ playing with monsters
- ❖ being the monster
- ❖ scary stories (one step removed)
- ❖ pretending to be scared
- ❖ playing “disaster”
- ❖ playing hospital/being sick

17

EMOTION-BASED PLAY

Play is a place to process their internal world

FACING SEPARATION in play

- ❖ playing dead
- ❖ playing the orphan
- ❖ hide and seek games
- ❖ fairy tales where children are lost or face separation

“It is through play that children get to imagine how they will survive in the face of adversity.” Hannah Beach

18

EMOTION-BASED PLAY

FRUSTRATION at play

- ❖ Playing out the impulses to make things work
 - construction play – blocks, Lego, etc.
 - puzzles
 - making things perfect
 - organizing and orchestrating
- ❖ Playing out the impulses to attack
 - *destroying & demolishing.*
 - *hitting and throwing*
 - *kicking & screaming*
 - *play fighting*
 - *war games, attacking games*

19

What Play Offers Emotion



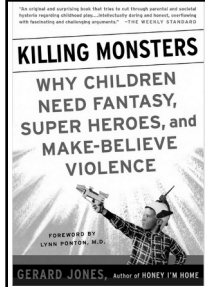
- a work-free space for development to take place
- protection for feelings
- expression without repercussion

20

The Healing Power of Play

- CAN **SOFTEN** THE DEFENSES AND HELP GET **TEARS** UNSTUCK
- provides the **SAFETY** from the repercussions of emotional expression
- enables the emotional **MOVEMENT** that is the essential for healing and recovery
- spontaneous **RE-PLAY** provides for emotional discharge, resolution and neural resetting
- inspires with alpha power and **STRENGTH**

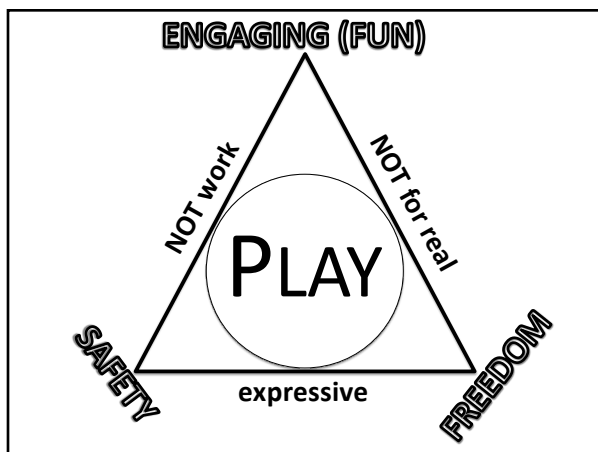
21



Gerard Jones: “Children crave fantasy violence for many reasons, but one reason they so often crave it raw, loud and angry is that they need it to be strong enough to match and master their anxiety and anger.”

“It allows them to master troubling ideas until those ideas are become familiar and lose their power.”

22



23

HELPING YOUR CHILDREN FIND THEIR PLAY



HELPING ADULTS FIND THEIR PLAY

24

TYPES OF PLAY

- spontaneous / organized play
- object play / imaginary play
- solitary play / social play
- rough-and-tumble play / co-operative play

25

Typical Play-THINGS

- playing with objects
- playing with movement
- playing with the voice
- playing with symbols (art, music, words)
- playing with identities and roles
- playing via imagination and fantasy
- playing with words and meanings
- playing with ideas
- playing with emotions and feelings

26

PROVIDE PLAY MATERIALS

- TOYS
- CRAFT MATERIALS (TP ROLLS AND ELASTICS, STRING, THREAD ETC. ETC.)
- ITEMS FROM NATURE – STICKS, LEAVES, PEBBLES
- PLAY DOH (MAKE YOUR OWN)
- PAPER AND CRAYONS

27

Having invitations to play, with materials 'out on display' primes their curiosity and opens the way to their imagination



28

You can build your own set of tools to build with with what you have at home:

- ✓ Clothespins
- ✓ Craft sticks of different lengths
- ✓ Wood cooking spoons
- ✓ Spatulas
- ✓ Wing flap clips
- ✓ Large paper clips
- ✓ Toilet paper rolls
- ✓ Yarn and scissors



29

Emotional Expression without Words

Drawing



Painting




30

PLAY WITH THEM

- **Singing**
 - ❖ Happy, Sad, Mad, Excited
- **Dancing**
 - ❖ Slow, Fast, Happy, Sad, Mad, Excited
- **Miming and Dress-up**
 - ❖ Being scary – being scared
 - ❖ Being a monster – super hero
- **Drawing**
 - ❖ All kinds - lots of emotion
- **Building and Imagining**
- **Board Games and Puzzles**

31

Grooving and jamming together! (Emotional Expression through movement)



32

• Fort/Tent Building



33

• Dress-up play, Creating a Puppet Show



34

• Baking and Cooking together



35

Soothing Quiet Time Activities

Mandalas



Free downloads on the internet

Yarn Creations



Corking

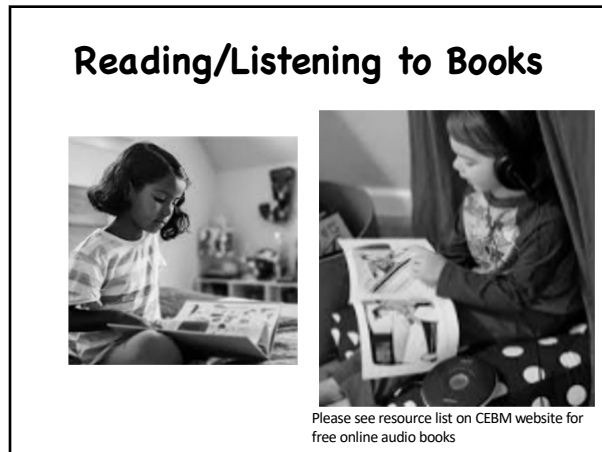


Knitting with a loom



Straw weaving bracelets

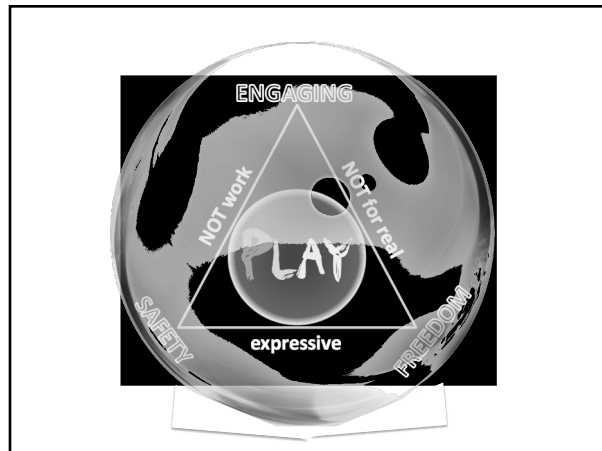
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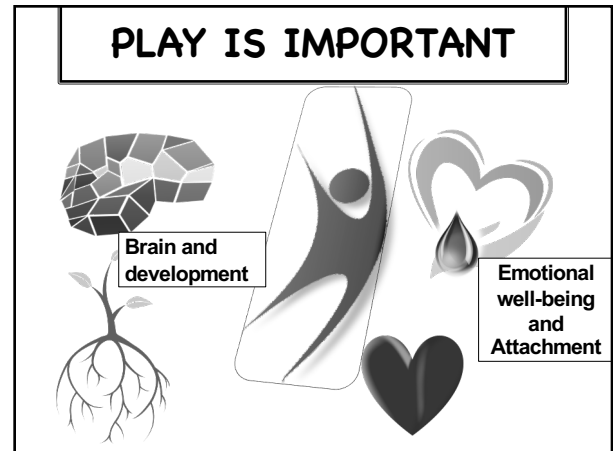
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38



39



40