



## From the Playroom

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### Finding opportunities for children to learn through play

A few weeks ago, my five-year-old "niece" walked into the kitchen where I was sitting with her mother. With plastic teapot in hand, she approached me and offered me a cup of tea. I played along as she poured the cup. She warned me that it may be too hot and went on her way. A few minutes later, she returned to pour me another. A delightful cup of tea it was...

The day before that, we went for a walk with her younger brother and mother to a stream that was partially frozen over. We tossed rocks, seeing how far we could throw them, and then discovered where best to hit the ice so that it would break! As the ice broke, we could watch a bubble of air as it moved beneath the ice to the open water.

Her brother, just shy of four-years-old, managed to put a 100 piece round puzzle together, telling me to find the edges and match the colors! He asked me if I knew that a round puzzle doesn't have straight edges. He worked and worked and suddenly his superhero puzzle was completed, with little help from me.

Soon these days of "idle" play will pass and they will have pencils in hand, flash cards with the 100 sight words to memorize by the end of kindergarten, and basic math facts to learn. I am thankful that their parents spend time daily with them running, moving, biking, skipping rocks, and swinging. They learn to negotiate when there are more kids than swings and when some kids want to go up a slide while others want to go down.

Who says children aren't learning when they play? Not me! Who says children aren't learning interpersonal skills when they are playing? Not me!

A *Scientific American* article reported that:

*In the 42 years since, he [Dr. Stuart Brown] has interviewed some 6,000 people about their childhoods, and his data suggest that a lack of opportunities for unstructured, imaginative play can keep children from growing into happy, well-adjusted adults. "Free play," as scientists call it, is critical for becoming socially adept, coping with stress, and building cognitive skills such as problem solving. Research into animal behavior confirms play's benefits and establishes its evolutionary importance: ultimately, play may provide animals (including humans) with skills that will help them survive and reproduce.*

Check out the full article at [www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-serious-need-for-play](http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-serious-need-for-play).

But before you do that...take some time to play today. And if you are in Rochester, NY, give one of us from the Primary Project team a call, we are always up for play dates! We are a team at Children's Institute that plays together regularly! We've enjoyed all types of activities together such as taking hikes each fall, canoeing adventures (funniest of all play activities), going on bike rides, playing card games during lunch, building towers with marshmallows on the top, and tossing the bocce ball at team picnics. Find ways to connect with your colleagues, children, and families through play and see how rewarding it can be!

—Deborah Johnson, Ed.D.  
Director of National Services, Children's Institute

# Play Memories

From Primary Project team members at Children's Institute

Roller skating and playing games like Red Rover, What Time is it Mr. Fox?, Hopscotch, and Jacks was how we spent our days. There was no such thing as a play date, rather we would just go to our friend's house and yell, "Can ----- come out and play?" We were then on our own until Mom would call us home for dinner!

Indoor play included "paper dolls" that became characters in wonderful stories. Our favorites were kept in Dads' old tie boxes. At night, my sister and I would jump from bed to bed trying to catch the lights of cars—I have a scar above my eye to prove it!

Sometimes I really miss those days!



—Arlene Bobin, Senior Project Coordinator



Growing up in the 1950s meant that "play" was central to living. TV was not part of our daily life, certainly not during the day. We built forts and our own miniature golf course in the backyard. We played with dolls, rolled a ball back and forth down the hallway at my grandparents' house, shot hoops (socks tied together and tossed into waste baskets), and loved card/board games (Life was my favorite!). We could spend hours playing at the beach with just a ball, shovel, and bucket!

Those were the days!

—Deborah Johnson, Director of National Services

Nothing was more fun than placing album covers from my parents 33 vinyl collection just so on the hardwood floor to create rooms for my dolls. You see, they had quite the lifestyle in spacious mansions with beautiful white gowns, made of tissues and toilet paper. Eight-track cartridges would become a couch, a coffee table, a bed, or even a car. Hair too long or in need of bangs, hairdresser Shelley was at the call. A color change needed, nail polish could do the trick. No Barbie dolls, mansions, or replica furnishings needed! Many hours of play with limitless plots. Imagination prevailed!



—Shelley Sanyshyn, Clinical Associate



Neighborhood friends and a box – what more could you need! The larger the box the better, especially those appliance boxes found on the curb. This simple "container" provided hours of imaginative play and limitless stories. When the four sides could not stand any longer, we would collapse it so that the box lay flat, and it would then become a slide. If the timing was right, and this happened during the fall, sliding into a pile of leaves was the best!

—Lynn Smith, Social Worker

## Possibilities of Play: Building Connections

A DVD that explores both the playful and serious sides of play

*“Ready or not, here I come!”*

*“Tag, you’re it!”*

*“Let me show you what I can do.”*

*“You be the [insert role] and I’ll be the [insert role].”*

*“Can I play just a little bit longer?”*

When was the last time you uttered any of these phrases?

For many, a smile begins to form when we recollect those carefree days, when the toughest part of the day was to wind down and just go to bed.

Children live in the moment through their play. As adults, we must be reminded of the important role play possesses in a child’s healthy development.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recognizes that play is essential to a child’s development, contributing to the cognitive, physical, and social-emotional well-being of children and youth. This resource captures these essentials from the perspectives of educators, pediatricians, play therapists, mental health providers, parents and grandparents.

Take advantage of the endless opportunities this tool provides. Perhaps to get the conversation started about play, schedule a viewing during an Open House to introduce the value of play to parents, school staff, and community members.

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# Bringing the Lessons Home

## Connecting with children through play

Play is powerful! To children, running, building, and pretending are playful activities that benefit all areas of their development. When children play, they practice thinking or cognitive skills through language, use imagination to create and recreate stories, and learn how to solve problems. Through interactions with peers, they are given opportunities to work on social skills by negotiating, taking turns, and compromising. Running, building, jumping, and drawing all contribute to the development of fine and gross motor skills. So while play at times may appear “purposeless” to adults, children are learning and developing their skills when given opportunities for spontaneous play.

As parents, you are your child’s first play partner! Infancy may have brought endless games of peek-a-boo, while toddlerhood provided the chance to stack item upon item to make the tallest of towers, only then to be knocked down. Games of hide and go seek (even when the hider announces their secret hiding spot) or playing kitchen with makeshift pots and pans are just a couple of examples of how you may have spent time actively involved in your child’s play.

Parents have wonderful opportunities to connect with their children through play. Find uninterrupted time to sit on the sidelines and let children lead the play. As you join in, comment on their discoveries and have fun!

—Lynn Smith, LMSW  
Social Worker, Children’s Institute



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Primary Project parents.**

**“It is paradoxical that many educators and parents still  
differentiate between a time for learning and a time for play  
without seeing the vital connection between them.”**

—Leo F. Buscaglia

**“Play gives children a chance to practice what they are learning.”**

—Mr. Rogers

# Trayendo las Lecciones al Hogar

## Conectando con los niños a través del juego

¡El juego es poderoso! Para los niños, correr, construir, y pretender son actividades juguetonas que benefician todas las áreas del desarrollo. Cuando los niños juegan, ellos practican destrezas del pensamiento o cognitivas a través del lenguaje, usan la imaginación para crear y recrear historias, y aprenden cómo resolver problemas. A través de las interacciones con los compañeros, ellos tienen oportunidades para desarrollar destrezas sociales negociando, tomando turnos y haciendo concesiones. Todas las actividades como correr, construir, saltar, y dibujar contribuyen al desarrollo de destrezas de movimientos finos y gruesos. Por eso aunque a veces el juego podría parecer como “sin propósito” para los adultos, los niños están aprendiendo y desarrollando sus destrezas cuando se les dan oportunidades para el juego espontáneo.

Como padres, usted es el primer compañero de juego de su niño! La infancia puede haber tenido juegos inacabables de “peek-a-boo,” mientras que en la niñez temprana ofreció el chance de apilar objeto sobre objeto para hacer las torres más altas solamente para ser derrumbadas. Juegos de esconderse (incluso cuando el que se esconde anuncia su lugar secreto donde está escondido) o jugar a la cocina con ollas y cacerolas improvisadas son un par de ejemplos de cómo usted quizás se involucró activamente en el juego de su niño(a).

Los padres tienen oportunidades maravillosas para conectar con sus niños a través del juego. Encuentre tiempo sin interrupciones para sentarse en el banquillo y dejar que los niños dirijan el juego. Al unirse al juego, ¡comente sobre sus descubrimientos y diviértase!

—Lynn Smith, LMSW  
Trabajadora Social, Children’s Institute



**Siéntase en libertad de copiar esta página y compartirla con los padres del Primary Project.**

**“Es una paradoja que muchos educadores y padres siguen diferenciando entre tiempo para aprender y tiempo para jugar sin ver la conexión vital entre éstos.”**

—Leo F. Buscaglia

**“El juego le da una oportunidad a los niños para practicar lo que están aprendiendo.”**

—Mr. Rogers



An illustration of how a small group of child associates and mental health professionals defined play at a training in Connecticut this past fall.

***“We don’t stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing.”***

-George Bernard Shaw

***“We are never more fully alive, more completely ourselves, or more deeply engrossed in anything than when we are playing.”***

-Charles Schaefer

***“Play fosters belonging and encourages cooperation.”***

-Stuart Brown, MD

## children's institute

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