

July 2020 Newsletter



Importance of Play

In a world that seems to always be on the go, it can be difficult to take time out of everyday life to sit down and engage in meaningful play with children. Sometimes a tablet can seem like a lifesaver and a quick fix to stimulate a young one's mind especially after a tough day at work, but play can be our brain's favorite way of learning. When parents support and interact with their child through play, it allows the child to

have fun and use their creativity to develop important lifelong skills. The skills a child gains through play (i.e. imagination, verbal skills, and motor skills, etc.) are beneficial for their growth and development. The power of play is something that cannot necessarily be gained from a screen or tablet, but it may be acquired from meaningful engagement and parent participation in hands-on child's play.

Laurie Pasch is a licensed independent clinical social worker and marriage and family therapist. She also is a diplomat in clinical social work. Laurie provides individual, family, marital, and group psychotherapy and crisis intervention for children, adolescents, and young adults at North Shore Center. She uses a variety of techniques to overcome difficulties driven by school problems, anxiety, depression, grief, family issues, or chronic illness. Laurie has extensive knowledge in play therapy and incorporates psychodynamic strategies into her therapy sessions.

Laurie's Words on Play

What is Play?

Laurie describes a child's play as the child's view of the world, and children give us permission to enter their personal world by including us in their play. During a play therapy session, a child uses the play to share their fantasies, dreams, and imagination as well as worries and concerns with Laurie. She also is allowed to see how the child

perceives and understands what is happening in the world around them. Laurie also describes play as a child's way of communicating with others. Specifically, when playing with a child, we are given insight into what might be going on inside their mind. For non-verbal children, play may be especially important because it may be their only way to communicate with the outside world.

What Developmental Skills Can We Gain From Play?

Laurie mentions the importance that human interactive play has on a child's development. Therefore, Laurie uses person-to-person play in therapy to help her clients develop basic life skills. Starts with their imagination and creativity skills. Laurie grows these skills by allowing her clients to be the "master of the play world." Meaning, she will set up an open-ended situation and allow the child to pick the setting, choose the characters, and create the story. By starting with the imagination and creativity, Laurie opens the door for many other skills to grow. By putting the child in control of their imaginary world, she allows the child to develop a sense of self. In addition, the child feels independent and grows in their ability to explore the world around them. By asking the child to explain their characters and what they are doing, Laurie helps the child grow in their awareness of relationships. Finally, Laurie uses play to help children master situations and grow their problem-solving skills. She does this by encouraging the child to talk through and solve the situations and problems they create in their play world.

What Does Play Look Like in Adolescents?

Laurie finds it important to mention that these skills are important to play at any age. However, in adolescents, skills such as a sense of self and independence are particularly important. Play is often a way for adolescents to connect with others while seeing themselves as independent from their parents. During play, such as a game of basketball or a board game, adolescents disconnect from their parents' rules and control which creates a spontaneous and playful interaction between them and their parents. This allows the adolescent to connect with their parent in a more balanced way because the child feels like an equal to their parent at those moments. Adolescents may engage in play because they want to be social. Therefore, it is important that parents make "playtime" with their adolescents a social phenomenon. Laurie suggests that parents share emotional experiences and make time together fun by adding humor into everyday routines. Making life more playful will bring the parent closer to their adolescent, improve their adolescent's sense of self, reduce parent and adolescent stress, and open the window for deep conversations. Laurie stresses how important it is to keep playtime as playtime. Meaning families should put down their phones, avoid discussing and solving their problems, and parents should refrain from parenting and punishing their kids during playtime.

Other Facts Parents Should Know About Play

Laurie talked about how a parent can use play to build a relationship with their child. Parents can help their children approach their goals and support them in achieving these goals in fun and playful ways. Laurie also talked about cooperative play or play where the parent and the child work as a team. This kind of play can help reduce a sense of competition and show the child they can share in a pleasant experience with their parent. Finally, she mentioned the importance of bringing play into daily family routines. This can be as simple as adding humor or fun into everyday household activities. This type of casual play is important in boosting relationships and reducing stress for all members of the family.

Laurie also talked about how parents can play with their children without taking control of the game or story. First, a parent must observe their child's play and try to recognize the child's process. Second, when the child invites them to play, the parent must be self-aware of their actions. Parents must make sure they know where they are coming from. Are they getting involved because they feel their child needs help or is the child genuinely seeking their support? Laurie recommends that parents ask themselves: "Am I doing this for the need of my child or for the need of myself?" before they interfere with their child's play. The parent needs to remember that they are entering the child's world when they play; therefore, interrupting or changing the story is not fair to the child. Usually, it will make the child upset and angry. Finally, if a parent wants to contribute an idea to the play, then they must model that idea. Never criticize the play, but simply add an idea into the play by meeting the child at their level and modeling your idea using the child's games and toys.

Playing in a Pandemic

Laurie's last part of the interview addressed the importance of allowing children and adolescents to keep in contact with their peers despite the pandemic. Video calls, Snapchats, and texting groups served an important role in keeping peers connected when the pandemic first hit; however, keeping tabs on apps requires a lot of energy and may not be a replacement for the face to face interactions that were lost in lockdown. Children of all ages may be experiencing nerves for the upcoming school year, fear being left out from the children who are no longer social distancing, and/or may have become too comfortable with the idea of not being social. For these kids, it is especially important that they get some form of peer interaction into their day. Laurie suggests that families look into socially distanced play dates. For example, allowing children to play on separate halves of the driveway or bring their own hammocks to a park and sit and talk. It can also be allowing them to go on outdoor walks or bike rides with their friends.

Whatever the activity, make sure that children are able to keep up their social skills and manage their anxiety before the fall!

For more information on the importance of play and the use of play therapy, please contact Laurie Pasch at admin@northshorecenterllc.com.

Wrapping it up

Because of the pandemic, parents have been given time with their kids that they normally wouldn't have. Laurie Pasch feels it is especially important for families to put this extra time to good use. Channeling energy into interacting and playing as a family will reduce stress, boost the family relationship, and allow for everyone to enjoy each other.

Now is the perfect time to engage in meaningful play with your children and adolescents. Play is a healthy and effective way to build strong connections with your children at any age. It can be a key part of their development and growth. In a world full of easy access technology, it is important to slow down and take a break from apps, YouTube, movies and instead absorb all the benefits of play with your kiddos.

Written by: Stephanie Fuller, BA Marquette University and Maggie Paulus, Winona State

MEQUON LOCATION

10303 N Port Washington Road

Suite 203

Mequon, WI 53092

BROOKFIELD LOCATION

12720 W North Ave

Brookfield, WI 53005