

HANDBOOK OF PLAYFUL PARENTING



Handbook of Playful parenting

Principles of playful parenting, which include

Joining children in their world of play: This means getting down on the floor and playing with your child, even if it means acting silly. Play is how children learn and explore the world, and it's a great way to bond with them.

Focusing on connection and confidence: Playful parenting is about building a strong relationship with your child, based on trust and mutual respect. It's also about helping your child feel confident and capable.

Giggling and roughhousing: Playful parenting doesn't have to be all sunshine and rainbows. It's okay to have a little fun and get silly with your child. Roughhousing can be a great way to release energy and build a bond.

Reversing the roles and following your child's lead: Sometimes, the best way to connect with your child is to let them take the lead. Let them choose the game, and let them be the boss.

Common widely-known games

Games for Autonomy and Independence

"Follow the Leader": One person leads the others in silly actions, encouraging children to make their own choices and express themselves.

"Obstacle Course": Design a safe course with pillows, blankets, and furniture, allowing children to navigate independently and problem-solve.

"Scavenger Hunt": Create a list of playful tasks or items to find, fostering initiative and exploration.

Games for Social Skills and Cooperation

"Puppet Show": Craft puppets and enact simple stories together, promoting communication and teamwork.

"Fort Building": Collaborate to build a fort with blankets and pillows, nurturing collaborative problem-solving.

"Make-Believe Restaurant": Take turns being servers and customers, practicing social interaction and role-playing.

Games for Emotional Expression and Regulation

"Silly Faces": Make funny faces in the mirror together, encouraging laughter and releasing tension.

"Pillow Fight": Engage in a playful, controlled pillow fight to help kids release energy and express emotions constructively.

"Storytelling": Create stories together, letting children express their feelings and perspectives through imaginative narratives.

Games for Imagination and Creativity

"Dress-Up": Raid the dress-up box and create fantastical characters, fostering imaginative play and self-expression.

"Building Block Creations": Build structures together, allowing for open-ended exploration and creative problem-solving.

"Finger Painting": Get messy and explore colors and textures together, encouraging sensory exploration and artistic expression.

Game scenarios

Roughhousing/Wrestling

Roughhousing or wrestling is a form of play that involves physical interaction between parent and child, emphasizing fun, energy, and physical engagement. It's a powerful way to connect, build confidence, and help children learn about boundaries and physical control in a safe environment. How to Play Roughhousing/Wrestling

Scenario: The parent and child engage in a playful wrestling match, making sure it is gentle and controlled, to avoid injuries.

How to Play

The game should focus on fun and laughter, allowing the child to explore their strength. Parents should ensure the wrestling is safe, using soft surfaces and establishing clear signals for when to stop. How Roughhousing/Wrestling Helps the Child

Benefit

This form of play teaches children about their physical capabilities and limits in a supportive setting. It helps in developing physical coordination, understanding of personal boundaries, and trust. Moreover, it's an excellent way for parents and children to bond, offering a fun way to express affection and mutual respect.

Role Reversal Games

Role Reversal Games are a creative and empowering form of play where the usual roles of reality are flipped, allowing children to experience being in charge and exploring power dynamics in a safe and playful environment. Through these games, children can take on roles typically reserved for adults, such as the parent, teacher, or superhero, thereby leveling the playing field and offering them a sense of control and authority. [How to Play Role Reversal Games](#)

Scenario

A child and an adult switch roles during playtime, with the child taking on the adult's role and the adult adopting the child's role. For example, a child could pretend to be the parent scolding the adult for not cleaning their room, or a teacher giving the adult homework assignments.

How to Play

Engage in scenarios where the child gets to make decisions, set rules, or solve problems typically handled by adults. The adult plays along, following the child's lead and instructions. This can involve playing school, family, or superhero games where the child assigns roles and directs the action. [How Role Reversal Games Help the Child](#)

Benefit

These games empower children by putting them in positions of power and decision-making, helping them to understand responsibility and leadership in a supportive setting. It boosts their confidence and self-esteem, allowing them to work through feelings of powerlessness and frustration that come from the real-world limitations they face daily.

Role Reversal Games also encourage creativity, problem-solving skills, and empathy by enabling children to see the world from another perspective

Fantasy Play

Fantasy Play is a versatile and imaginative form of play that allows children to explore different scenarios and roles, transcending the limitations of their reality. It's a creative outlet for expressing feelings, experimenting with ideas, and solving problems in a whimsical setting. Through fantasy play, children can become anyone or anything they wish, from everyday roles reversed in playful jest to entirely imagined characters and situations.

How to Play Fantasy Play

Scenario: The child and adult engage in a game where they pretend to be different characters or in different situations than their real-life roles. For instance, a child might say, "Let's pretend you're the dad and I'm the daughter and you're mad at me," even though those are their actual roles, to add a layer of playfulness to a real situation.

How to Play: Begin by proposing a scenario or accepting one proposed by the child, such as pretending to run a school of nonsense and goofiness, where everything is deliberately silly and the usual rules don't apply. Embrace the role fully, whether it's being a good friend, a bad friend, or an educator in a nonsensical school, and allow the child to guide the play, making up rules, challenges, and outcomes as you go along.

Benefit

Fantasy play is a powerful tool for children to process their emotions, practice social interactions, and develop creative thinking and problem-solving skills. It offers a safe space to explore fears, joys, and curiosities in a controlled environment. By engaging in fantasy play, children learn to navigate their feelings and relationships in a

supportive context, enhancing their emotional intelligence and adaptability

Playing Catch

Playing catch is a timeless and simple activity that involves tossing a ball or another object back and forth between players. It's a fundamental way to connect with children, teaching them about coordination, cooperation, and the joy of shared play. How to Play "Playing Catch"

Scenario

In an open space, stand at a comfortable distance from each other where throwing and catching are challenging yet achievable for the child's age and skill level.

How to Play

Start by tossing the ball gently to the child, encouraging them to catch and throw it back. As the child becomes more comfortable, you can gradually increase the distance or introduce variations, such as using different types of balls, to keep the game engaging and to challenge their skills further.

How "Playing Catch" Helps the Child

Benefit: This game enhances hand-eye coordination, motor skills, and timing. It also teaches children about turn-taking and patience, as they wait for the ball to be thrown to them. Playing catch is a great way to bond, providing a simple yet effective way to spend quality time together. The game's back-and-forth nature fosters a sense of connection and teamwork, showing the child that they are a valued and integral part of the game.

Given the focus on connection, empowerment, and reversing roles found in Cohen's approach, "Playing Catch" can also be seen as a

metaphor for the give-and-take in healthy relationships, emphasizing cooperation, mutual respect, and joy in each other's company.

Chase and Tag

Chase and Tag is a classic outdoor game that promotes physical activity, laughter, and joy. It involves one person being 'it' who chases the others, trying to 'tag' one of them, making them the new 'it.' It's a simple yet effective way to engage in playful parenting, encouraging exercise and bonding. How to Play Chase and Tag

Scenario: In an open space, designate one person as 'it.' The others run away, trying to avoid being tagged.

How to Play

The person who is 'it' chases the others, attempting to tag one of them. Once someone is tagged, they become 'it,' and the game continues. The game can be modified with safe zones where players can rest without being tagged or special rules like 'freeze tag,' where tagged players remain frozen until another player unfreezes them by tagging them again.

How Chase and Tag Helps the Child

Benefit: This game enhances physical fitness, agility, and speed. It teaches children about rules, fairness, and cooperation. The excitement of the chase and the laughter that accompanies the game reinforce bonding and reduce stress. It also allows children to navigate winning and losing in a safe, supportive environment, building resilience and sportsmanship.

Other games

Board Games: Playing age-appropriate board games that require taking turns, planning, and strategy. Benefit: It teaches patience, turn-taking, strategic thinking, and dealing with winning or losing gracefully.

Art and Craft Activities: Creating art together, using materials like paint, clay, or recyclables. Projects can be themed or free-form. Benefit: It encourages creativity, fine motor skills development, and offers a non-verbal way to express feelings.

Storytelling: Taking turns to tell a part of a story, building on each other's ideas. Benefit: It enhances verbal skills, imagination, and can be a way to work through emotions or fears in a safe context.

Music and Dance: Sharing music, making up songs, or having a dance party at home. Benefit: It allows emotional expression through rhythm and movement, promoting a sense of joy and physical coordination.

Puzzle Solving: Working together on a jigsaw puzzle or similar problem-solving game. Benefit: It develops spatial awareness, patience, and the satisfaction of achieving a goal through persistence and teamwork.

Building Blocks Challenge: Use building blocks or LEGO to create structures from imagination or replicate objects and scenes. It enhances spatial awareness, creativity, and engineering skills.

Nature Scavenger Hunt: Go on a walk and look for items on a list, like a leaf of a specific shape or a smooth stone. It promotes observation skills and appreciation for the outdoors.

Cooking Together: Choose a simple recipe to make together. This teaches life skills, following instructions, and the science of cooking.

Story Dice: Roll dice with pictures to create unique stories. It fosters imagination and language skills.

Freeze Dance: Play music and dance, freezing when the music stops. It's great for physical activity and understanding musical cues.

The Love Gun Game

This imaginative game transforms a typical play scenario involving a squirt gun into an opportunity for connection and affection. When a child pretends to shoot with a squirt gun, the adult responds as if the gun were a "love gun," proclaiming that being shot makes them love the shooter even more. They might chase the child to give them a hug, expressing exaggerated affection.

How to Play "The Love Gun Game"

Scenario: The child finds a squirt gun and pretends to shoot the adult. The adult, knowing the gun is empty, decides to interpret the gun as a "love gun."

How to Play: The adult says, "Hey, you found the love gun. When I get shot with that gun, I just have to love the person who shot me." They then act overly affectionate towards the shooter, chasing them around in a playful manner and expressing exaggerated love.

How "The Love Gun Game" Helps the Child

Benefit: This game helps children understand that aggression can be met with humor and affection, teaching them to express themselves in positive ways. It also reassures them of the adult's love and attention, turning a potentially negative interaction into a fun and loving experience.

You'll Never Get Away

In this playful challenge, the adult tells the child that they'll never be able to get away from them. After a mock struggle, the adult lets the child escape, pretending not to notice at first, then expressing mock surprise.

Benefit

This game encourages physical activity and problem-solving, as the child figures out how to escape. It builds confidence and resilience, giving children a sense of accomplishment and strength. It also emphasizes the joy of togetherness and the loving, playful pursuit that characterizes healthy family dynamics💎💎💎

How to Play "You'll Never Get Away"

Scenario: The adult challenges the child by stating they will never be able to escape from them.

How to Play: After catching the child, the adult holds them gently, allowing them to try to escape. If the child enjoys it, the adult increases the challenge by pretending to use special maneuvers, making the game more fun and engaging.

How "You'll Never Get Away" Helps the Child

Benefit: This game builds physical coordination and strength, enhances problem-solving skills, and boosts the child's self-esteem through the playful challenge of escaping. It reinforces the bond between adult and child, providing a sense of security and fun in their relationship.

Both games emphasize the importance of connection, understanding, and emotional safety in parent-child interactions, addressing the child's need for physical closeness, emotional expression, and the joy of play.

Swing and Pretend Fall Game

This game involves taking a child to the swings, pushing them, and then playfully pretending to be knocked over when the swinging child's feet come close to touching the adult. The adult acts as if they've been pushed too hard, falls over dramatically, and then pretends to be upset, encouraging the child not to do it again, only to repeat the process with delight.

Benefit: This game cleverly blends physical play with emotional connection and empowerment. It allows the child to feel a sense of control and power in a playful setting, building their confidence. The pretend upset and subsequent falling act inject humor, helping the child release frustration related to their own physical challenges, such as the frequent falls they experience while learning to walk or master other physical skills. It's a fun way to engage with the child, emphasizing connection, laughter, and the joy of play.◆◆◆◆◆◆.

How to Play "Swing and Pretend Fall Game"

Scenario: During a visit to the playground, the adult stands in front of the child on the swing and gives them a gentle push. As the child swings back towards the adult, the adult lets the child's feet just touch them before making a big show of being knocked over.

How to Play: Each time the child's swing comes close, the adult pretends to be overwhelmed by the force, falling down in an exaggerated manner and then acting mock-angry at the child, saying, "You better not do that again!" This encourages laughter and anticipation as the child looks forward to the adult's next dramatic tumble.

How "Swing and Pretend Fall Game" Helps the Child

Benefit: This game enhances the child's sense of connection with the adult through playful, shared laughter and the physical interaction of the swing. It builds the child's confidence as they see themselves in a position of playful power, able to 'knock over' the adult. The game also allows the child to process and release any frustrations they may have about their own physical limitations in a fun, supportive environment. It teaches them about cause and effect in a very gentle way, all within the context of playful affection and attention.

Fill-Up and The Love Egg

This nurturing game is designed to help children feel loved and connected, especially during times of change in the family, such as the arrival of a new sibling. It reassures older children that they are still loved and valued despite the necessary attention given to the newborn. How to Play "Fill-Up and The Love Egg"

Scenario: A mother uses a special game to reassure her older children of her love after the birth of a new baby, which might make them feel sidelined.

How to Play

The mother invites each child to sit on her lap and tells them she is going to "fill them up with Mommy love." Starting at their toes, she works her way up, ending with a kiss on top of their heads. Adding another layer to the game, she uses the "love egg" technique, pretending to crack an egg on their heads, then gently spreading her fingers down their hair, symbolizing spreading more love.

How "Fill-Up and The Love Egg" Helps the Child

Benefit: This game directly addresses the children's need for reassurance and affection during times when family dynamics change. By physically showing love and attention, the game helps alleviate feelings of jealousy or neglect that older siblings might experience with the arrival of a new baby. It encourages a positive, loving relationship among siblings and helps the older children adapt to their new roles within the family, fostering a sense of security and belonging.

Simon Says

"Simon Says" is a classic, fun game that encourages children to listen closely and follow directions, with a playful twist on obedience and quick thinking.

How to Play "Simon Says"

Scenario: One person is "Simon" and gives commands to the other players. If Simon starts the command with "Simon says," players must do it. If the command doesn't start with "Simon says," players should not follow it.

How to Play: Simon issues commands, such as "Simon says jump" or "touch your nose." Players only follow commands that begin with "Simon says." If Simon gives a command without saying "Simon says" first, and a player does it, they are out of the game. The game continues until one player remains or by agreement for fun.

How "Simon Says" Helps the Child

Benefit: This game enhances listening skills, attention to detail, and self-control. It teaches children to pay attention to verbal cues and follow instructions precisely. It's also great for physical coordination when involving actions and movements, making it a holistic activity that supports both cognitive and physical development.

Building Blocks Challenge

The Building Blocks Challenge is a creative and educational game that encourages children to use their imagination and problem-solving skills through play. This activity is perfect for developing fine motor skills, spatial awareness, and an understanding of geometric concepts.

How to Play the Building Blocks Challenge

Scenario: Set a specific goal or theme for the building session, such as creating the tallest tower, constructing a house, or replicating a famous landmark.

How to Play: Using building blocks or LEGO, participants attempt to construct their designs within a set time limit or with specific constraints (e.g., limited types of blocks). Encourage creativity and innovation by posing unique challenges or incorporating storytelling into the construction process.

How the Building Blocks Challenge Helps the Child

Benefit: This game promotes critical thinking, enhances creativity, and improves hand-eye coordination. It also teaches children about planning and perseverance as they work to achieve their construction goals. Engaging in the Building Blocks Challenge fosters a sense of accomplishment and can also be a fun way for parents and children to bond over shared tasks and imaginative play.

The Dress-Up Race

The Dress-Up Race is a playful and effective game to motivate children to get dressed quickly, making morning routines or preparing for outings less stressful and more fun.

How to Play The Dress-Up Race

Scenario: The game is set up as a friendly competition between the child and a parent or siblings to see who can get fully dressed the fastest. Set a timer or count down to start the race.

How to Play: Lay out all necessary clothing items for the day. On "Go," each participant starts getting dressed as quickly as possible. The first one fully and correctly dressed wins. To add variety, include challenges like wearing a hat or tying shoelaces.

How The Dress-Up Race Helps the Child

Benefit: This game encourages independence and self-care skills in children, making the often tedious task of getting dressed fun and engaging. It improves their ability to follow directions, enhances motor skills by practicing buttons, zippers, and ties, and teaches time management. The competitive element motivates them to focus and complete tasks more efficiently.

The Feelings Bucket

The Feelings Bucket game is designed to help children express and manage their feelings of anger or disappointment in a constructive way.

How to Play the Feelings Bucket

Scenario: When a child is feeling upset or angry about something not going their way, introduce the concept of the "Feelings Bucket."

How to Play: Give the child a physical container or have them imagine one as their "Feelings Bucket." Ask them to describe or write down the feelings they are experiencing and "put" these feelings into the bucket. Together, discuss each feeling, acknowledging it, and talking about healthy ways to cope with or address these emotions.

How the Feelings Bucket Helps the Child

Benefit: This game helps children understand and articulate their emotions, providing a tangible way to express themselves. It encourages emotional literacy and resilience by teaching kids that it's okay to feel upset or disappointed, but also important to find constructive solutions. This process aids in emotional regulation and promotes a healthy dialogue about feelings between the child and the adult.

Balloon Squish

The Balloon Squish game is designed for younger children, such as those around 3.5 years old, who might not yet have the words to express complex emotions like frustration or disappointment.

How to Play Balloon Squish

Scenario: When a child starts to feel upset or frustrated, introduce a colorful balloon as a playful distraction and a way to physically vent their feelings.

How to Play: Inflate a balloon (not fully, to make it easier to grab) and encourage the child to squeeze or hug the balloon as hard as they need to release some of their pent-up energy. You can also gently toss the balloon back and forth as a way to shift their focus from the frustration to a fun activity.

How Balloon Squish Helps the Child

Benefit: This simple game helps young children with limited verbal skills to channel their emotions through physical activity, providing an immediate outlet for their feelings. The act of squeezing or playing with the balloon can be soothing, and redirecting their attention to a playful task can help alleviate immediate feelings of anger or disappointment. It's a tactile, engaging way to help them calm down and reset emotionally.

Weather the Storm

This game is designed for young children, like a 3.5-year-old, to help them experience and process emotions such as disappointment or sadness in a healthy, supportive way.

How to Play Weather the Storm

Scenario: Create a calm, comfortable space where the child can be with their emotions. Use a 'weather' metaphor to describe feelings: sunshine for happy, clouds for sad, storm for angry, etc.

How to Play: When the child feels upset, sit with them and describe their feelings using the weather metaphor. For example, "It seems like there's a little storm happening because you wanted to keep playing, and now it's bedtime." Offer to be with them until the 'weather' changes, providing comfort and understanding.


How Weather the Storm Helps the Child

Benefit: This approach helps children acknowledge and accept their emotions without immediately trying to change them. It teaches emotional intelligence by helping them recognize and name their feelings, understanding that emotions are temporary states, much like changing weather. Being present with them through their 'storm' shows empathy and provides a model for processing emotions healthily.

Mirror Mirror

A simple yet profound game, "Mirror Mirror," enhances connection and understanding between you and your child.

How to Play Mirror Mirror

Scenario: Sit opposite your child, making sure you  are at the same eye level.

How to Play: One person is the 'mirror' and must mimic the actions, facial expressions, or sounds the other person makes as accurately as possible. Take turns being the mirror, encouraging detailed observation and imitation.

How Mirror Mirror Helps the Child

Benefit: This game promotes emotional bonding, attentiveness, and empathy by encouraging both of you to pay close attention to each other's non-verbal cues. It's a fun way to deepen your connection, improve communication skills, and enjoy laughter together.

Which games help with what?

Autonomy and Independence: Follow the Leader, Obstacle Course, Scavenger Hunt

Social Skills and Cooperation: Puppet Show, Fort Building, Make-Believe Restaurant

Emotional Expression and Regulation: Silly Faces, Pillow Fight, Storytelling, The Feelings Bucket, Balloon Squish, Weather the Storm

Imagination and Creativity: Dress-Up, Building Block Creations, Finger Painting, Fantasy Play, Story Dice

Physical Activity and Coordination: Roughhousing/Wrestling, Playing Catch, Chase and Tag, Swing and Pretend Fall Game, You'll Never Get Away

Connection and Reassurance: The Love Gun Game, Fill-Up and The Love Egg, Mirror Mirror

Learning and Cognitive Development: Board Games, Puzzle Solving, Building Blocks Challenge, Simon Says

Routine and Responsibility: The Dress-Up Race

Emotional Intelligence and Empathy: Weather the Storm, Mirror Mirror

Anger and Frustration Management: The Feelings Bucket, Balloon Squish, Weather the Storm