



Play

THE BEST GIFT OF ALL

EDITORIAL

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Looking for the perfect gift for that special child? A gift that will last for the rest of their life? A gift that will entertain, delight and educate them? A gift so priceless that money cannot buy it?

Why not try the gift of play? Free, unadulterated, spontaneous play. Play where time and opportunity is freely given, not rationed or limited by adult agendas.

Play is a gift that is self sustaining. It produces endless hours of magic, imagination, adrenalin rushes and anticipation.

The anticipation of hiding in a cramped space during a game of hide and seek and the thrill of running for your life in a game of chasings are simple pleasures that we can often recall with little effort. Be it hanging from a tree, a Hills Hoist or a modular piece of play equipment – we have all felt the joy of hanging from a height and letting ourselves drop onto the ground below.

Play is the gift that keeps on giving. The sharing of a childhood play experience creates opportunities for further healthy development in the mind, body and souls of those who are given it. Play has been identified as critical in the development of healthy brains ¹.

Just like any gift, play can bring happiness and play can bring disappointment.

Play can be painful. It can tear at your skin and leave a scar, it can bruise your body and it can sometimes bruise your ego. Play can draw blood and at the same time draw delight.

Sometimes play can produce acts of cruelty, discrimination and segregation. Likewise play can bring joy, laughter, inclusion and belonging.

The experience of play, positive or negative, does not negate the importance of play for shaping the social and emotional identity of humans ².

Play is a versatile gift given regardless of size, colour or taste... consider;

- *Play is colour blind – you can be any colour to play.*
- *Play is classless – your family income and background does not depend on play.*
- *Play is portable – it can happen anywhere.*
- *Play is universal; it belongs to no one in particular, but to everyone who wants it.*
- *Play is enjoyed by animals, children & adults.*

Play is a celebration of life & living.

External factors may influence your choice of companion, your location or the type of play but it will not stop you from what is a natural, intrinsic desire to play. Play sustains us. Even in the most war torn and ravaged countries we witness play.

Like all gifts, play signifies a celebration.

Play is a celebration of life and living.

Play challenges our imagination and takes us on a journey of exploration and self discovery.

Play brings us beautiful memories of childhood friends and shared experiences that we then carry with us through our lives. No matter where we go or how far we travel, we take the gift of play with us and it never wears out.

Play embodies freedom and expression; it gives wings to imagination and allows for reinvention.

So why do we need to fight so hard to have play respected when it is such a wonderful gift?

The biggest threat to play is the adult led paradigm that play wastes rather than enriches time. To view play as confined to scheduled outings and programs or led by adults is not a gift; it is a punishment. Opportunities for self directed play are essential.

We have a responsibility as advocates for children to reshape the perception of play to create the impetus for real and lasting change

in our community. A community where opportunities for play are sacred. Where spaces for play are integral in all community planning and not just reserved for a brief period in a school playground. We need to create opportunities for the development of an appreciation for the value of play and a universal understanding of the negative impact on our society when play is restricted. Our own gift to ourselves should be to empower our friends and family to give play priority in their

own lives and in the lives of the children.

In the words of David Elkind, "When we adults unite play, love, and work in our lives, we set an example that our children can follow. That might just be the best way to bring play back into the lives of our children, and build a more playful culture."³

The greatest gift we can give this year, and in the years ahead to all children, is time to play, beautifully wrapped in the love and respect from those of us who have not forgotten how precious the gift of play is.

This article was first published in 2009 (edited 2012) and as 2013 dawns we welcome a new understanding and recognition of the importance of play as we await the adoption of a General Comment on Article 31 in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

¹ Bergen.,D. Plays Role in Brain Development., Association for Child Education International (ACEI).

² Ginsberg,K. The Importance of Play in Promoting Healthy Child Development and Maintainin Strong Parent-Child Bonds., American Academy of Paediatrics 2007

³ Elkind,D. "Cognitive and Emotional Development Through Play" Greater Good Magazine 2008