

Play as the missing engine of emotional development
How it shapes emotion, attachment, and becoming your own person

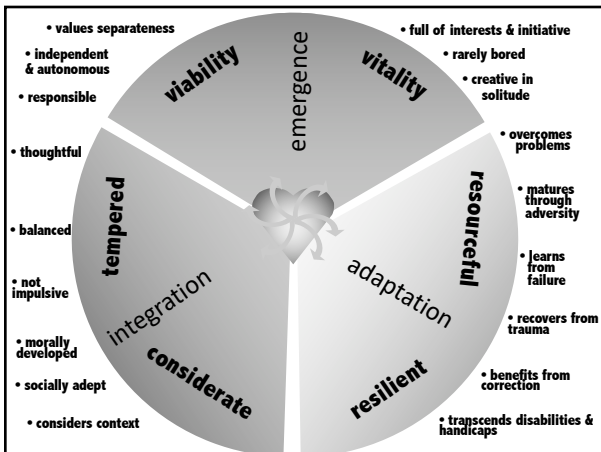
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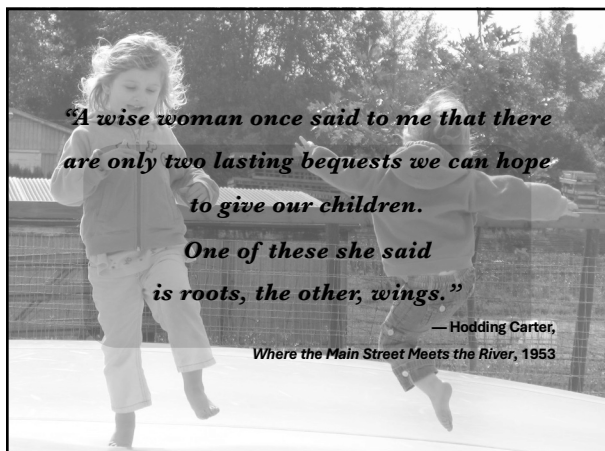
flourish (verb)

... to grow well or luxuriantly; to thrive; to grow and develop in a healthy or vigorous way, especially as a result of favorable conditions.

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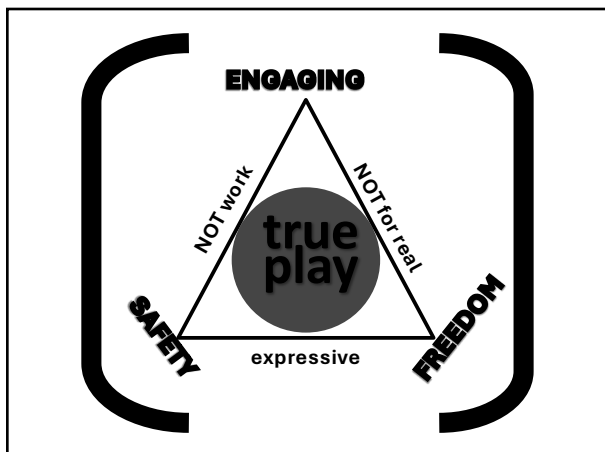
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	PLAY	WORK
<i>the focus</i>	the activity	the outcome
<i>what engages</i>	the activity	the outcome
<i>where the fun is</i>	the activity	the outcome

Work consists of whatever a body is obliged to do. Play consists of whatever a body is not obliged to do.

— Mark Twain

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PLAYGROUNDS

laughter and humour	stories and writing	drama and theatre
drawing and painting	singing and music	dance and movement

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Losing the Space to Play

- In the last 20 years, 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, have been almost silenced by the **high-tech commercialized world** we have created
- 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

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Children and Digital Devices

- American Academy of Pediatrics, minimal screen time under 2, limited for over 2 years of age
- Concern is with effects on brain growth and development of social, emotional, and cognitive skills
- Screen time interferes with basic needs such as sleep, linked to obesity, attention, learning and social problems

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Some facts and figures:

- Children are now introduced to screens in infancy
- **Close to 30% of children under the age of 1 are watching TV or video for approximately 90 minutes a day**
- **More than 60% of children between 1 and 2 are watching TV or video more than 2 hours a day – some as high as 4.5 hours**
- **children 8–18 years of age spend an average of 10 hrs, 45 min a day accessing technology (Kaiser Family Foundation – 2010)**
- **74% of our youth connect to a social network through their mobile phones.**
- **teenage internet addiction is on the rise and has evoked pediatric warnings.**

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Children and Digital Devices

Parents who grew up with devices are more likely to ...

- **73% use them to do chores**
- **60% use them to run errands**
- **66% use them to calm a child down in public**
- **29% use them to get a child to sleep**

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Sandra Hofferth and John Sandberg

- 25 percent reduction in time children spent playing.
- 55 percent reduction in time engaged in conversation at home
- 19 percent reduction in television watching
- 18 percent increase in time spent at school
- 145 percent increase in time spent on schoolwork at home
- 168 percent increase in time spent with parents shopping. Play is competing against increasing academics, structured activities, and consumer-focused activities.

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Anxious for our children to succeed in a global economy, we now regard **play as a luxury** that the contemporary child cannot afford.

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What role does play serve in development?

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Play programs the brain's problem-solving and learning networks

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When can work replace *play* in the life of a child?

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A child is not ready for work until the *prefrontal cortex* in the brain is sufficiently developed.

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Prefrontal Cortex



The capacity for registering more than one feeling at a time develops between 5 to 7 years of age.



The more intense the feelings, the more difficult they are to mix. Neurodivergent kids may need more time to develop (7 to 9 year shift).



Results in brain integration with intempered impulses, understanding context, perspective, capable of keeping secrets and telling a lie.

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impulses to react & caring about impact = SELF-CONTROL

frustration & caring feelings = PATIENCE

fear of the dragon & caring about the treasure = COURAGE

concern for self & caring for another = CONSIDERATION

impulses to get even & caring feelings = FORGIVENESS

limitations & caring to make something work = SACRIFICE

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PLAY

FUN

Activity Outcome

0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9.....10

- units of time (eg, minutes, hours, days, years) -

WORK

Activity Outcome

0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9.....10


- units of time (eg, minutes, hours, days, years) -

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Play builds the brain that schools will use.


Implications for Early Education

TOO SOON



Pressure before readiness creates frustration.

READY



When the brain is ready, learning flows.

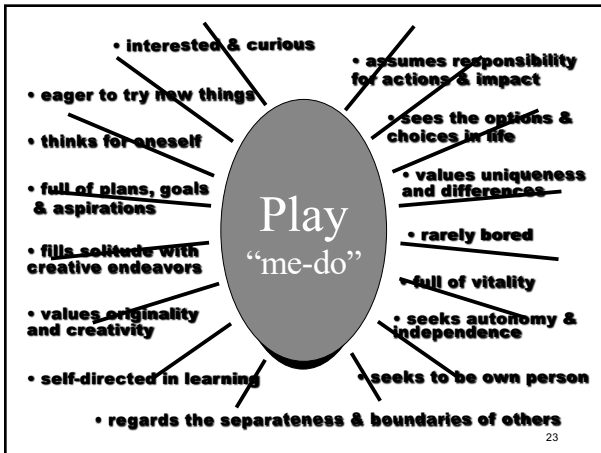
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What role does play serve in development?

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Play is where we develop a sense of agency and responsibility.

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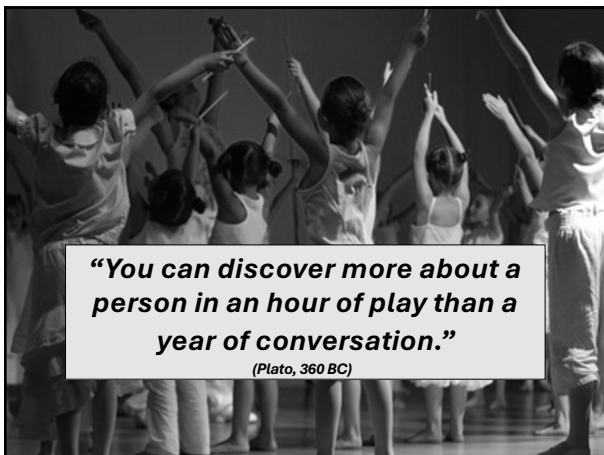
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What role does play serve in development?

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Play is where the self is discovered and future work interests are born.

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“You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than a year of conversation.”
(Plato, 360 BC)

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What role does play serve in development?

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Play preserves emotional health and well-being.

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Defining Emotion

• **to be stirred up**

- happens to us as opposed to under our control
- is irrational although the brain has its reasons

• **to be moved to**

- is meant to move us in ways that would serve us
- how a child moves reveals how they are stirred up

EMOTIONS NEED TO BE EXPRESSED TO RESTORE BALANCE AND EQUILIBRIUM

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Problems with raw and unbridled expression

a) is **uncivilized**

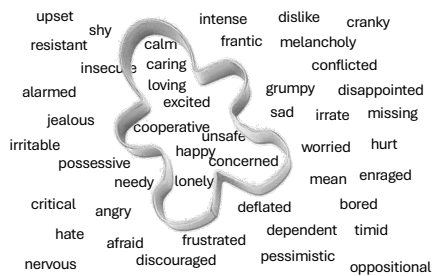
- messy & noisy, chaotic & unacceptable, alienating & wounding (most problem behaviour is emotionally fueled)

b) can **threaten** the child's relationships

- the attachment brain presses down on emotions that threaten relationships

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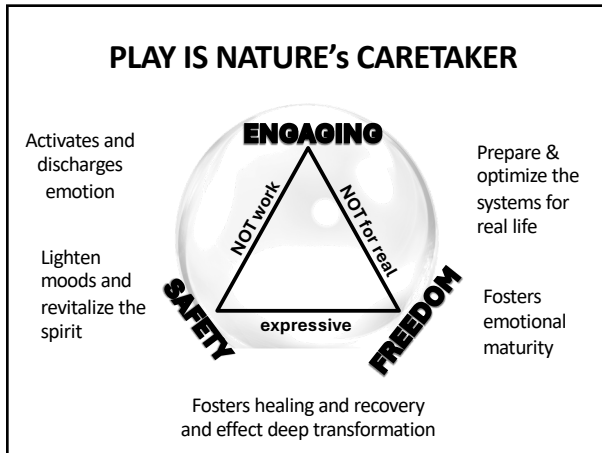
PARAMETERS OF ATTACHMENT



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Play and the Displacement Principle

Play should be
the lightning rod for
the thunderbolts of aggression.

eg, play fighting, mock aggression, war games, attack games, sword play, attack sports, attacking in fantasy, insult games, as well as attacking energy in art, music, wit, writing and stories

Play, if the stage is set, should naturally and automatically attract any stuck or residual attacking energy

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Draw pent-up FRUSTRATION into PLAY

<p>vent frustration through playful CONSTRUCTION</p> <p>provide a safe place to express frustration via effecting change or by making things work</p> <p>⇓</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • constructing and crafts • organizing and orchestrating • solving engaging problems • designing perfection 	<p>vent frustration through playful DESTRUCTION</p> <p>provide a safe place for impulses to attack or destroy (ie, to relieve oneself of foul frustration)</p> <p>⇓</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • destroying and demolishing • hitting and throwing • kicking and screaming • war games, attacking games
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Playing with FRUSTRATION

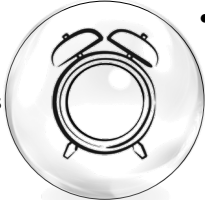
• mock aggression	• war games
• building	• play fighting
• fixing	• pretend pain
• reassemble and reorder	• destroying
• silly self	• growing and planting



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Playing with ALARM


- peek-a-boo play
- rescue play
- startle play
- safe hide-away play
- ambush games
- dare games
- 'tumble' play
- monsters & scary creature play
- safe-at-home play
- scary stories, games and activities




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Playing with PURSUIT

- chase
- hide and seek
- hunt
- dress up
- marriage
- hoarding and collecting
- family
- possession
- competition
- magic and deceit



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**EMOTION
IS NATURE'S WAY
OF TAKING OF US**

**PLAY
IS NATURE'S WAY
OF TAKING CARE
OF EMOTION**

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What role does play serve in development?

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Play strengthens and preserves our attachment to each another.

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PLAY IS NATURE'S MATCHMAKER

- Play is more likely to *engage*
- Playfully collecting *builds relationship*
- Play can defuse *shyness* instincts
- Play provides a *sense of safety*
- Play sets you up to get *close* without it being real

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The lullaby is perfectly suited to prime sadness as well as to reduce the separation faced at bedtime



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Play is a spontaneous activity that cannot be taught or commanded.

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- enough freedom from competing activities -

- a) enough freedom from the pressure to produce and perform
- b) enough freedom from screens, stimulation and entertainment
- c) enough freedom from structured activity
- d) enough freedom from instruction and schooling
- e) enough freedom from work and responsibility

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Play is a spontaneous activity that cannot be taught or commanded.

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Conditions Conducive to Play

freedom from competing activities

sufficient **SPACE**

sense of **SAFETY**

freedom from emotional wounding

sense of **SECURITY**
freedom from facing separation and the work of attachment

Rituals, customs and 'playgrounds' characterized by these conditions.

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CREATING THE CONDITIONS FOR PLAY

1. **VALUE** the role of play in children's lives
2. Don't turn activities into work by focusing on **OUTCOMES**
3. Buffer against outside forces and **PROTECT** spaces for play
4. Help a child find their **NATURAL** bent for emotional expression
5. Provide the necessary **FREEDOMS** that give rise to play
6. Provide **REST** by cultivating deep meaningful relationships

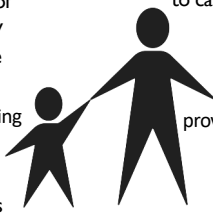
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**Providing REST is
the most significant
contribution we can make to
a child's development.**

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dependent instincts

- to trust in & depend upon
- to get one's bearings
- to be taken care of
- to serve and obey
- to seek assistance
- to look up to
- to belong seeking
- to follow
- to express needs
- to wait for orders
- to look for guidance
- to comply and conform



caretaking instincts

- to take responsibility for
- to orient and to inform
- to care for & take care of
- to protect & defend
- to guide and direct
- to look out for
- providing to possess
- to lead
- to hide needs
- to give the orders
- to transmit one's values
- to command and prescribe

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Accept the WORK of the Relationship

- assume responsibility for the relationship
- to preserve contact and closeness
- to convey the invitation to exist in your presence
- to nurture a sense of belonging and significance
- to provide a sense of security
- to 'bridge' separation and problem behaviour

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SPACE
IS REQUIRED
FOR PLAY TO HAPPEN.
PLAY WILL NOT TAKE THE SPACE
IT NEEDS AND SO MUST BE GIVEN.

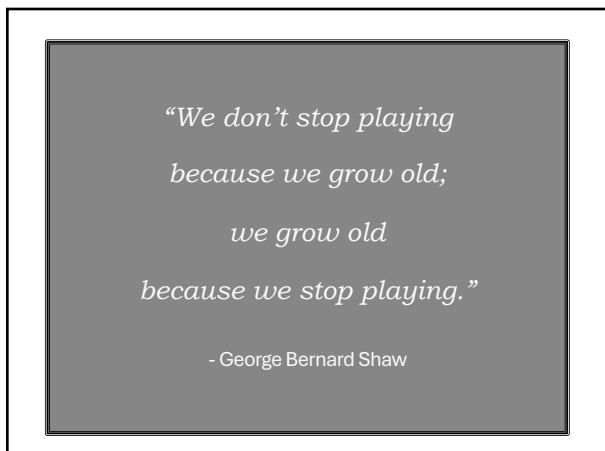
CULTURE
WAS MEANT TO
PROTECT A SPACE FOR PLAY
BUT NOW IS ENDANGERED ITSELF.

CONSCIOUSNESS
IS NOW OUR LAST RESORT TO PROTECT
THAT WHICH IS ESSENTIAL TO OUR BECOMING.

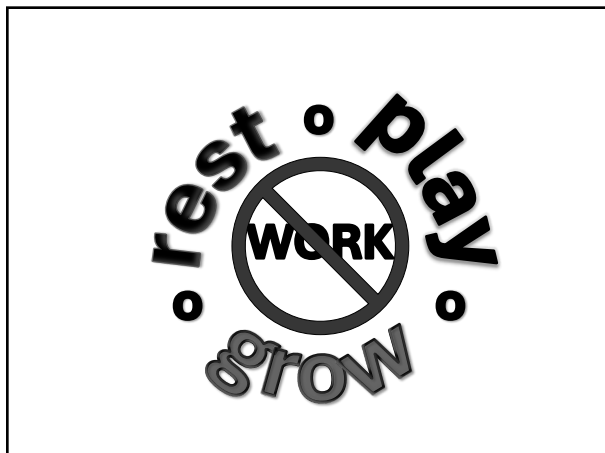
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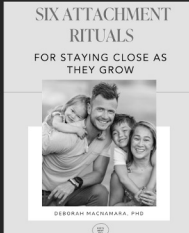

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Grab the free guide:

SIX ATTACHMENT RITUALS:
Staying close through the years



www.macnamara.ca

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Counsellor, Educator, Author

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