

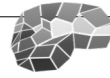
WHY PLAY IS IMPORTANT



Eva de Gosztanyi, psychologist

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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 ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES
AND TRAUMA

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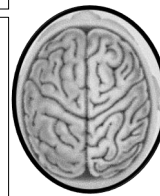
GROWING A GOOD BRAIN IS LIKE
GROWING A DELICIOUS TOMATO –
IT TAKES TIME IF YOU WANT A GOOD
ONE.



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LEFT HEMISPHERE

- learns facts
- focus is on details and rules
- wants the answer



RIGHT HEMISPHERE

- looks at the whole picture
- makes sense of a lot of details
- considers the context

RIGHT HEMISPHERE REQUIRES
EXPERIENCES NOT INFORMATION TO
DEVELOP



AND SO THE NEED FOR **PLAY-**
LOTS OF PLAY

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PLAY and the BRAIN

The Power of Play: A Pediatric Role in Enhancing Development in Young Children, Michael Yogman, MD et al. Pediatrics 2018

- Play is not just about having fun but about taking risks, experimenting, and testing boundaries.
- Play is not frivolous; it is brain building. Play has been shown to have both direct and indirect effects on brain structure and functioning.
- Play promotes executive function (i.e. the process of learning, rather than the content), which allow us to pursue goals and ignore distractions.
- Play improves LANGUAGE and MATH skills in school

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PLAY and the BRAIN

When children were given blocks to play with at home with minimal adult direction, preschool children showed improvements in language acquisition at a 6-month follow-up, particularly low-income children.

Randomized trials of physical play in 7- to 9-year-olds revealed enhanced attentional inhibition, cognitive flexibility, and brain functioning that were indicative of enhanced executive control.

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

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PLAY and the BRAIN

William Doyle and Pasi Sahlberg are co-authors of "Let the Children Play: How More Play Will Save our Schools and Help Children Thrive."

REOPEN SCHOOLS WITH A 90 day 'GOLDEN AGE OF PLAY'

A time of joy, movement, discovery and experimentation without fear of failure; a time when every student should enjoy comfort, safety, and socialization with peers and warm, caring adults.

Dr. Jeffrey Hutchinson, pediatrician, "Play is essential. Unstructured time is vital for development, stress reduction and physical and mental health."

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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

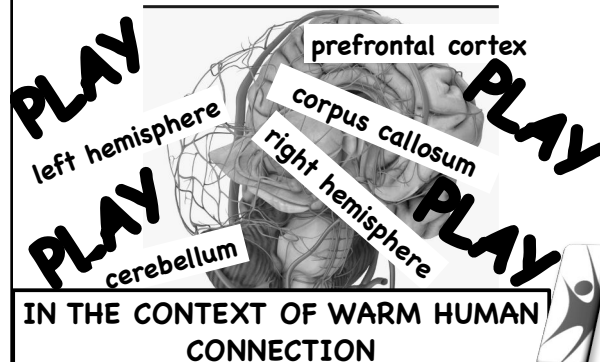
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PLAY and the BRAIN

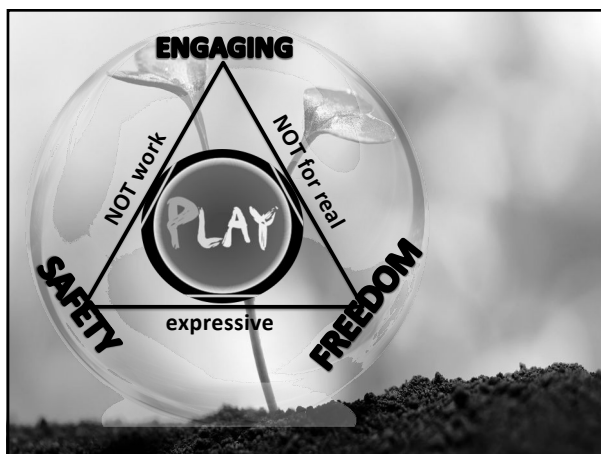
- it is playful activity, not stimulation or instruction, that makes a positive difference in brain development
- PLAY BUILDS THE BRAIN THAT CAN THEN BE USED TO RECEIVE INSTRUCTION OR SOLVE PROBLEMS
- the most impressive brain growth happens when play is in the context of WARM HUMAN CONNECTION

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



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	PLAY	WORK
<i>the focus</i>	the activity	the outcome
<i>what engages</i>	the activity	the outcome
<i>where the fun is</i>	the activity	the outcome

Activities more likely to be Work or be made into work or not truly play:

- Craft activities requiring a specific outcome
- Singing a song to learn the content
- Where the outcome will be praised or rated
- Most screen time (computer, iPad, tablets etc.)

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TYPES OF PLAY

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

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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

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EMERGENT PLAY

- creativity, discovery and exploration
- attention is at play – curious, inquisitive, interested
- is usually quite solitary in nature, although it can exist as parallel play in young children, and if quite strong, can also survive social interaction
- is the setting in which
 - boundaries are first formed,
 - intentionality originates,
 - interests are primed,
 - a sense of agency begins,
 - a sense of responsibility is introduced
 - and an emergent sense of self is born

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PLAY and EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

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



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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.

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Losing the Space to Play

Data from the CDC's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report detailed that, as of 2016, 1 in 6 children ages 2 to 8 years of age had a diagnosed mental, behavioral or developmental disorder.

And a study in the Journal of Abnormal Psychology revealed that from 2009 to 2017, depression surged 69% among 16- to 17-year-olds.

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

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Losing the Space to Play

- Panksepp suggested that play deprivation is associated with the increasing prevalence of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder.
- Play helps children deal with stress, such as life transitions. When 3- to 4-year-old children who were anxious about entering preschool were randomly assigned to play with toys or peers for 15 minutes compared with listening to a teacher reading a story, the play group showed a twofold decrease in anxiety after the intervention.

So, how does Play enhance Emotional Well-Being?

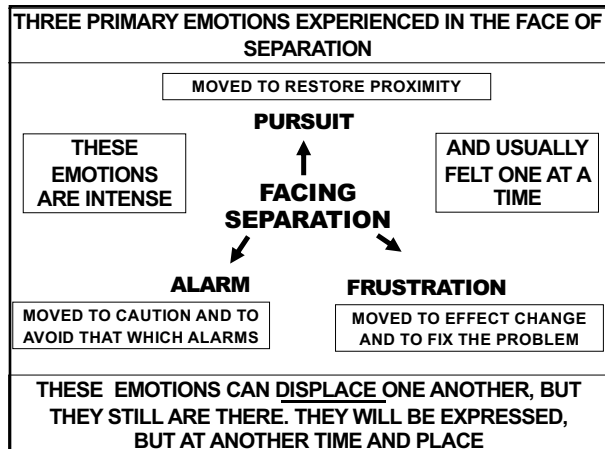
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**EMOTION
needs to be
EXPRESSED to preserve
healthy functioning and well-
being**

**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.**

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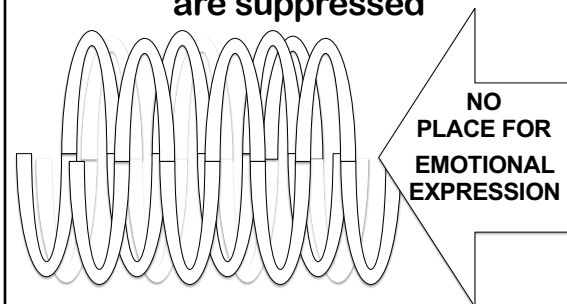
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SYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM the system of ACTIVATION

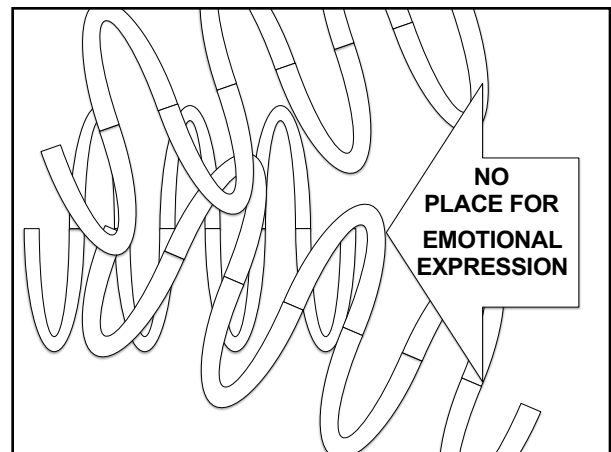
- **Cortisol** – increase blood sugar – suppress immune system
 - **Adrenaline** – increases heart and respiratory rate
 - **Norepinephrine** – responsible for vigilant concentration
 - **Growth Hormone** – increases glucose
 - Constricts blood vessels
 - Suspends “rest & digest”
 - Sharp Increase in Breathing & Heart Rate
 - Blood diverts to Muscles
-

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what happens when emotions are suppressed



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The Challenge

In dealing with problems rooted in emotion

EXPRESSION WITHOUT REPERCUSSION

As a caring ADULT how can we
HELP EMOTION FIND EXPRESSION?

"I SEE YOU HAVE AN EMOTION IN YOU THAT
NEEDS HELP GETTING OUT.
HERE, LET ME HELP YOU FIND A WAY TO GET IT
OUT THAT WON'T CAUSE YOU MORE PROBLEMS."

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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".

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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

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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

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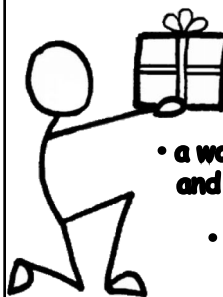
EMOTION-BASED PLAY

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

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What Play Offers Emotion



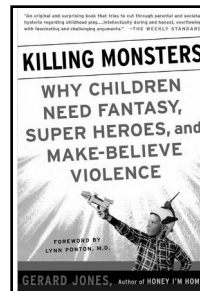
- a work-free space for growth and development to take place
- protection for feelings
- expression of emotion without repercussion

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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**

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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."

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HELPING CHILDREN FIND THEIR PLAY



HELPING ADULTS FIND THEIR PLAY

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Outdoor Play



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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**

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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



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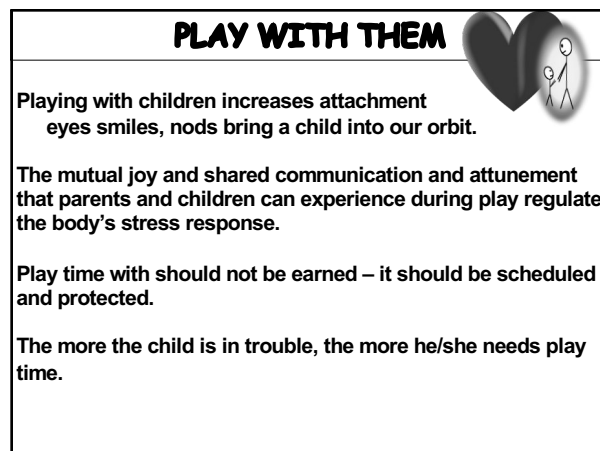
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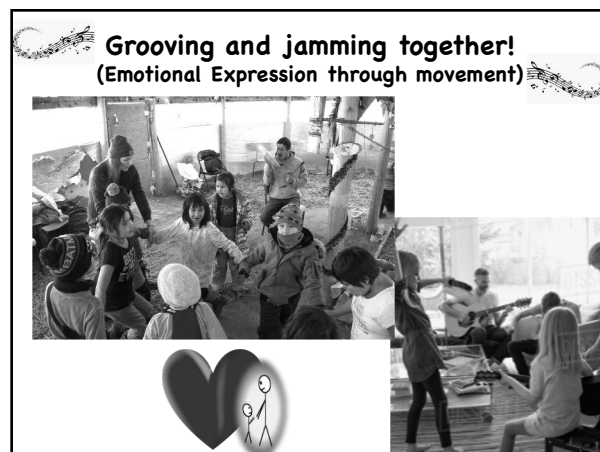
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Baking and Cooking together



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Stories as a playground for emotion



- reading stories,
- writing stories,
- telling stories,
- hearing stories,
- watching stories (movies),
- creating stories,
- acting out stories

- stories are probably the main playground for emotion, providing multiple ways of activating, accessing and expressing emotions (albeit vicariously) that are at least one-step removed from real life

- stories allow us to touch upon dynamics and topics that could be overwhelming in real life, as well as to take a break from real life

- as such, stories can also be used to address defenses, get past emotional defenses, or provide confrontations that would ordinarily trigger defenses

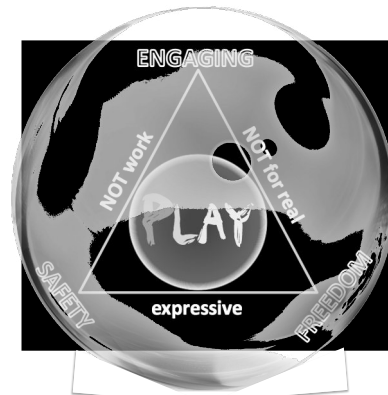
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Especially if tears are needed

- It is easier to cry for someone else in a story or a movie.
- Hence the importance of reading and watching sad movies to help the tears to flow.
- BUT must be safe from judgement.
- When we cry we **DON'T HAVE TO KNOW WHY WE ARE CRYING.**
- When the tears come – rejoice and see them as a sign of **EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING.**

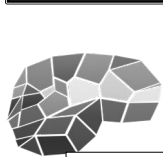


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PLAY IS IMPORTANT



Brain and development



Emotional well-being and Attachment

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PLAY - Resources

- Michael Yogman, MD et al. Pediatrics – 2018 - *The Power of Play: A Pediatric Role in Enhancing Development in Young Children*
<https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/142/3/e20182058>
- William Doyle and Pasi Sahlberg – 2019 - *Let the Children Play: How More Play Will Save our Schools and Help Children Thrive.*
- Tamara Strijack and Hannah Beach – 2020 - *Creating Playgrounds for Emotional Expression* - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WNJUA9dU-AI&t=19s> (video)
- Stuart Brown (National Institute of Play)
- David Elkind – 2007 – *The Power of Play*
www.cebim.ca – Corona Virus for Parents

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