



## WEEK 11 | YOUR TRANSFORMATIVE PARENTAL JOURNEY

# Playful Parenting & Storytelling

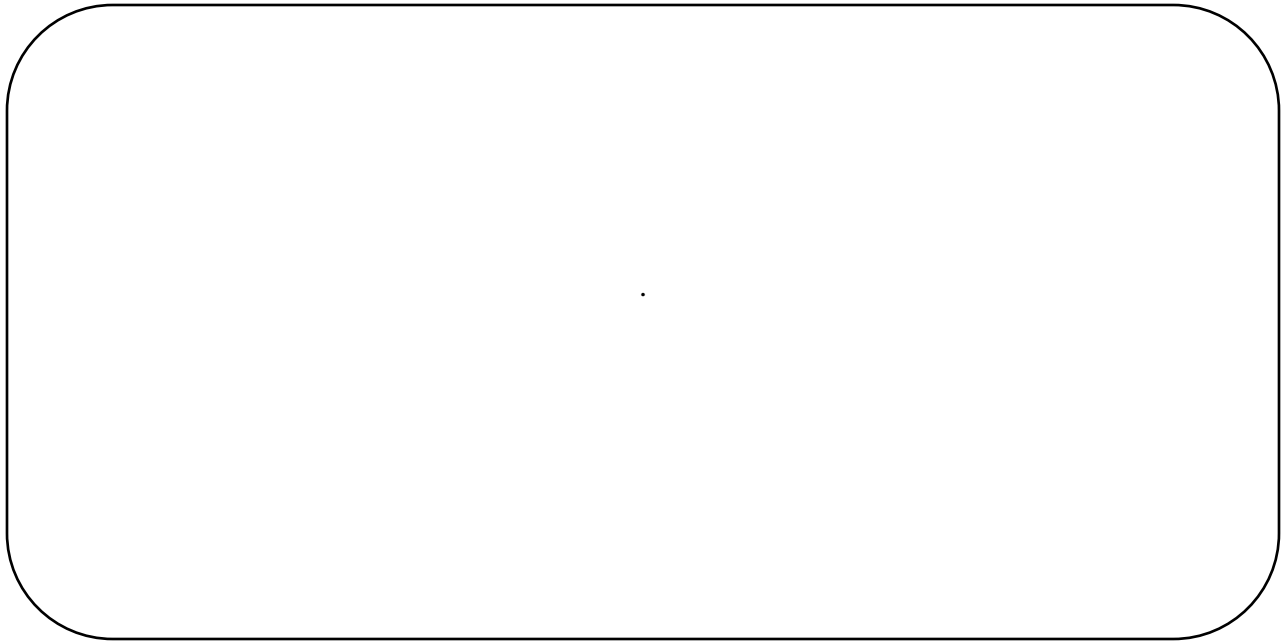
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### Let's Recap:

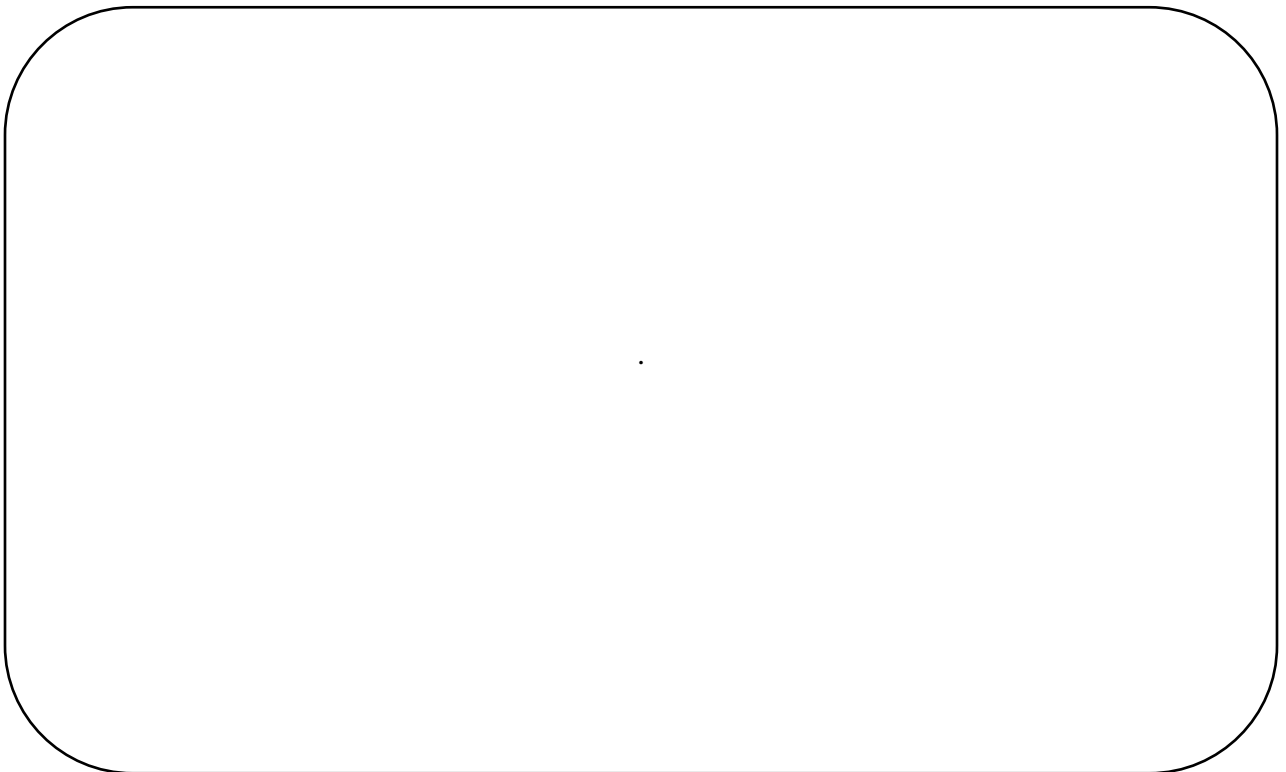
Have you discovered your sensory calming tool?

Are you finding yourself able to notice your thermometer rising when under stress?

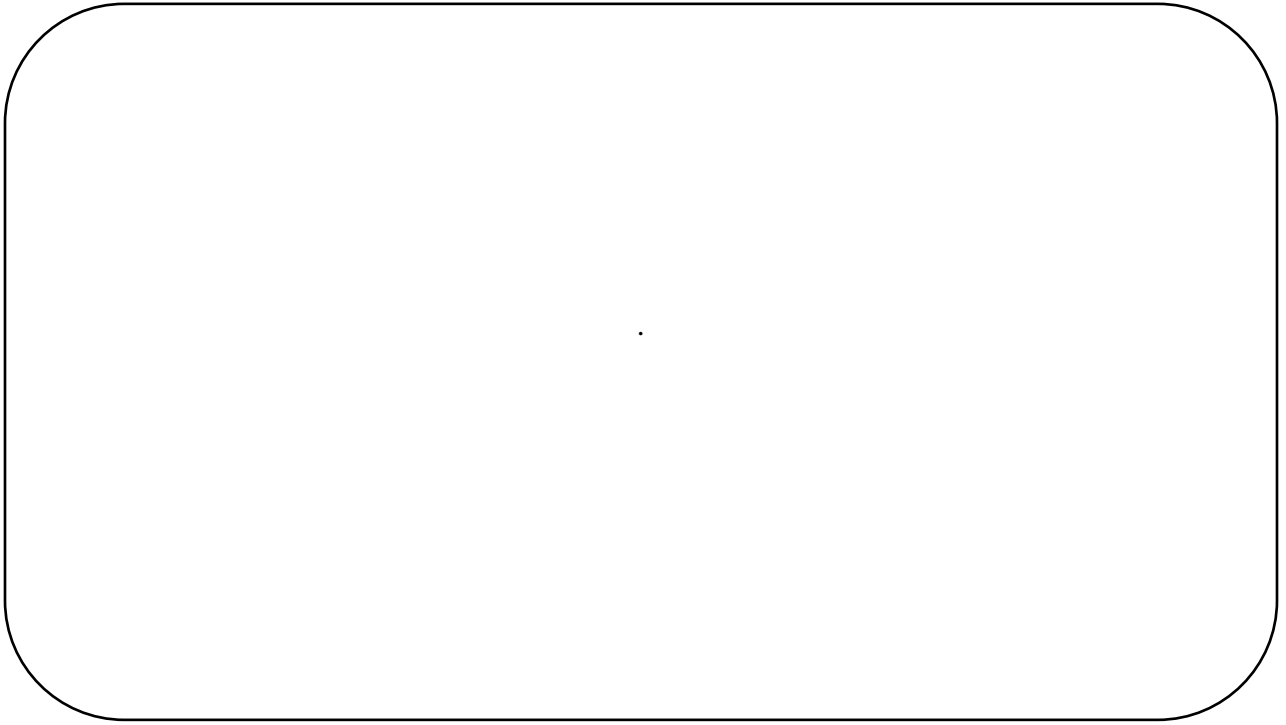
How has your understanding of anger and aggression shifted?



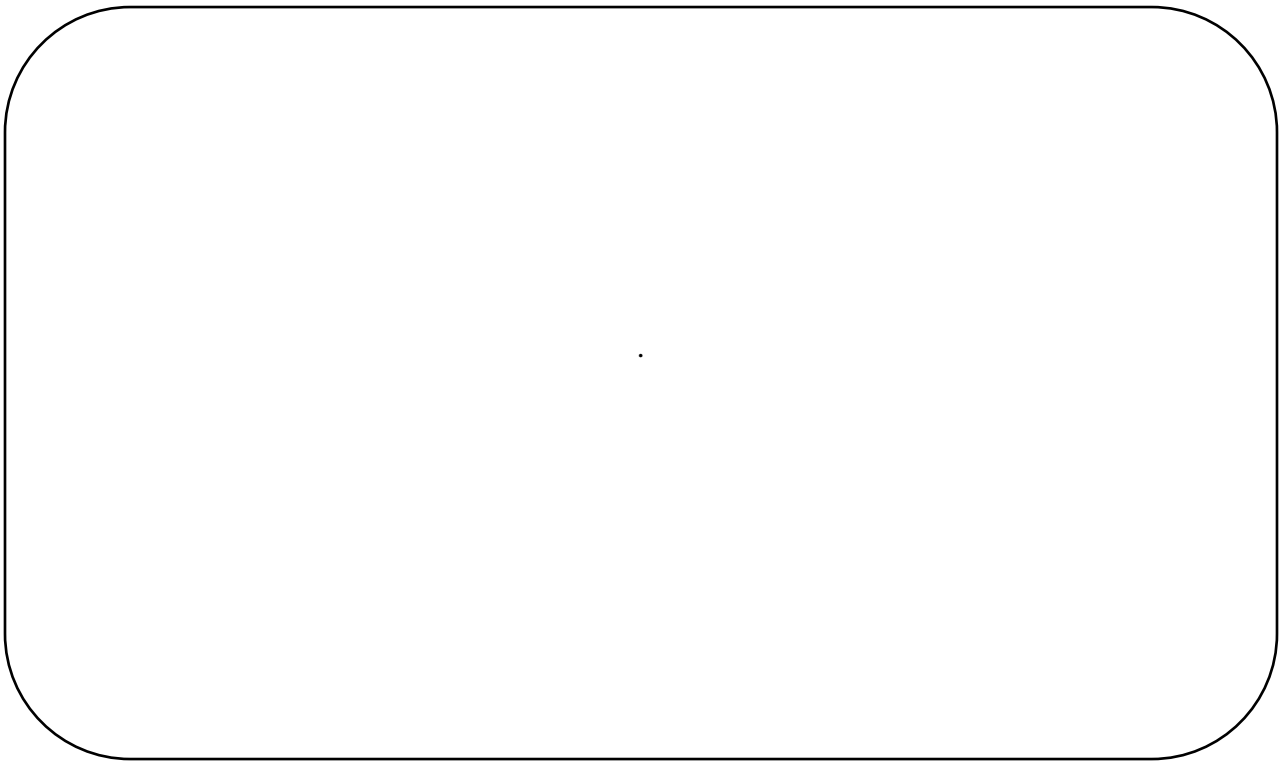
Are you able to hold space for your child's anger and aggression with less fear, judgment, and limiting beliefs?



How has your relationship to boundaries shifted?



Are you finding more ease in your communication of your feelings, wants, needs, and requests with your family?



# Playful Parenting

## The Magic of Empowered Parenting

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You have made it to the finale in your Empowered Parenting Process. When we prioritize self-awareness, integration of information, and recommit (daily) to the ongoing and ever-evolving path of transformation, we create S P A C E in our heart, head, and hands.

This space brings us closer to every human beings' birthright: to exist within the stillness of joy and a light heart. Let's end this process together by creating as much space as possible for you to allow more lightheartedness, curiosity, awe, and wonder within your daily life.

Before we dig into the "how to do it" behind playful parenting and storytelling, we need to discover what keeps us from BEING playful, spontaneous, and creative.

We'll do this like we have throughout our time together: weaving a coherent narrative, but connecting our past with our present, and casting the vision of our future.

Let's get started!

### **Playful Parenting: Past and Present**

How would you describe your relationship with the part within you who craves joy, play, and fun? Be honest here, there is no judgement.



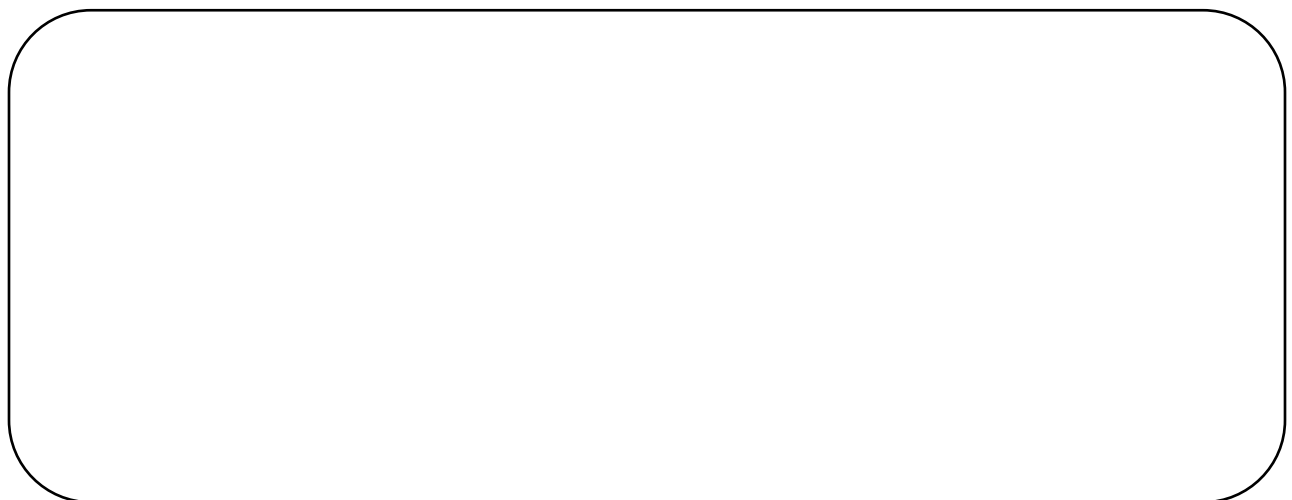
How would you describe your relationship with the emotion of JOY?



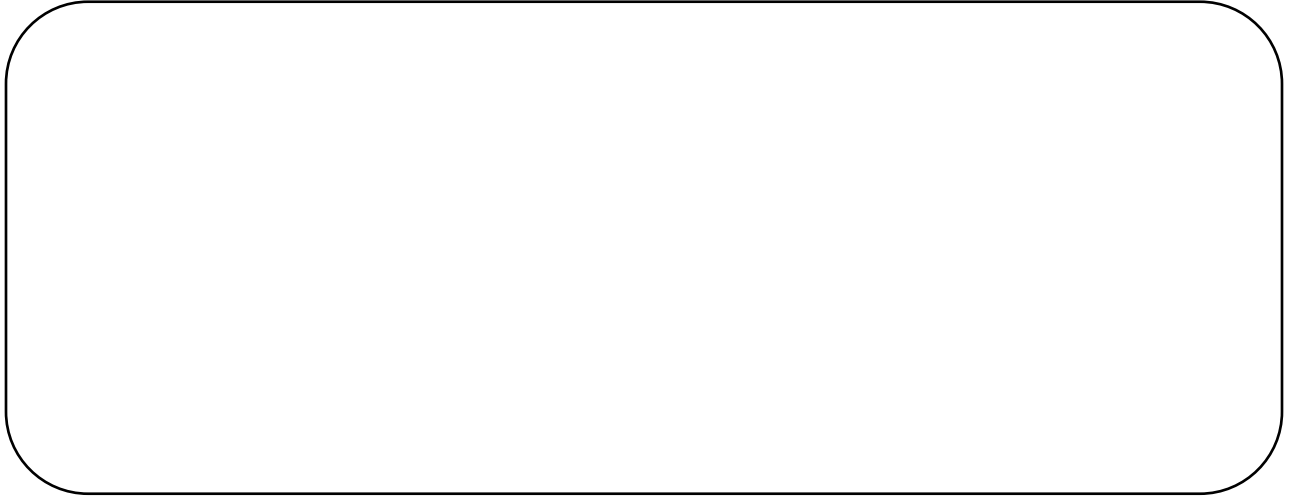
Where do you feel JOY in your body? Can you feel it? If so, what does it feel like?



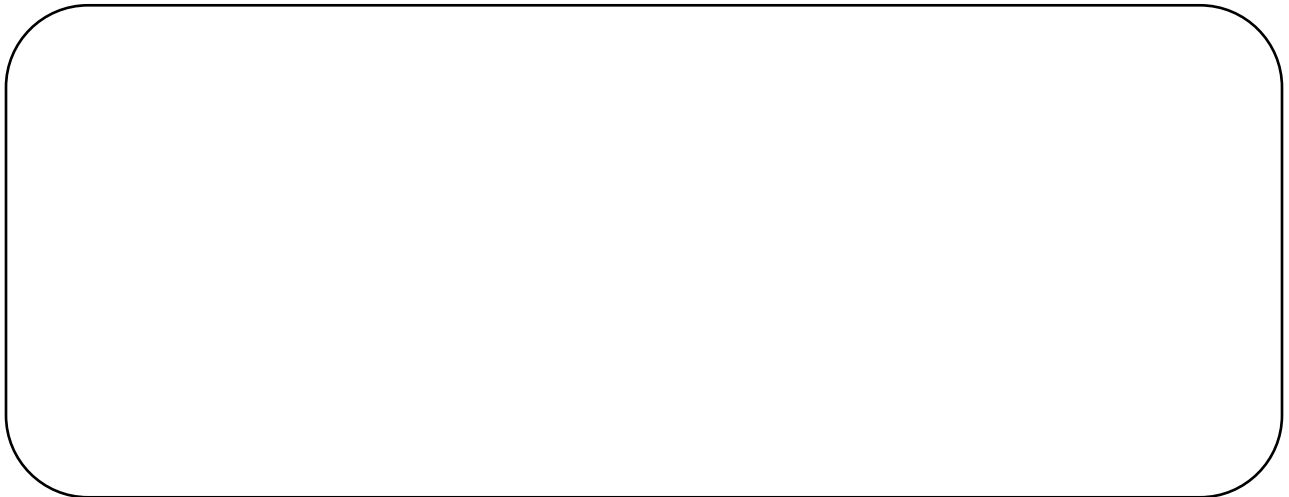
What brings you utter JOY, in your body, heart, and mind?



What could you do for hours and lose track of time?



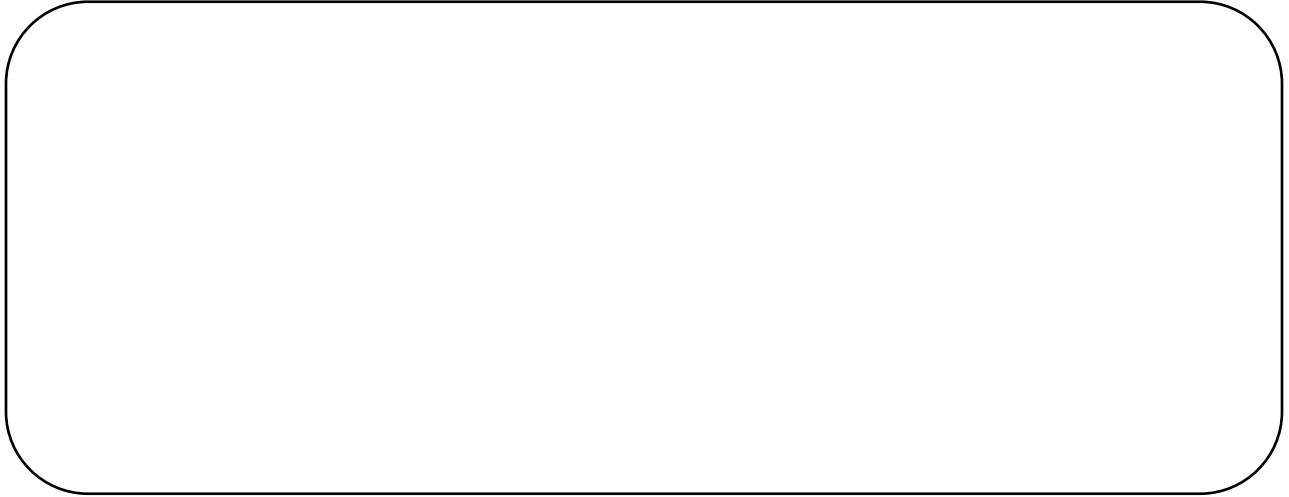
As a child, what were your favorite games or activities to play?



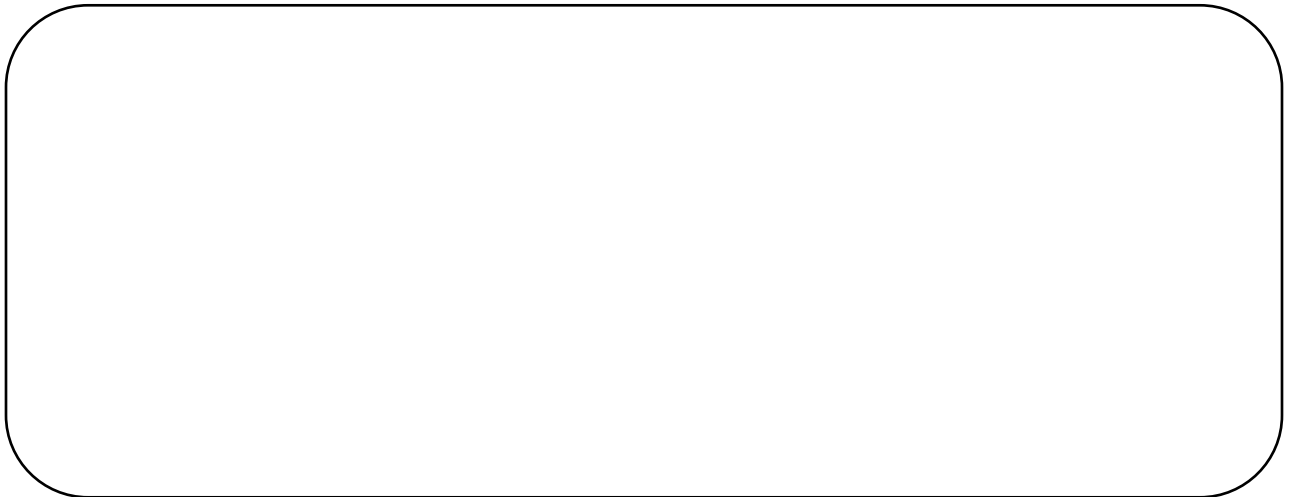
As a child, did your caregiver(s) ever play with you?



With your children, what games or play activities come easily for you?



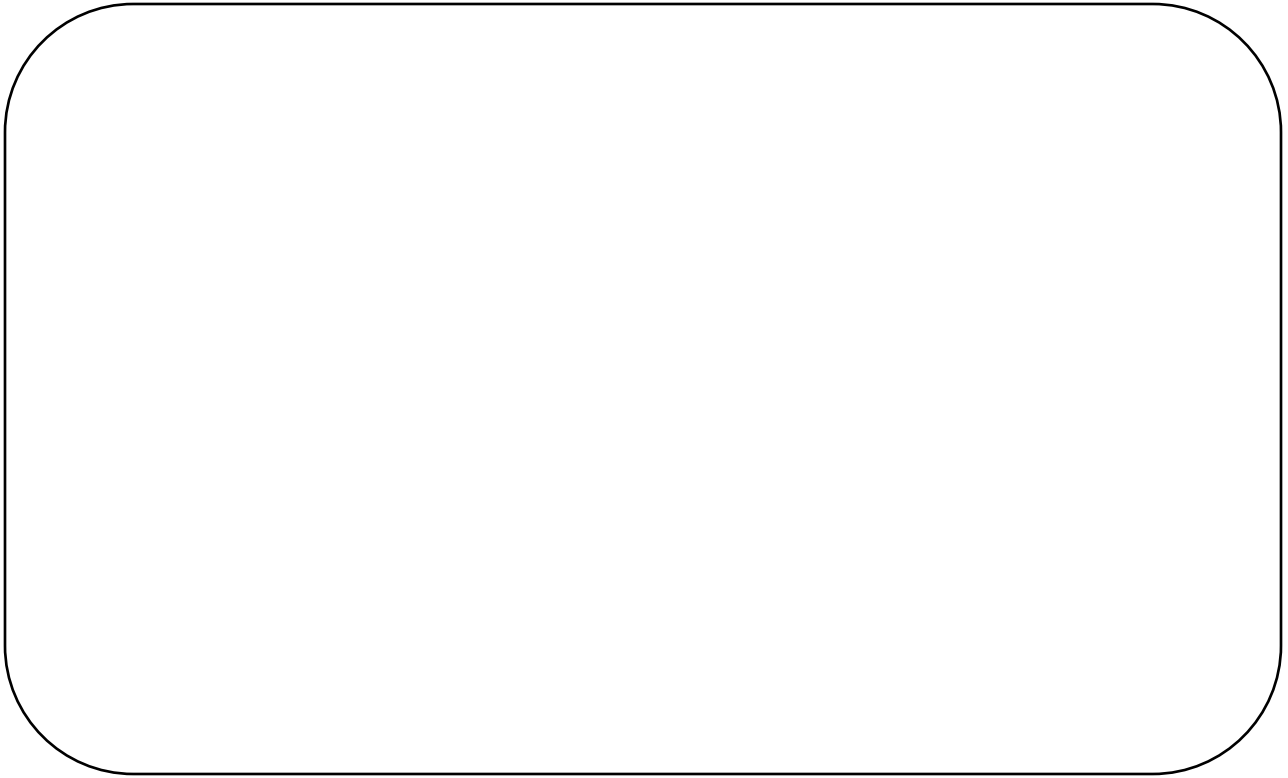
What games and activities feel like a burden or a chore for you?



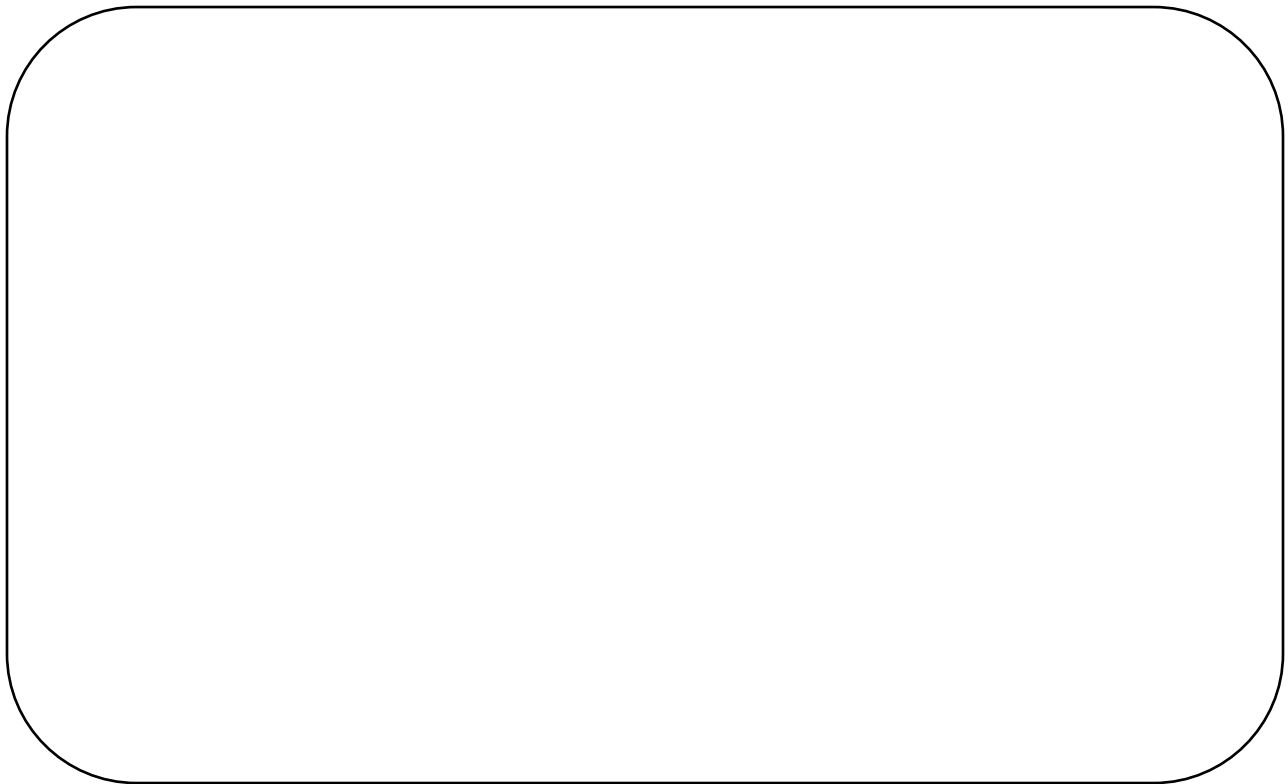
When you find yourself accessing playfulness, what beliefs are present within you?



When you can access play, how do you feel?



When you can access play, what needs are being met?





# Why Play?

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*An article published through Bright Horizons, entitled “The Benefits of Play for a Child’s Development,” suggests that “play helps children understand the world and discover how their bodies work.” It is, quite literally, a child’s sacred work. It is their contribution to life, to their developing sense of self, and their language, their lens, and their lifeblood.*

*“Play is something done for its own sake,” says psychiatrist Stuart Brown, author of “Play.” He writes: “It’s voluntary, it’s pleasurable, it offers a sense of engagement, it takes you out of time. And the act itself is more important than the outcome.”*

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## Benefits Of Play

**Physical:** Active play helps kids with coordination, balance, motor skills, and cultivating a healthy relationship with their environment.

**Emotional:** While playing and engaging the social engagement system, children can experience strong emotions like anger, fear, shame, and sorrow, in a way that is digestible for them. Acting out these emotions, and role playing through them, supports children to diffuse any pent-up painful memories of these emotions, and create a secure attachment to these emotions. This develops emotional regulation as they age. It’s never too late to begin this practice.

**Social:** Play helps children develop awareness of social cues, empathy, collaboration, and negotiation.

**Cognitive:** Play is every child’s learning language. It ignites their social engagement system, which puts their brain at ease. When the brain is flooded with stress and pressure to learn, the brain is flooded with fear, and will not retain what it’s learning. Alternatively, it can begin to associate learning with stress, and limiting beliefs like “I’m stupid” or “I’m not capable.” The more joy, and less pressure our children experience in their learning process, better their brain will develop.

**Creative:** Imagination without any control, or interruption, brings children to a place of “anything is possible.” This is nourishment for their prefrontal cortex, the space in their brain where genius occurs. Imagination IS the pathway to genius, innovation, and infinite possibilities.

**Communication:** Play allows children to practice communication in a “low stakes” arena. They act out and practice the nonviolent communication you are modeling, and they diffuse any words of violence or other stress they have heard throughout their life.

## The Science Of Play

Play is surrendering to the present moment. It is the epitome of the nervous system state of social engagement. Play flows when we feel safe in our bodies. Play supports both a child and an adult to de-stress and return to safety within.

With nervous system science in mind, understanding that play is the social engagement that brings life, we recognize how exercising playfulness and actively playing with our children nurtures our child’s sense of security and belonging to themselves, their family, and life around them.

Play, especially unstructured play (outdoors whenever possible), provides opportunity for our children to meet their innate limitations, bypass the limitation of time and space, and develop their prefrontal cortex. Remember this is the area of the brain where executive functioning happens, like conscious decision making, an understanding of long-term consequences for short-term decisions, and a willingness to collaborate, compromise, and collaborate as a teammate toward a shared goal.

Bright Horizons writes that “play is so important that **NAEYC** (National Association for the Education of Young Children) has called it a central component in developmentally appropriate practice,” and the **United Nations High Commission on Human Rights** declared it a **fundamental right of every child**. Play is not frivolous. It is not something to do after the “real work” is done. Play is the real work of childhood. Through it, children have their best chance for becoming whole, happy adults.”

## What Keeps Us From Playfulness?

For some parents, playing with their children is akin to pulling teeth without anesthesia. We KNOW it’s good for our children, for us, and for our relationship with our children, but we struggle, nonetheless. For many parents, this is a source of great shame and avoidance.

Why is this?

- **Lack of safety in childhood:** As children, play may not have been prioritized in our everyday world. If you were raised in a home where there was no safety, or if you were raised by an adult who “couldn’t” play, your ability to access play, awe, wonder, and imagination may have been blocked. This is temporary, and can be softened. We may believe that letting go and surrendering to presence is not safe, and struggle with feeling “out of control” when our child is directing the play.
- **Lack of emotional connection in childhood:** For many adults, we were not met with vulnerable, emotional connection. Play requires presence, which is the most intimate and vulnerable expression of our humanity.

According to Sarah Baldwin, a polyvagal-trained coach, it makes sense why you struggle playing. She writes,

*“Is playing hard for you? Do you find yourself avoiding it all together? Or when others are playing do you find yourself feeling overwhelmed, uncomfortable and wanting to jump out of your skin or get away?”*

All of this makes complete sense.

### **Here’s how:**

When we experience trauma, our systems are either able to process that overwhelming energetic charge in our systems or they’re not.

Whether or not your system was able to process that energy through at the time of the trauma has **NOTHING** to do with your ability, capacity or function. It has everything to do with the external circumstances that followed a traumatic event.

You see, our systems want to be able to process what happened but they need the conditions necessary to do so.

Those conditions include safety after the event ends, and a mutually empathic witness. This witness is someone who can hold space for our experience and remain anchored in safety for us while also dipping into the state we are in to attune with our experience and support us to feel less alone in it.

Those conditions create the possibility for our systems to do what they have the natural intelligence and capacity to do, which is to gain freedom from what

happened. When we don't have those conditions, our systems are left in the replaying of the traumatic event and our protective parts show up lovingly to do their best to be sure what happened never happens again.

Play is an experience of regulation and in many ways mimics what our systems are saying was dangerous in the past. So we want to begin stepping towards play gently.

Might you be able to explore play with a pet or a child?

Can you tolerate watching dogs play or kids playing at the park?

What about playing with creativity, having a game night, dancing alone, listening to a playful song and taking it in?

Play is an act of incredible healing and however you relate to it now makes so much sense. It's always one brave step at a time.

Let's explore the potential barriers that keep us from accessing playfulness and lightheartedness with our children. We will explore 12 potential wounds, and 12 remedies.

Go through the list in the next section and checkmark or circle the one that stands out the STRONGEST.

There may be more than one, and if so, do your best to choose the strongest of the few.

## **When Shouldn't We Be Playful?**

It's important to be "in tune" with what children are communicating non-verbally as well as verbally. If they're already dysregulated, adult-initiated play may feel unsafe and chaotic to them.

Similarly, if children are experiencing any sort of trauma, the uncertainty and novelty of play may be anything but grounding to them. What they need most in this instance is solid and peaceful connection through co-regulation before their nervous systems will be open to anything that resembles levity.

Likewise, if the adult is feeling anxious, angry, or escalated in any way, children can perceive their play as aggressive -- and will therefore be unreceptive to it.

Play works best when both parent and child are emotionally grounded and in tune with one another. Second best is when the adult is feeling fully regulated and sees the child starting to dysregulate. Here, the adult may be able to bring the child back to a regulated state through gentle, slow, and intentional play.

## Remembering Our Joy Within: Discovering Your Play Language

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Each of us has a natural play language. To be “playful” is not just to be silly and active. It’s about being connected to our natural expression of joyfulness. For some parents, playfulness means going rock climbing. For some parents, their idea of play is cuddled on the couch reading books with our child. You get to be **YOURSELF** in your play, and your children get to be themselves!

We learn to embrace our natural play language, which will fill us with clarity, confidence, and security. This way, we can more easily enter our child’s play language. The resentment won’t be as strong, or won’t exist, because you are grounded in what brings you joy, and consciously choose to enter your child’s expression of joy.

The closer you are to your joy, the more willing and calm you will be engaging in boundary setting with your child around play time. You will have more energy, more enthusiasm, and more **S P A C E** to practice and be joyful.

### **1. A Play Language Of Action, Initiation, And Leadership**

**Needs:** A need of appreciation for your love of leadership

**Wound:** As a child, I lacked the authentic and heart-centered approval of my natural leadership skills. The way I show up in the world is naturally as a leader. I may have been called “bossy” by adults, when really, I needed support to hone in and refine my inherent talent to assume the role of leadership within a group. I disconnected from my inner child because I fear that they are too bossy. My inner child drives people away with their bossiness.

**Remedy:** Give yourself the appreciation and approval you seek for your natural tendency to assume a role of leadership. Remind yourself that you can be both a leader AND a member of a group. They are not mutually exclusive. Find games, activities, and hobbies that allow you to shine in your leadership. Maybe you are meant to nourish your inner child by becoming a facilitator of a group? A teacher? Love yourself for this gift.

## **2. A Play Language Of Touch, Cuddles, And Coziness**

**Needs:** Lots and lots and lots and lots of touch

**Wound:** As a child, I used my natural expression and light to acquire material possessions. I may have fallen into a pattern of neglecting emotions, only focusing on receiving material expressions of love. Meaning, my parents or caregiver may have shown me their love through material objects, versus emotional attunement. Therefore, I disconnected from my authentic expression and need for emotional intimacy and physical affection. My child self is more focused on measuring the abundance or scarcity of the material world. I neglect my inner emotional world and my need to measure how full my emotional cup is.

**Remedy:** Be honest about your need for affection and emotional intimacy. Your inner child is starving for it. Material objects and abundance of “things” will only satisfy your inner child to a certain level. They need much, much deeper layers of intimacy and abundance. Give yourself the affection you need. Self-massage is a beautiful remedy here. Allow yourself to be the center of attention in affection by receiving a professional massage. Ask for, and offer, plenty of hugs.

## **3. A Play Language Of Learning And Teaching**

**Needs:** Time to spend learning and space to teach others.

**Wound:** As a child, I was labeled a “smarty pants” by friends, parents, or teachers. I showed up with a natural fire and power in my ability to communicate facts, information, and always had the answers to questions. I become overzealous with my need to know the right answer, and that may have been stressful for me, especially if I did not have a loving and attuned adult to work with me through my intense need to be right. I disconnected from my inner child because my desire to know deeply and express accurately was too stressful for me. Now, I suppress my desire to learn and communicate what I learn.

**Remedy:** Find a healthy outlet for your natural desire to shine. You shine by knowing information and communicating information. You LOVE being smarty

pants! Find a group of people who want to learn from you. Start a YouTube channel so you can relay your information without fear of being scolded or judged by your need to express facts. Read fact books, memorize them, and tell the facts to your children or your partner. Get creative with your inner child's longing to learn and share what you learn.

#### **4. A Play Language Of “All Eyes On Me”**

**Needs:** Time in the spotlight. Time as the center of attention.

**Wound:** As a child, I longed to be the center of attention. I was the teacher's pet. I was the golden child in the family. I didn't like to share the attention and affection of my parents or caregiver. I became very jealous when I saw an adult figure express love and affection to another child or adult. I expressed my natural desire to shine in a family or intimate group by becoming the perfect child. I disconnected from my inner child because I see them as attention hogs, and just way too needy and jealous.

**Remedy:** Embrace your need to be deeply appreciated by your family. You shine as the caretaker and want to hear, feel, and see the appreciation your family members have for your light. Make the home your stage. Put on one-person plays or dance routines. Express yourself in the home in a way the rest of the family must pay attention to you. Include your children in your need for the spotlight within the home. Within friend groups, be open and honest about your need to feel adored. There is nothing wrong with that need. It is valid. The right friends will understand this quirk and will love this quality your inner child carries.

#### **5. A Play Language Of Art, Creativity, And Unbounded Expression**

**Needs:** Time and space to create and express yourself.

**Wound:** As a child, cultivating my natural ability to shine through creative pursuits of any kind became my obsession. I wanted to become the best of the best. Whether it was drawing, soccer, the piano, or singing, I wanted to be the best. Without proper facilitation of this deep need to express my light through my creativity, I detached from the emotional/heart connection to my creative pursuits and became hyper-focused on the results. As an adult, I fear connecting to my inner child because I view them as too dependent on external validation of my creative skills. I focus more on the product of my skill and less on the emotional connection I have to the process.

**Remedy:** Regain faith and joy in the process of creation. Remember that the truest fulfillment of your natural inclination to shine your light into the world through creative means has less to do with the final product and more to do with who you become through the process of creation itself. **PLAY!** Play, play, play. Be creative and messy with your kids without thinking about what the project will look like. It truly doesn't matter what it will look like. What matters is the way you **FEEL** with yourself, your connection to source, and your connection to your children.

## **6. A Play Language Of Caregiving And Service**

**Needs:** To have a job that benefits others, especially organizing, caregiving, helping others, and making lists.

**Wound:** As a child, I took great pride in my natural abilities to get things done. I helped clean the house. I helped take care of the pets, my siblings, and the garden. I helped with breakfast and dinner. I wanted to be acknowledged and appreciated for my ability to be so selfless and of service. As a child, I was unappreciated for my small, daily acts that contributed to the home or classroom. I would slack off, and get in trouble, instead of being asked by an emotionally attuned adult **WHY** I suddenly lost interest in my contribution. I stopped doing chores. I became labeled as "lazy." I disconnected from my inner child because I did not understand and believe that my way of shining is not as big, bold, or beautiful as other people's. As an adult, I put myself in service positions that feed my ego. I agree to acts of service but become resentful.

**Remedy:** I must reconnect with the heart of my inner child. Their "why" behind being of service will help support me toward a better balance of my natural need to be involved in daily work that contributes. I find joy from tending my home and daily responsibilities. I can give my inner child the validation and appreciation they seek. That way, I am dependent on external validation and appreciation, which causes me to overextend, and agree to roles of service that burn me out.

## **7. A Play Language Of Stillness, Ease, And Simplicity**

**Needs:** Activities that flood you with harmony and peace.

**Wound:** As a child, I was often stuck in a cycle of indecision. I needed an attuned, wise adult to guide me through my internal processes to find a clear decision within myself. I disconnected from my inner child because I didn't trust the decisions they made and why they made them. The phrase "just make up your mind already!" could have been directed at me. My natural strength shines when I



am in peace and harmony within and with all things. Because this did not feel possible for me as a child, under the weight of the indecision and limitless number of possibilities, I shrank from my need to weigh options, think carefully, and decide upon a course of action that serves both myself, and the other.

**Remedy:** Reconnect with your inner child by cultivating self-trust. This means committing to one small act every day that empowers your decision-making skills.

Give yourself two options in the morning: peppermint tea, or chai? DECIDE. Give yourself two options in the afternoon: almonds for snack, or granola with yogurt? DECIDE. Don't ask other's opinions. Just check in, get quiet, take your time and decide. Small decisions every day will rebuild self-trust between your inner child and your present self. As a parent, offer clear, concise choices for your children, so you can all remain connected instead of overwhelmed with too many options.

## **8. A Play Language Of Intrigue, Exploration, A Good Scare**

**Needs:** Exposure to mystery, and healthy connection to fear.

**Wound:** As a child, I had a deep need to understand life and all its complexities. I may have been fascinated with death or suffering. Taboo subjects like life after death, ghosts, the spirit world, anything invisible and unseen, called to me and frightened me. I needed an attuned adult who kept these wisdoms to guide me. I may have been called a "scaredy cat!" because topics like monsters or ghosts were not just pretend to me, I understood them as very real, and needed respect and guidance to navigate this unseen realm. I disconnected from my inner child because they could feel and sense too strongly, and I felt so afraid that I chose to shut that part down. Now, I either avoid these topics at all and can even greatly fear death, or I proclaim myself an expert while hiding behind a scared inner child.

**Remedy:** Allow yourself the time and space and your inner child craves to learn about the esoteric, and mysterious subjects of the world. Find a reliable teacher who can pass on the wisdoms you seek. Find healthy expressions to shine your light in this area. Study your faith if you have one, explore your belief systems, speak with an expert, or, contact a death doula and learn the ways of holistic death practices. Volunteer in a hospice center and just hold space for those who are near the end of their physical incarnation. Allow yourself to seek the truth within the greatest mysteries of the world. Your inner child will remember the wonder of it all, while being guided by the attuned adult that is now YOU.

## **9. A Play Language Of Exploration, Big Movement, And Excitement**

**Needs:** Lots of adventure and spontaneity.

**Wound:** As a child, I saw excitement everywhere. I was full of energy and enthusiasm. The world was beautiful and good. I had a bountiful will and didn't like to stay still for long. Always moving, always exploring. Getting bored, moving on, getting bored, moving on. I needed constant stimulation, new learning, new experiences, new sensations, new people.

This may have gotten me in trouble in my home or classroom. I may have been too, loud, too boisterous, too needy. "Why can't you just sit still?" may have been directed at me.

I disconnected from my inner child because I came to understand that my natural way of showing up in the world, bright, bold, and beautifully hungry for everything I can see, touch, and learn, irritated those closest to me. Now, I often feel trapped, stuck, disenchanting, or disheartened by humanity.

**Remedy:** Reestablish your connection to your fiery, passionate inner child by allowing yourself small acts of spontaneity. Go outside your comfort zone or daily routine and indulge in something you may have once judged as "ridiculous." Eat ice cream for breakfast. Go to the library and read the first page of ten different books without guilt or shame. Allow yourself to dream of the far away places you could travel, and the cultures you could learn. The people you could meet. Let yourself dream. People watch and find all those little quirks of beauty that you once so readily saw in all things. Shine your optimism in appropriate moments. Model your strong faith of goodness in humanity.

## **10. A Play Language Of Order, Structure, And Dependability**

**Needs:** A slow, steady rhythm. Long, lazy days at home. A day planned ahead of time.

**Wound:** As a child, I may have been an observer. I moved slowly and needed time to warm up. I may have been teased for this need and was labeled as shy. That wasn't true. I need an attuned and caring adult to advocate for me and remind me that my strength lies in my willingness to move intentionally through a chaotic world. I disconnected from my child self because I wanted to fit in, and my serious, focused, and practical nature was not affirmed. Now, I may struggle letting my guard down and showing up in the arena of my life.

**Remedy:** Allow yourself to embrace your natural tendency to shine as a beacon of light through your commitment to your responsibilities and your path. Your seriousness can model to those around you the necessary values and skills it takes to manifest one's dreams into the world in a way that is sustainable and long-lasting. If you feel cautious, go slowly. If you feel shy, surround yourself with people who accept you for who you are. Find daily, or weekly, rituals or hobbies that support you to deeply relax and let loose. Dancing can be a great outlet for you, as it is grounded and reliable, yet promotes abandon and surrender.

## **11. A Play Language Of Quirky Silliness!**

**Needs:** Originality, silly time to pretend and imagine new and impossible heights.

**Wound:** Naturally eccentric, I shine my light as a child by expressing my individuality in any means possible. My unconventionality may not have been understood or appreciated. In fact, instead of establishing myself within a group, or my family, my quirks ended up separating me from them. The “black sheep” of the family. The “weirdo.” I disconnected from my child self because their quirks and unique way of navigating the world, and questioning convention, isolated me from others. Now, I just try to be normal.

**Remedy:** Parent, fly your flag! You are here to model unconventionality. No, you do not do things as everyone else does. Support a reconnection to your child self by allowing yourself to express your light in all the weird ways you want. Wear many patterns and colors and textures. Dye your hair red and green. Walk backwards down the street. Talk with your children about your unique qualities. Believe that your quirks can bring you CLOSER to love and affection, versus separation.

## **12. A Play Language Of Fantasy, And Hours Of Daydreams**

**Needs:** Time to space out and just dream.

**Wound:** As a child, I was lost in dreamland. The boundary between what was real and what was not didn't exist for me. I could get lost in books for hours on end. I sat in school daydreaming. The strength of my light shone brightest behind closed doors. This natural inclination to sequester myself and dig into rich fantasy may have been the cause of much criticism. Without a loving, attuned adult, this strength may have tipped the scales. The strength of the day dreamer can turn into the escapism of the addict. There may have been addiction in my family, and so the sensation of becoming “lost” in anything frightened me. I disconnected from my

inner child because the power of imagination became too strong for me to carry on my own.

**Remedy:** Find and allow yourself safe ways to escape. Supplement your daily duties and responsibilities with a fantasy science fiction novel. Allow yourself to watch one or two movies a week. Set clear boundaries for yourself around daydreaming. For example, instead of constantly daydreaming and becoming lost, give yourself a half hour every day to sit and write in your journal, or to stare off into space and fantasize. Your creative light shines behind the curtain. Give yourself the isolation you seek, in an empowered way. One that honors your need for solace and deep dreaming, without separating you from your children, family, or friends.

## Becoming Clear

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Of the 12 potential disconnections from you to your inner child, which three ring the strongest?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

What are their remedies?

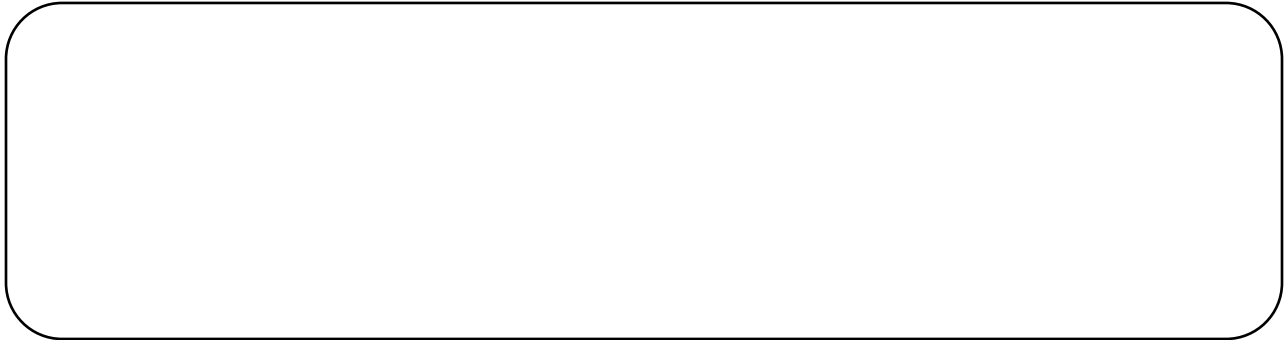
1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

If you are to narrow the three down to one, which is the strongest of the three?

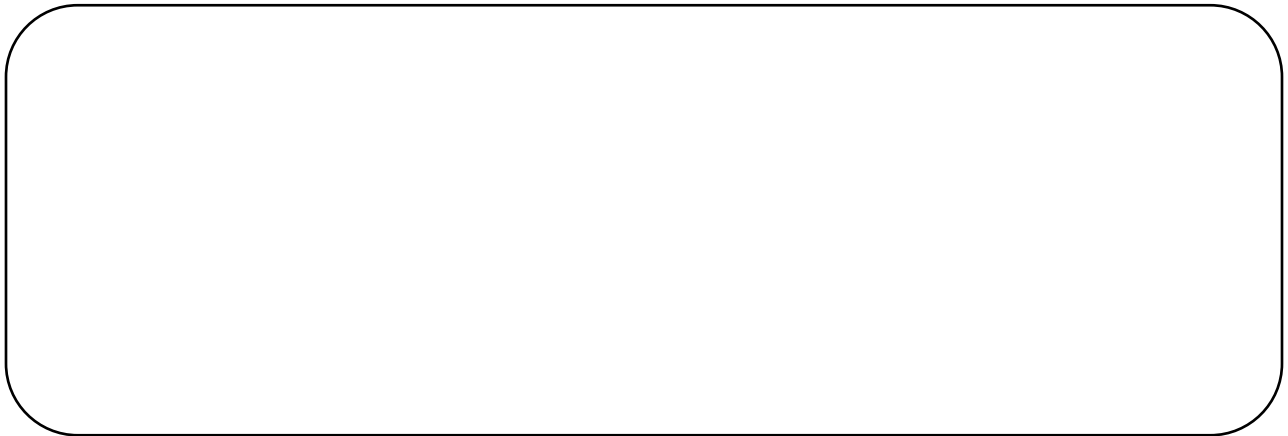
Wound:

Remedy:

Breathing into this awareness, how do you feel? Is there pain? Hope? Share what has come up for you.



How could you grant yourself permission to begin honoring this remedy? How could you integrate this new awareness into your daily life?

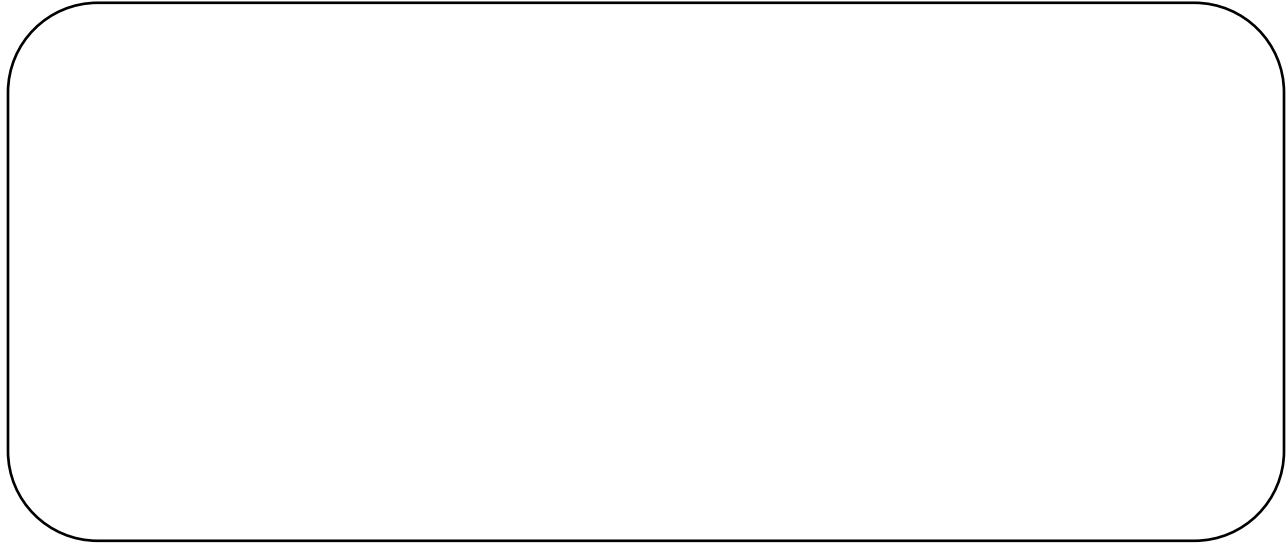


**For Your Child/Children**

Which of the above 12 disconnections, do you think your children could be missing?



What remedies could your children be needing in their daily life?



## Moving Forward Into Play: Special Time For You and Your Child

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Children thrive when their family prioritizes free, unstructured play.

No rules, no fancy equipment, no directing or teaching.

Play meets our children's needs of discovery, exploration, mental health, vitality, joy, enrichment, connection, to name a few. Our children may struggle to play alone when they lack a secure play relationship with their primary caregiver. We want to trust that our child will develop individual play in their own time, at their own pace.

This is especially true if the child, parent, or family has undergone a big transition. Remember, what seems little to you, may seem HUGE to a child. Transitions can include something as mundane as rearranging the furniture in the home, to a new sibling being born. A "regression" into PLAY WITH ME may occur.

Do your best to surrender and "lean in" to your child's request, trusting the "what we resist, persists," and inching closer into a connection that will support your child to proceed through their inner transition more quickly. To nourish your bond with your child, and to support your child into secure attachment within themselves, with you, and play, **special time is an invaluable tool.**

Can you surrender to your child, and play anything they want for at least 15 minutes a day? Ideally, an hour a day?

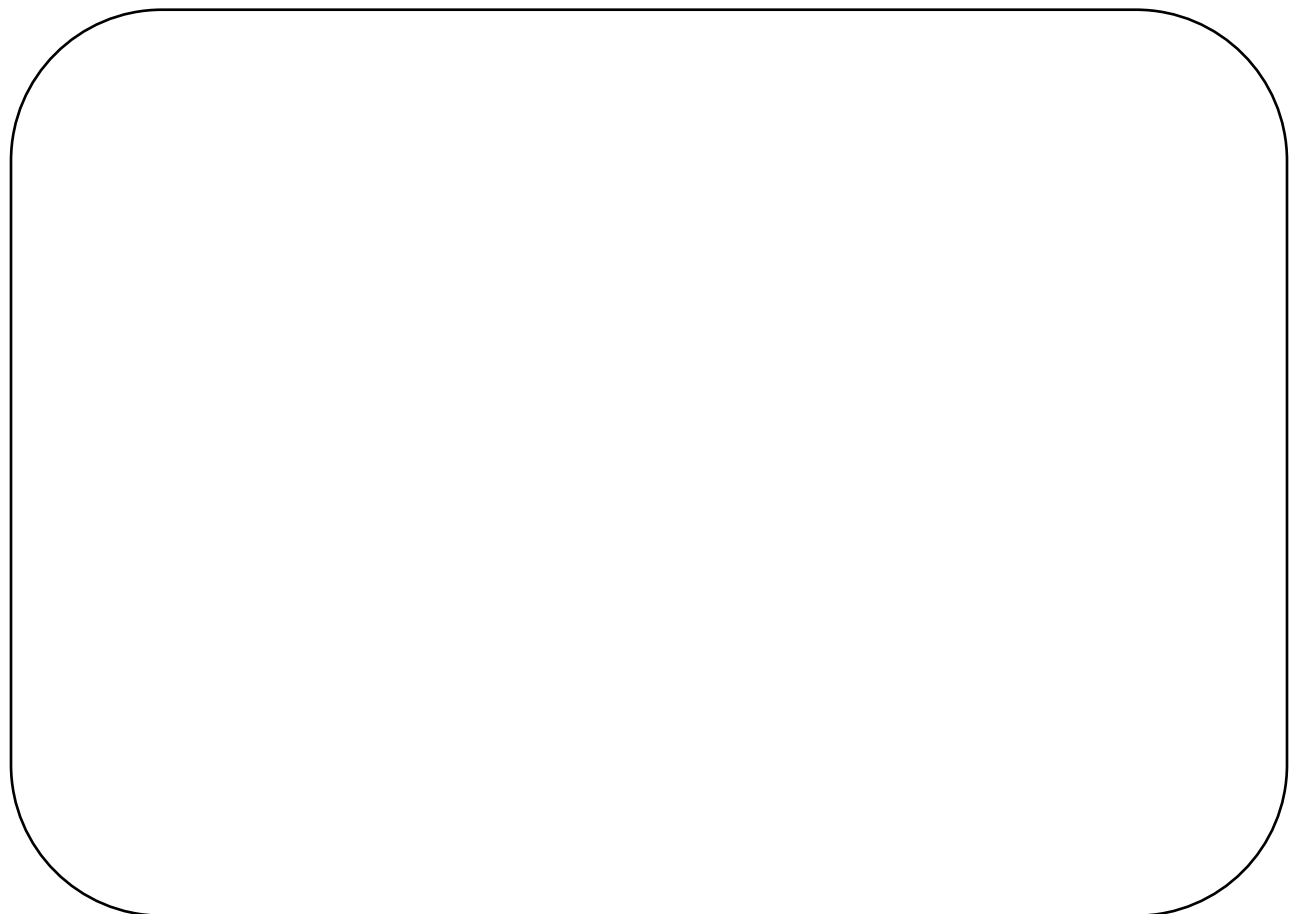
Can you follow their lead without interruption? Can you allow yourself to enter their world and fall in love with them? Nothing to do. Nothing to say. Nothing to teach.

With a secure relationship in play with your child, you two have a chance to experience deep intimacy, allow your bodies to be flooded with oxytocin and dopamine, and “reset” your connection.

When can you and your child connect for daily special time? This can be playing cars with your 6-year-old in the sandbox, or watching funny YouTube videos with your 16-year-old.

It’s the daily commitment that matters. It’s the spirit of light-heartedness, a release of commitment to logistics and the “to-do” list, and **the power of showing up.**

Your commitment to yourself and your child to have daily, or weekly, light-hearted joy



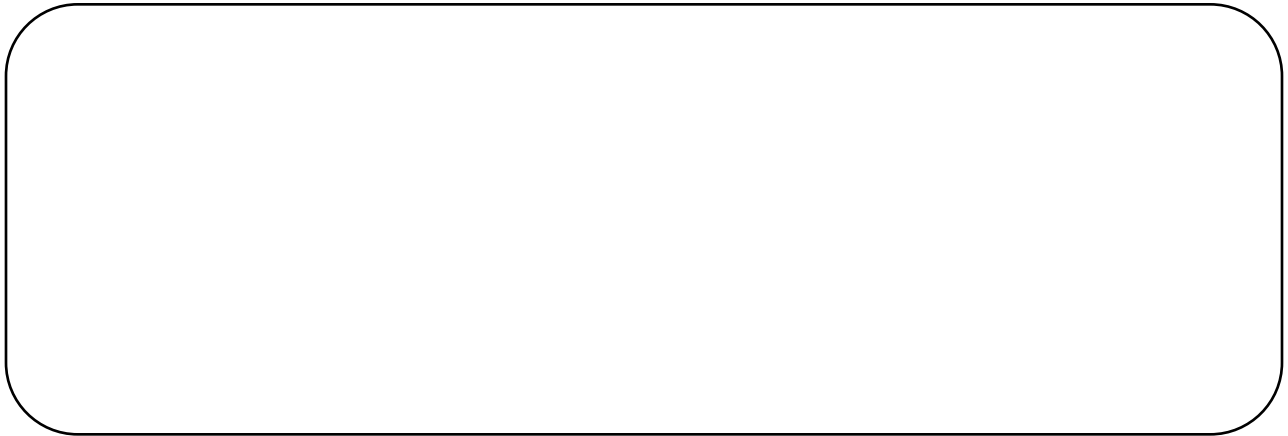
# Become Clear On Your Feelings About Play With Your Child

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Explore each of the questions below.

Write what comes to mind without a filter. When we are honest, we can discover what blocks us from connecting with our children through play.

Playing with my child feels fun for me, and “fills my cup.”

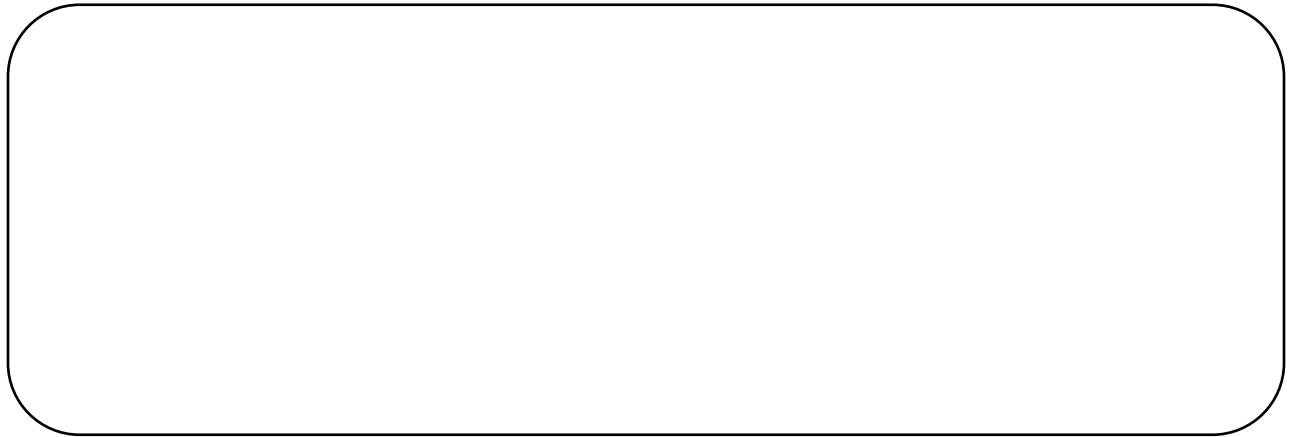


I wish I had more time to play with my kid. I work so much that I’m not able to.

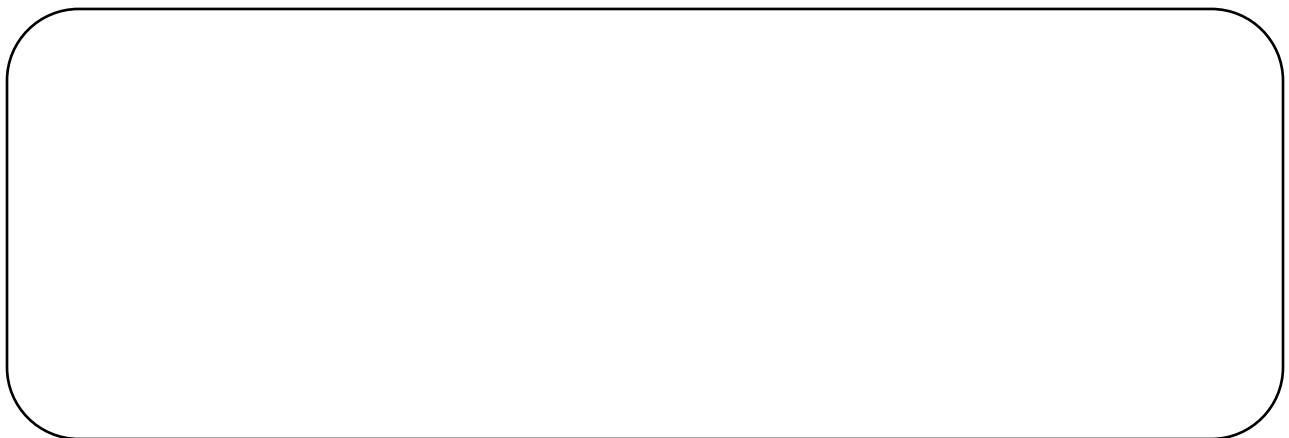




I perceive play with my child as a burden, and dread the words “mommy/daddy play with me!”



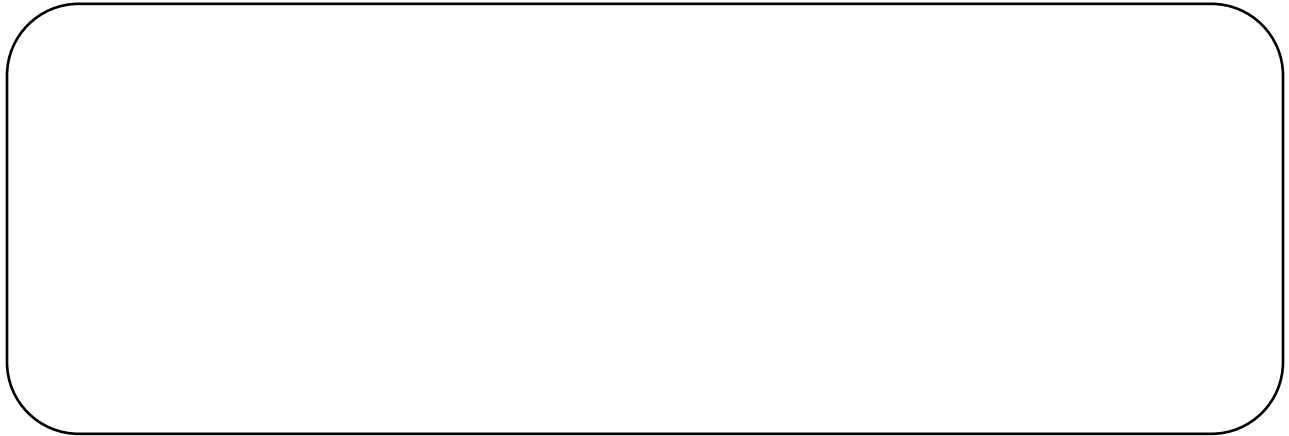
My child is so clingy. I wish they would just play alone.




I feel sad because my child doesn't invite me into their play. Do they not like me?



I find my child's frustration when I don't do what they tell me to do in a game infuriating. I don't like being controlled and told what to do by my kid



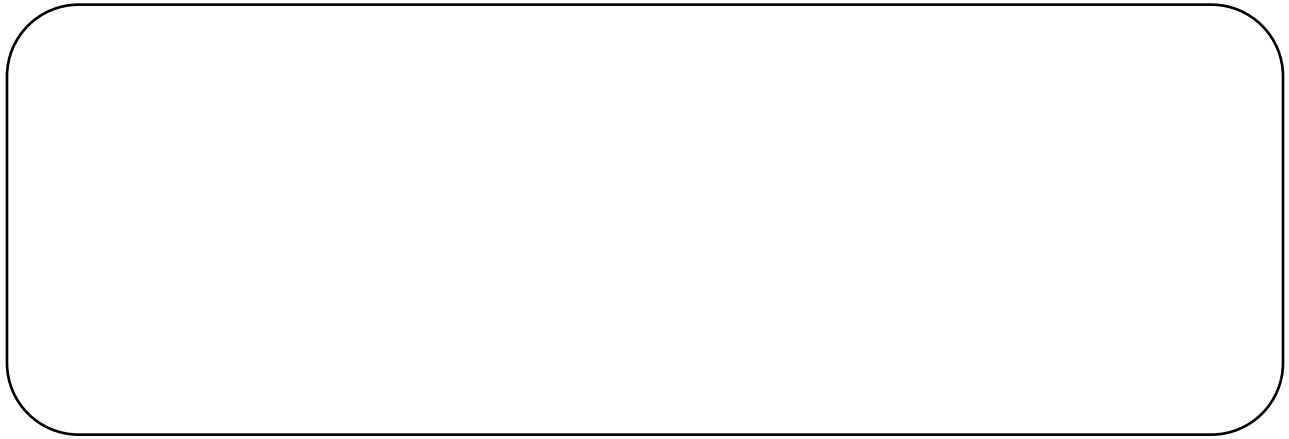
I don't understand my child's desire to win and make everything into a competition.



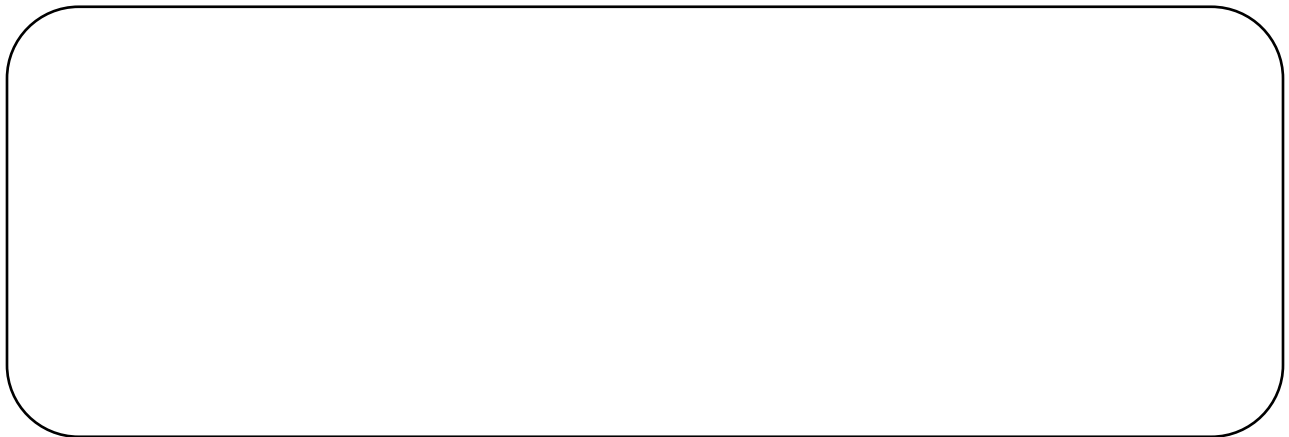
I find it intolerable when my kid wants to change the rules in a game. That's not how life works.



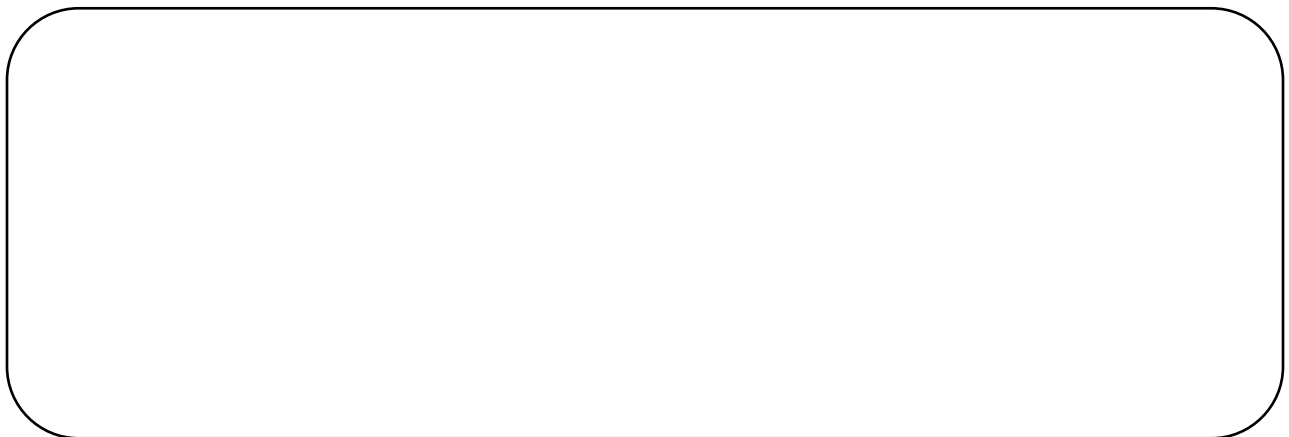
When my child cheats at a game, I lose all interest in playing with them. I will not reward that behavior with my presence.



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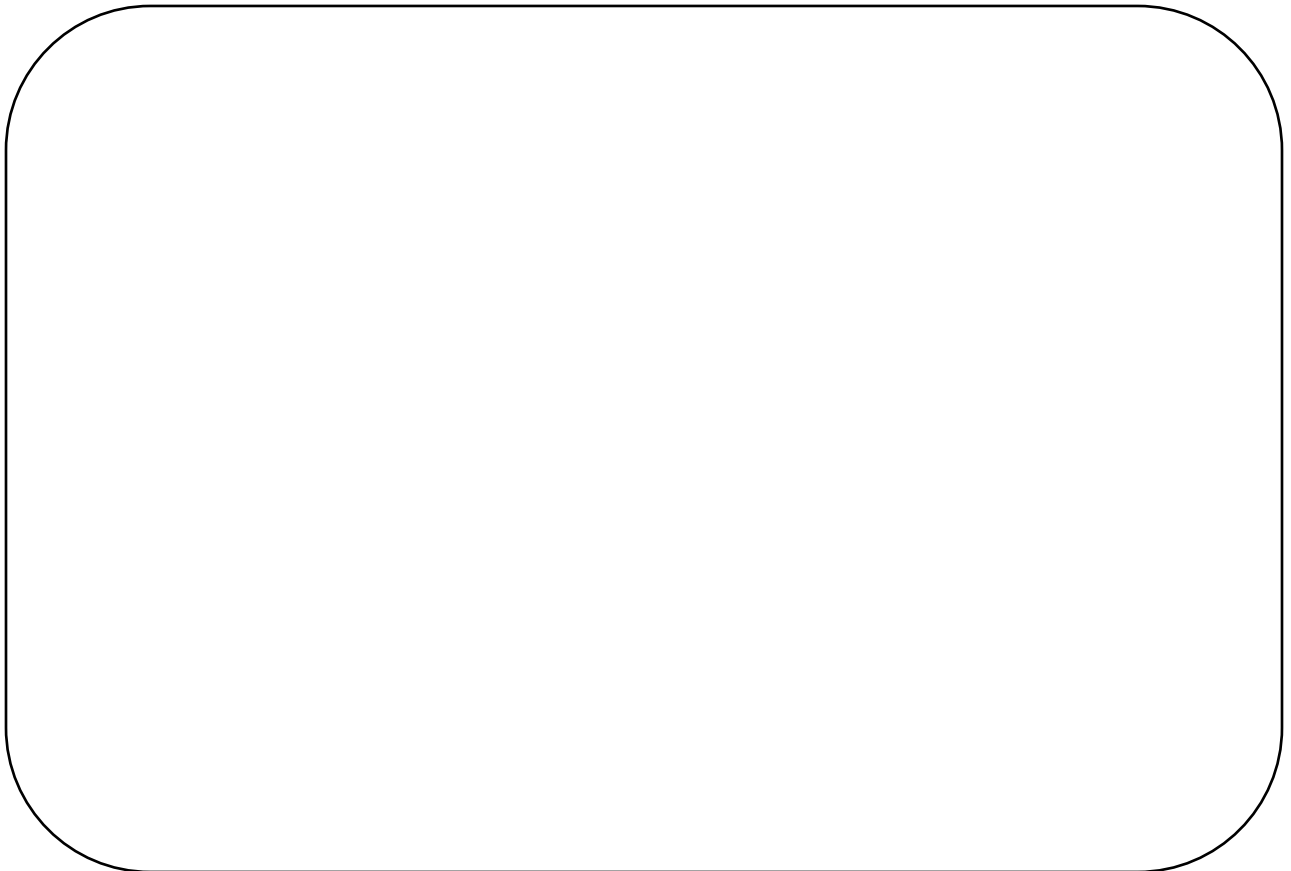
I give my kid EVERY toy they want, but they just want more, more, more!



My child constantly whines and tells me to play when I am SITTING right there playing. I don't get it.



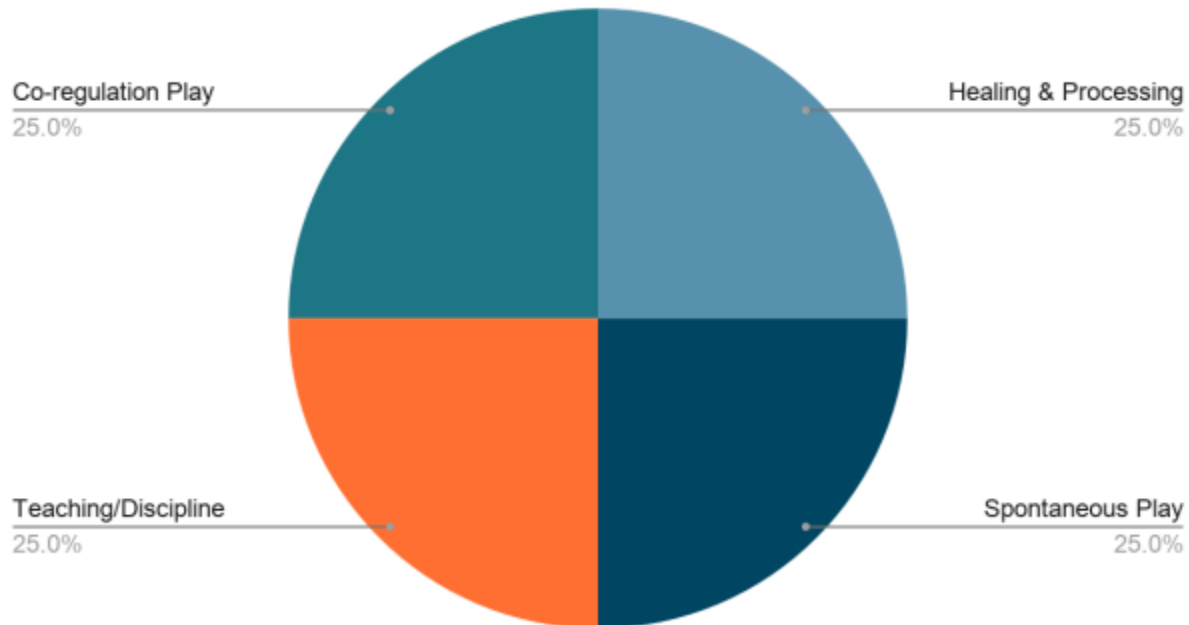
How do you feel reflecting on these questions? Which questions stood out to you?



# Exploring Ways To Play

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## Four Quadrants of Empowered Play



### Co-Regulation Play

This quadrant of play focuses on attuned and connection with your child. It's surrendering to the moment with a consciousness and curiosity: "How can I deeply be with my child in this moment, so they feel felt, unconditionally loved, and cherished as who they are now?" How can I connect deeply, heart, head, and hands, with my child?

**Non-directive child-centered play:** According to Aletha J. Solter, author of "Attachment Play," child-led play supports a child to regain a felt sense of trust and safety within the presence of an attuned adult. The child will spontaneously craft their own play therapy.

- Are you willing to allow yourself to not correct, teach, inform, guide, or advise your child in this play?
- Are you willing to devote at least 15 minutes a day to saying YES to your child's play?
- Are you willing to witness your child in their play, every day, for at least 15 minutes?

**Body-oriented play:** As humans, we need touch to feel alive and connected to ourselves and each other. Touch, when used consciously, with respect and regard for our body boundaries, and the body boundaries of our children, can be our most powerful co-regulation tool. And it can be fun! Playful touch can strengthen the security of your attachment, and can meet your child’s needs of safety, adornment, and belonging. Physical play and touch can keep our children connected to expansive beliefs that they are wanted, they are beautiful, they are cherished and beloved.

- **Roughhousing with clear boundaries:** Are you willing to engage in playful games like wrestling in bed? Communicate that STOP means STOP and there is no hitting, slapping, biting or kicking. FOLLOW THE GIGGLES!
- **Dance parties:** Are you willing to put on some music and let loose? Can you dance around like a silly wild toddler? Are you willing to initiate the dance party even if your kids are saying “Daaaaad stopppp you’re so embarrassing!” Are you willing to keep a light heart and show your child the power of dance?
- **What body oriented activities does your child like? Can you join in on their sport, or movement activity?** Remember, high-energy body activities, in conjunction with connection and presence with you, the parent, supports our children’s pent-up anger and aggression.

## Spontaneous Play

Spontaneous play is a dedication to being present and living with a light heart. It’s walking through life with a lens that anything and everything has the potential to be silly. This does not mean that we dismiss and invalidate painful moments that require a serious response, but rather we hold a paradoxical vantage point: Even the most serious of parenting scenarios can be met with a light heart. In spontaneous play, we allow laughter and silliness to arise like a wave, and ride its heart out.

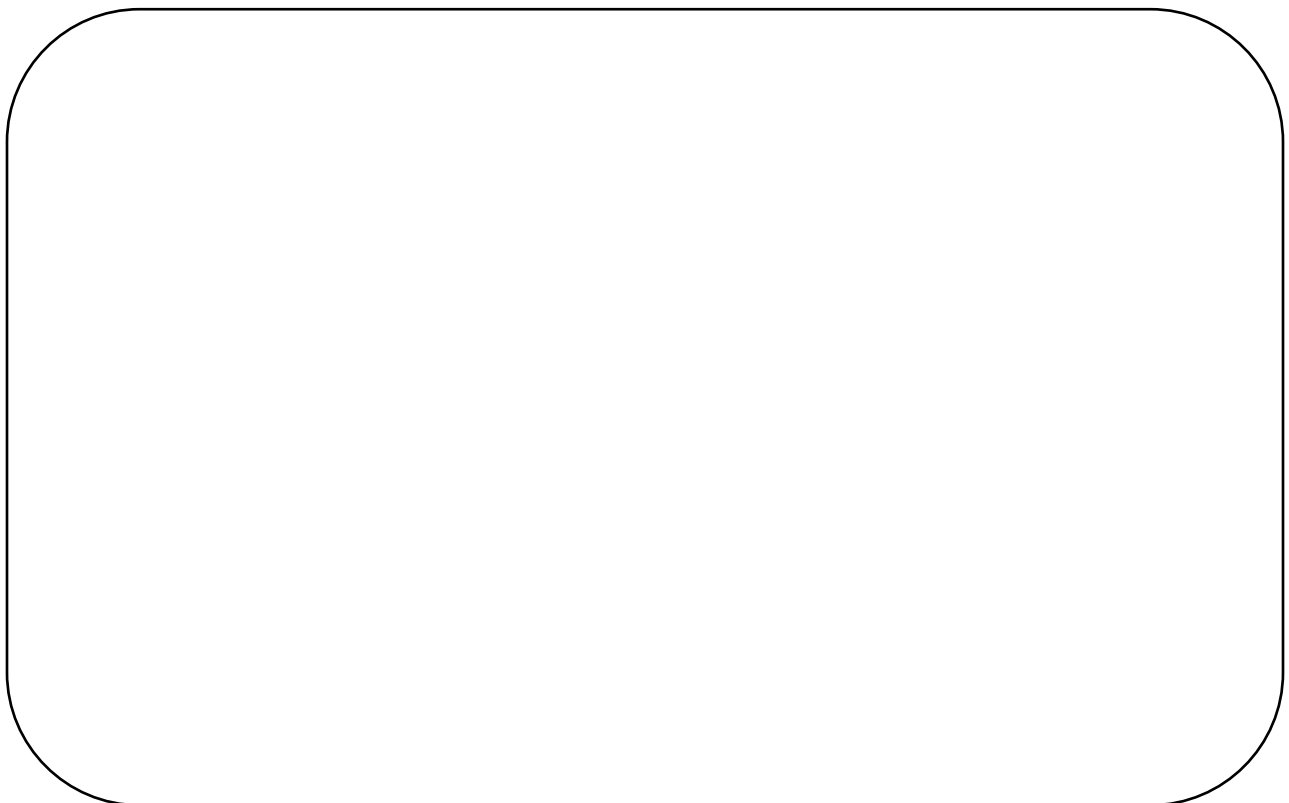
### Examples:

- Singing your grocery list in a Donald Duck voice while shopping with your children. This helps them stay focused, engaged, and willing to cooperate to get the shopping done. If your child wants sugar cereal or a treat from the shelf, you respond, while whispering in a super-secret voice, “We must stick to our list. We are on a very important mission!” (You

would use an example that matched your child's interest and agent of motivation.)

- Your child doesn't want to go to bed, so you fall down on the floor and begin to pretend to cry, wailing to yourself that "it looks like we are going to be awake all night, and I won't get to dream and snore and cuddle!" Exaggerate how desperate you are to go to sleep to get your child laughing. Laughter connects and makes the transition easier because your child's pent-up energy has a space for release.
- You have been noticing how frustrated your child has been while learning to read. They often give up and say "I HATE READING!" So you begin to fall down while you walk, over and over. UGH! Your feet aren't working! It's SO HARD TO WALK! You, with extreme exaggeration (no mocking), begin to mutter "I hate walking. I wish I was a fish so I never had to walk. Poor meeeeeee!" Get the giggles going. Follow the giggles. If your child does in fact feel mocked, own up and apologize. Let them know that you were trying to get them giggling but it didn't work, and you won't do that again. Maybe what they needed was to cry?

How is spontaneous play showing up, or not, in your parenting?



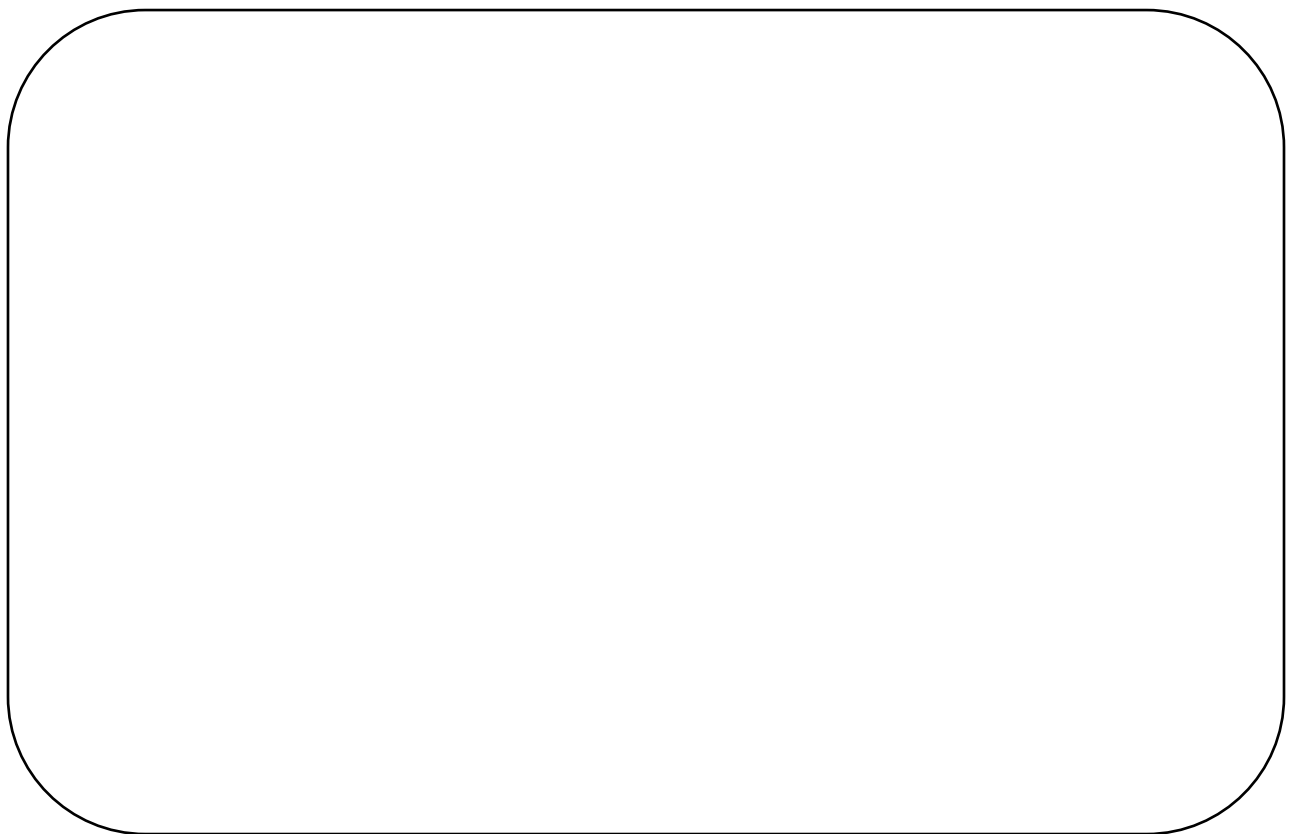
## Healing and Processing

Role play an experience in your child's life that is causing them stress. Switch roles to allow your child to experience both perspectives. It's important here to not control the role play, but to offer doorways, and allow your child to step through them, or not. It's not to accomplish anything other than a safe space to feel their feelings and be held within the secure presence of their caregiver.

**Role reversal:** A child is going to school soon and feels very nervous. The parent asks the child to play a game of "school" and the parent pretends to be a nervous child. The child gets to soothe the parent and feel seen and understood.

**Regression games:** The child's family just had a new baby. Mommy or Daddy pretend that the older sibling was just born, and holds them like a newborn baby. The parent playfully tells the older child that they need their diaper changed, and pretends to change the diaper. A child longing to be "babied" is very normal. How many of us adults just want to be sweetly cared for at times? Meeting your child in their regression game will help the transition shift more quickly for the child.

Is there any experience in your child's life that could benefit from a healing role or regression play?

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## Teaching Through Empowered Discipline

Remember that the essence of discipline is modeling what you teach, and teaching with empathy, attunement and trust. When teaching your child new skills--whether it's mental, emotional, or physical--involve a game, song, story and rhyme to engage their prefrontal cortex and social-engagement system.

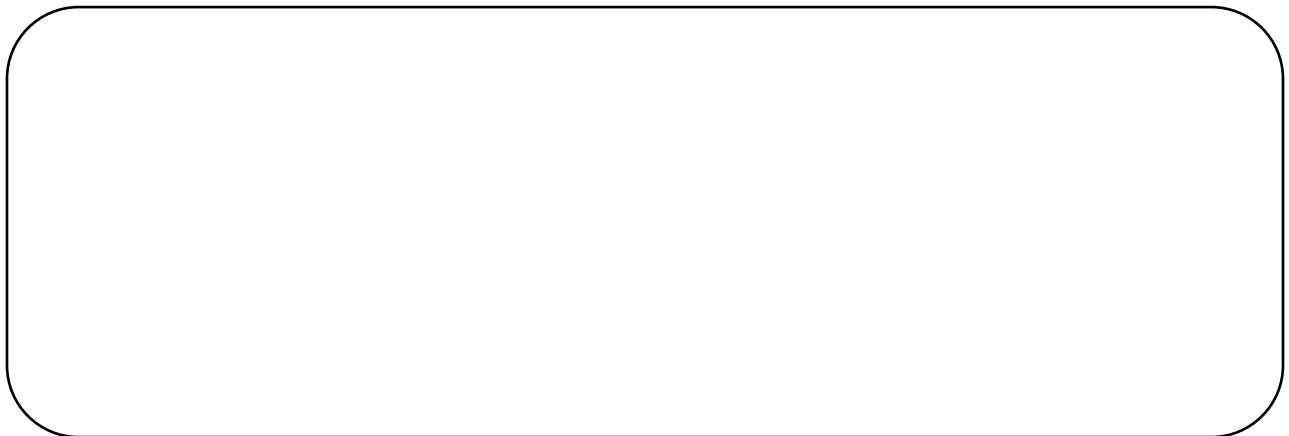
**Song, story, game:** Teaching your child to tie their shoes, add a story and song to accompany your instruction. Or, teaching your child how to memorize facts for their history test, add a rhyme or silly song to aid their memory.

**Emotional Regulation:** Sing a song about a bear whose fur turns red when they're angry. They must hunt around the home (put the child on your back for a ride) and go and search for the magic calming potion. Use your child's sensory calming tool as the bear's magic potion.

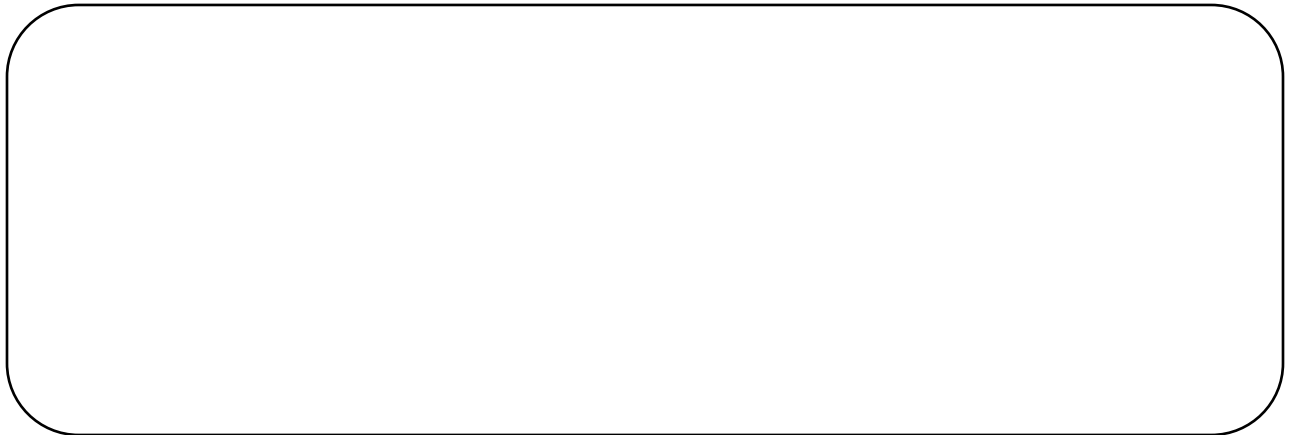
**Conflict resolution:** A child begins to become stressed as a transition between dinner and bedtime begins. Mom or dad sees the energy rising, and they pick up their child and begin blowing raspberry kisses on their cheek to get the giggles flowing.

**Stress resiliency:** When you see your children beginning to fight or argue, you run into the room and scream, "AVALANCHE!" and jump onto the couch and burrow under blankets. Your children might run over and join the game, or they might find your attempt to be less than successful. It's a trial-and-error process, remember that.

Is there a skill or teaching that your child could benefit from adding playfulness?



Is there anywhere in your daily parenting where playfulness for play or conflict could be supportive?



## Storytelling and Song

### “Eye-to-Eye and Heart-to-Heart”

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Oral storytelling has been a practice of humankind since the beginning. We’ve become severely separated from this practice as humanity has progressed into a lifestyle that is fast-paced and reliant on screens and the imaginations of other people. The first sensory experience of children, in the womb, is sound. As human animals, we are deeply attuned to sound. We relax into sound and story. We relax into rhythm. Being in another person’s presence, “eye-to-eye and heart-to-heart,” without a book between you, is one of our most primal joys as humans.

*Note: WE LOVE BOOKS! Read to your children from (or even before) birth. Encourage reading when your child shows interest.*

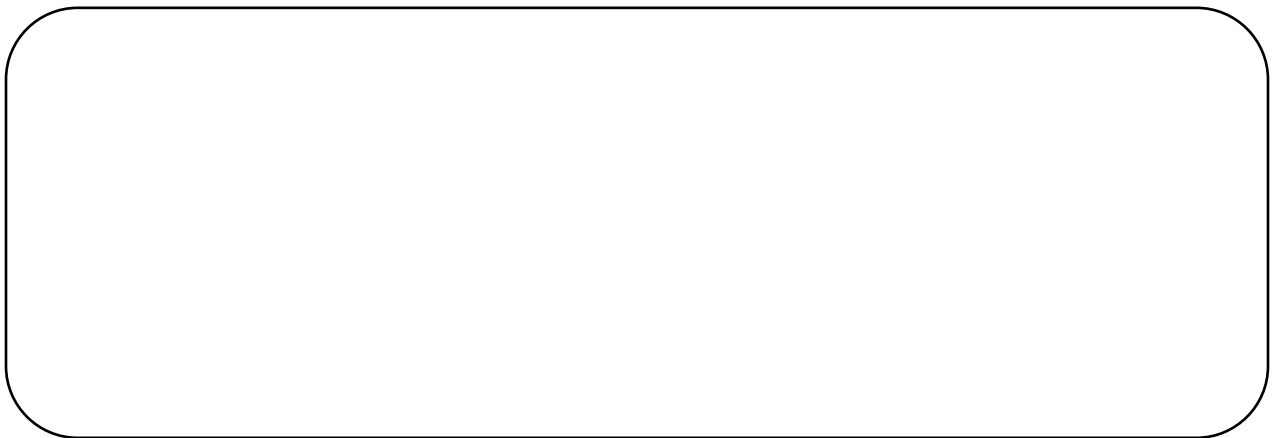
Storytelling is utterly magical. It connects our inner world to our child’s inner world. We can provide our children an opportunity to glimpse into stories as a way to learn:

- **Family values:** Tell stories to your children that embody your family values.
- **Language development:** Slowly speaking and carefully enunciating your words will teach your children clear speech. Include simple language and songs as much as possible.

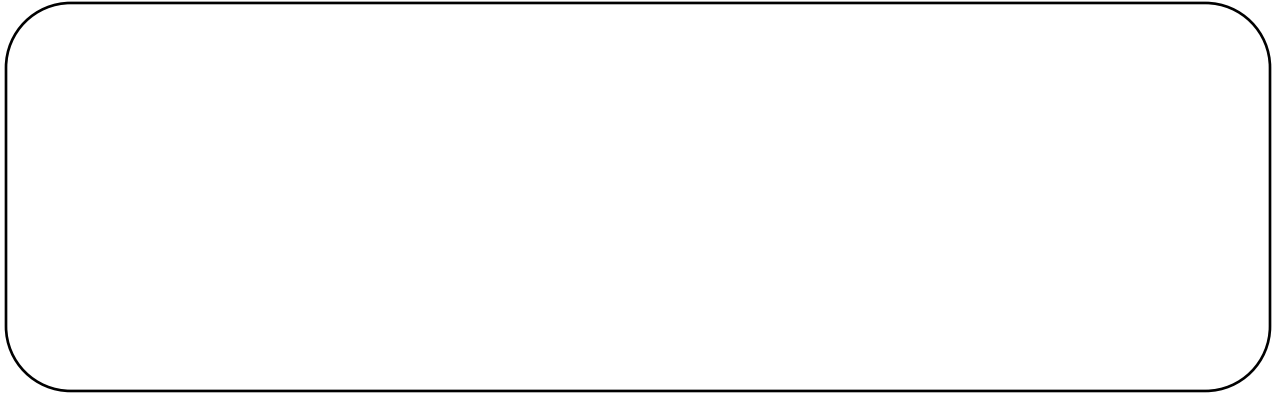
- **Memory:** Tell the same story over and over and over again. This is very normal, and an excellent way for our children to really immerse themselves into this fantastical world and soak up its lessons.
- **Mindsight:** Use detail to describe your story. Use a warm tone and clearly visualize your story. Let it whisk you away. Your child will develop an ability to “see” what cannot be seen.
- **Problem solving:** Deliver stories of solutions within conflict. Tell a story of how easy it was to find a collaborative solution.
- **Empathy for self:** Tell a story embodying a challenge your child may be going through. Give the animal in the story empathy. Let’s say a child’s parents are going through divorce. The mom or dad can tell the child a story of a little mouse who felt afraid, because they were not sure what was going to happen when winter came. This is obviously NOT the same scenario, but the feelings are the same, and so are the needs. You can normalize your child’s feelings and needs.
- **Communication:** Tell a story showcasing an empowered conversation between a parent and child.

## **Everyone is a Storyteller!**

What are your beliefs about storytelling? (It’s amazing! It’s not necessary, etc.)



What are your beliefs about yourself as a storyteller? (I'm a natural! I'm definitely not a storyteller!)



What fears do you have around storytelling? (My kids won't like it, they'll tell me to stop.)




What barriers do you have around storytelling? (I'm not creative. I don't have 1:1 time with my child or children in order to do this.)



## Start Small & Show Up Daily

- **Share stories of your childhood memories.**
- **Use family meals as an opportunity to tell a story about your day.** Have everyone take turns.
- **At bedtime, review the day through a story.** Have your child fill in the gaps and be a part of the remembering.
- **Tell a story role playing a difficult scenario that happened in the day.** Instead of a daddy yelling at a child, and the child feeling afraid, tell a story about a daddy tiger who roared at his cub, and the cub felt scared and hid. Show your child, through the story, how the daddy quickly repaired the disconnect, and apologized for roaring.
- **Tell a story of siblings who work out their conflict in ingenious ways.** Instead of lecturing your children to get along, bring their conflict to life and exaggerate it. Instead of a brother and sister who can't share, it's a story about a unicorn and a troll who could not find a way to share the forest, so the volcano erupted, and they had to come together to find a new place to live.

Can you make a storytelling commitment? Once a week? Once an evening? You don't have to replace books, but ADD to your daily or nightly routine.



What is your greatest takeaway from play and storytelling?

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