

## Preparation for Play

As a kid, I remember losing myself for hours in imaginary worlds, playing marbles or LEGOs or dolls or in the woods behind our house in Oregon. I remember playing the piano and long hours spent splayed across my bed reading. But I also remember that my mother, usually with a basket of laundry in hand, would come across me and sigh, “I wish I had the time to do that.” Did I somehow absorb the idea that becoming an adult, a mother, meant giving up time for the things that give you joy? *Brigid Schulte*

Play. The word evokes total absorption in childhood activities with our focus totally in the moment. When we were children, play encouraged our creativity and allowed us to take risks. It helped us grow and learn—from developing our motor skills to fine-tuning our emotional skills. And it was fun!

Then we became adults. We needed to provide for our material needs as well as pursue our lives’ work. We learned to work hard and be responsible, and our need for play was diminished. Yet being responsible does not preclude being able to play. Play is important for adults. It is an exercise of the spirit. It helps us live in the moment. It still encourages our creativity and allows us to take risks. Play relieves stress, and it can improve our connection to others. It refreshes us and allows us to put our responsibilities in perspective. Some research is showing that play, such as crossword puzzles and other thinking games, can slow cognitive decline in the elderly. And it is fun! A problem for us is to find a place for play in our busy lives.

Piaget believes that children go through three sequential stages of play: (1) sensory-motor play, (2) symbolic play, and (3) games with rules. In *Understanding Children’s Play*, Jennie Lindon states that children’s play can be viewed as four broad kinds of involvement: solitary play, spectator play, parallel play and co-operative social play. She notes that children do not move from one stage to another leaving the earlier stage behind, but rather move back and forth.

What does play look like for adults? There is a growing trend of coloring books for adults, games on the Internet such as Lumosity, which features brain games, and sports such as Pickleball, which some call “senior tennis” since it requires less stress on knees and hips. Many adults return to the creative arts, including painting, photography, or playing a musical instrument, after the busy years of work or raising children. Others engage in sports, including walking and hiking, golf, swimming, working out at the gym or taking a class in yoga. And more: hobbies, travel, cooking, gardening, being of service to others by volunteering (think of our tutoring program and ESL program at 1st UU). Ideas are endless!

All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. *English proverb*

We need to learn to incorporate play and relaxation into our daily lives—they are an important counterpart to the natural stress of life. *Patricia Hoolihan*

The balance of family and social recreation is becoming harder and harder to come by. The balance of work and real play, activities done for no purpose at all except the release and recapture of energy, is becoming foreign. As a consequence our souls are drying up in work and

our minds are being numbed by TV nothingness. We need to learn to play again if our spiritual lives are going to be healthy at all. *Joan Chittister*

Almost all creativity involves purposeful play. *Abraham Maslow*

We need play in our lives for the same reason children do: to hone new skills, develop new empathies, involve us with new people, teach us our limits, and outfit us for our continuously changing environment. *Christine Robinson*

Play is not something that we do; it is something that we are. It is the state of consciousness that we are born with, and it gradually diminishes in power as we age, until, as adults, we generally find that we are able to enter and exit this state with ease only if we have practiced.  
*Amy Fusselman*

There often seems to be a playfulness to wise people, as if either their equanimity has as its source this playfulness or the playfulness flows from the equanimity; and they can persuade other people who are in a state of agitation to calm down and manage a smile.  
*Edward Hoagland*

Consider what the world would be like without play. It's not just an absence of games or sports. Life without play is a life without books, without movies, art, music, jokes, dramatic stories. . . . In a broad sense, play is what lifts people out of the mundane. I sometimes compare play to oxygen—it's all around us, yet goes mostly unnoticed or unappreciated until it is missing.  
*Stuart Brown*

## **Questions to Ponder**

1. What were your favorite play activities as a child? This question will be part of the sharing at the meeting.
2. How do you balance a need for play with the more serious aspects of life? What activities are play in your life now?
3. What activities in your life do you consider play? How does play nourish your spirit/soul and enrich your life? Are there activities that you do for recreation or leisure that don't really feel like play?
4. If you could find more time to just play, what would you fill it with?
5. List some ideas for play that you might like to try. Include activities you do now but would like to spend more time doing.
6. Think about different kinds of play—solitary play, social play, imaginary play and object play.
7. Has technology changed the way that you play, or what you consider play? If it has, how do you feel about the change?