



THE AMAZING BENEFITS OF SELF-DIRECTED PLAY

Excerpt from Pop-Up Adventure Play's P.L.A.Y. Guide
By Anna Housley Juster, Ph.D.

Child-directed play: the play that evolves when children choose what to play and make up their own rules for how to play.

When children play this way, they...

- ★ Figure out things for themselves.
- ★ Learn how to take healthy risks.
- ★ Find innovative ways to think about the world and how it works, based on their own self-led, intrinsically motivated interests.
- ★ Practice necessary skills such as overcoming obstacles, creative problem solving (on their own or with other children), communicating their feelings effectively with others, and working with those who may have difference points of view.
- ★ Experience the joy of self discovery, the thrill of being able to pursue their own creative ideas without the fear of failure that usually arises when there is one, predetermined way to be "right" or to "win".

Years of research show conclusively that child-directed play... fosters the development of the whole child – children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical skills; contributes to school success; and is a necessary and important part of every child's life.

Children are experts
in their own play.
Follow their lead and when invited,
PLAY ALONG!



TOGETHER, WE ALL CAN SUPPORT CHILD-DIRECTED PLAY – ONE CARDBOARD BOX AT A TIME

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The Amazing Benefits of Child Directed Play

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Many children do not have the opportunities they need for child-directed play. You can help to provide more child-directed play opportunities just by keeping these four key P.L.A.Y. Ideas in mind:

Permission To support child-directed play, give children permission by making sure they have downtime every day – time with no adult-directed activities. Some children may need encouragement, “It’s okay. Just play!”

Loose Parts Loose parts are simple, everyday materials that children can change and use as they please (e.g., cardboard boxes, paper towel tubes, paper bags, crayons, fabric sample, etc.). Just add tape or glue and kids will do the rest!

A Safe Space Children need a place where they feel safe to play freely and get messy! An old sheet or towel on the floor can help to create a safe space inside where children can play and create with tape, glue, and crayons. Draped across chairs, the sheet makes a place to hide. If possible, you can bring materials outside to a porch or the playground.

You Children are experts in their own play. One of the ways to support play is to simply watch and listen. When invited, play along! If children ask for help (e.g., cutting a window in a cardboard box), lend a hand! By showing that you support their play without taking over, you offer your children a priceless gift.

The benefits start today and will last a lifetime.

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