

The Consequences

Stuart Brown, MD, founder of the National Institute for Play, and psychologist and play researcher Dr. Peter Gray are among the experts who link play deprivation with hostility and depression among children, youths, and adults. They point out that as opportunities for children to play have lessened, aggression and depression have increased.

Dr. Brown interviewed inmates at a prison and learned that the most violent among them were those who never played as children.

Why do we now insist that *accomplishment* and *achievement* be words associated with childhood? *Play* is the word that is supposed to be associated with childhood.

If children don't learn to play as *children*, they aren't likely to discover its value as adults. And just think about what a dreary, deadening existence daily life can become without a playful attitude.

If children begin living like adults in childhood, what will there be left to look forward to? And what joy will they find as adults if striving to "succeed" has become life's sole purpose? To my way of thinking, a life without joy can't be considered a successful one.

"I shouldn't have to defend play for children any more than I should have to defend their eating, sleeping, and breathing."

~ Rae Pica

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Why Play Matters



The Disappearance of Play

When I did my first professional development training back in 1981, never could I have imagined that play would disappear from children's lives. But because it's seen to have little value – less, certainly, than “busyness” – play is being pushed out of their lives at an alarming rate.

Moreover, educators all across the country tell me that children don't even know *how* to play anymore! Because being scheduled and supervised and “schooled” are all considered more essential than something as “frivolous” as play, children are losing the knack to do what should come naturally to them. To learn in the way they were meant to learn.

Play is actually a biological drive nearly all young animals share. Can you imagine trying to keep kittens and puppies from playing, when that is so clearly what nature intended? The idea is ludicrous, and it should be just as ludicrous for children.

What Children Gain from Play

The adult personality is built on the child's play. Among the social skills learned are the ability to share, cooperate, negotiate, compromise, make and revise rules, and to take the perspective of others. Play provides opportunities for children to meet and solve problems – the number-one ability they will most assuredly require in this rapidly changing world. Play helps children express their thoughts and feelings and to deal with stress. To cope with fears they can't yet understand or articulate. Through play, children acquire literacy, mathematical, and creative skills. Make-believe play, in particular, has been linked to self-regulation skills, which in turn have been linked to greater academic success than IQ has.



“Play is the highest form of research.”

~ Albert Einstein

Play Benefits Academics

Studies show children enrolled in play-oriented preschools do *not* have a disadvantage over those who are enrolled in preschools focusing on early academics.

One study, in fact, determined there were neither short-term nor long-term advantages of early academics versus play, and that there were no distinguishable differences by first grade.

The only difference was that the children who experienced early academics were *more anxious* and *less creative* than their peers who had been in traditional, play-based preschools!

In another study, 4th-graders who had attended play-oriented preschools in which children often initiated their own activities had *better* academic performance than those who had attended academics-oriented preschools.