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“It’s Just Child’s Play” - and That’s a Very Good Thing

by Susan Poncy

Few times are as exhilarating for children as the beginning of summer. For me it brings back memories of long days at the beach with picnics of pimiento cheese sandwiches and lemonade. My mother was of the no-television-play-outside persuasion, meaning that my sisters’ and my childhood summer days were filled with “going out to play.” With our neighborhood pals, we went camping in the woods (which really amounted to eating breakfast in the empty field behind our houses), formed a club, and wore out the slip-n-slide. The grand finale of each summer was the circus we put on. And grand it was, with acrobatic acts, a clown show, and pet performances. Our backyard circus was the culmination of months of planning, negotiation, and a fair share of arguments about everything from our costumes to our admission price – usually a dime. I hope summer evokes similar memories for you.

With these thoughts in mind, it seems a fitting time to share some thoughts about play. For many parents, child’s play is synonymous with wasting time. This is evidenced by the fact that much, if not most, play is now managed by adults according to *their* rules, as in organized sports. Problems are not worked out by the kids themselves, but by adults. Because of this, kids seem to be losing leadership skills. Since achievement and goal direction have become paramount, today’s play is often more about winning than about

having a good time. Fortunately not at Benjamin, but many schools are devaluing play and, under pressure to enhance achievement and provide more time for academic study, are eliminating recess.

This attitude toward play holds true even for America’s preschool set; academic pressures on these little children are squeezing out playtime. In opening remarks at the 2005 Play=Learning Conference, Kathy Hirsh-Pasek reported that the percentage of time preschool kids spend in play decreased from 40 percent in 1981 to 25 percent in 1997, while a whopping four billion-dollar tutoring industry has sprung up – with 26 percent of it lavished on two- to six-year-olds. Although this free time decreased to 25 percent of a child’s day, most of that time is unfortunately spent watching television. Can it be that this play deprivation of a whole generation of youth might be contributing to their mental fragility?

What are some of the benefits of play? Specialists Hara Estroff Marano and Jaak Panksepp recognize that play is vital in teaching children how to control themselves and how to interact with others. Kid-centered, kid-controlled, old fashioned make-believe actively stimulates the development of self-regulation. The social interaction of play serves to sharpen intellectual skills. Play has extraordinary intellectual and developmental value. In fact, it is in free unstructured play, where children

continued on page 2

CONTENTS

“It’s Just Child’s Play”

“Chores + Routines = Responsibility”

“Conversation Starters”

“Suggested Reading for Parents”

Conversation Starters

by Kathy Bailey

With the school year ending and summer beginning it is a nice time to learn some new things about your child. Here are some questions that can start and/or foster good communication with your child:

- * What was your most memorable moment this year?
- * What was the greatest lesson you learned in and out of school?
- * What one experience this year stands out in your mind?
- * How do you think you have grown this past school year?
- * What was the biggest challenge you faced and how did you overcome it?

(continued from page 1)

invent and interact with each other, that cognitive skills are most acutely developed. Peer play has long-term effects on learning and stimulates sophisticated language use. Through play, children learn how to get along with others. Play is the true preparation for adulthood – it is rule-bound activities in which the outcome is unknown.

So, as you and your children plan for summer, be sure to allow plenty of time for free, unstructured, creative play. Who will give them the freedom and benefits and many happy memories of play? You're it, no tag-backs.



Suggested Reading for Parents:

Last Child in the Woods
by Richard Louv

A Nation of Wimps
by Hara Marano

A Family of Value
by John Rosemond

Six Point Plan for Raising Happy,
Healthy Children
by John Rosemond

Parent Power
by John Rosemond

The Pressured Child
by Michael Thompson

Chores + Routines = Responsibility

by Danielle Benvenuto

As summertime approaches, it is important to make this time not only enjoyable for your child but an opportunity to learn and grow as well. To help your child gain greater responsibility and maturity this summer, it might be helpful to make chores and routines important parts of your summer plans.

Chores are an excellent way for your child to not only demonstrate responsibility but to become more independent. Research has shown that children who can act independently and assume appropriate levels of responsibility are more likely to have higher levels of self esteem. Remember, we do not give our children self esteem but rather help to foster it by teaching them responsibility, independence, the value of hard work, and by allowing them to experience opportunities where they can achieve their capabilities. As John Rosemond wrote in his book "A Family of Value," when children participate in family work (i.e. household chores) the child becomes a valued member of

the family which in turn enhances the *value of family* for the child. Having your child continue with the chores they now already perform coupled with additional chores added over the summer months can help prepare your child to enter the next grade with a heightened level of maturity and accountability.

Routines, while certainly more relaxed in the summer, are also another great way to help your child stay focused this summer. Routines provide organization and familiarity, which children need at all stages of development. This can be accomplished by creating time to consistently practice math facts, to read for an allotted amount of time each day, and to journal about everyday adventures as well as priceless experiences on family vacations.

By helping to foster responsibility in our children over the summer months, we will assist in the development of children that will grow to become reliable and dependable individuals.



**HAVE A
GREAT SUMMER!**