



THEME FOR THE MONTH OF JULY

Unstructured Play

from

VARA Youth Coordinator, Alex Krebs



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It is with great appreciation that we are proud to include our supporters on our youth emails.

Julie Woodworth - VARA Executive Director

WHY UNSTRUCTURED PLAY IS SO IMPORTANT



When we were young we were told to "go outside and play". We didn't come home until it was dark. Remember when play was building forts with blankets in the living room, creating obstacle courses in the backyard, riding bikes with friends or playing telephone

with paper cups? Not by staying indoors texting, tweeting, playing video games or computers. What happened to simple play?

Play is how children prepare for the future and is an essential part of a healthy childhood. According to pediatric occupational therapist Angela Hanscom, if children don't get enough unstructured playtime, "They are more likely to be clumsy, have difficulty paying attention, trouble controlling their emotions, utilize poor problem-solving methods, and demonstrate difficulties with social interactions." Many believe that playing outside has a positive impact on manual dexterity, depth perception, physical coordination and tactile sensitivity.

What is play? Play is fun and imaginative. Play is rolling, running, jumping, chasing and leaping for the sake of movement itself. Children do it for the satisfaction of playing. Even if children have a goal, such as "Let's climb to the top of the tree," the journey is more important than the destination. Play isn't racing to the finish line but relishing the journey. It should be difficult. If it's not children quickly drift away.

Children direct their own play. Adults should support it and set up safe environments for play. When adults become too involved and directive, play deteriorates. Few would dispute the value to children of participating in sports, organized or otherwise. Being physically active and engaged in friendly competition is widely acknowledged to be good for children's physical, mental and social well-being. It can foster discipline, cooperation and camaraderie as well as a good time.

Years ago, kids were free to play games and sports that they chose or devised. They picked teams, made the rules and enforced them themselves. No officials monitored their activities and no adults oversaw or commented on how well or poorly they played. There were occasional spats, but they learned how to resolve them on their own and get back to having fun.

Given all of the benefits and intricacies of play, it can be easy to forget that at its core, play is a source of joy. We never want to lose sight of the fact that play is fundamentally joyful. Children have always played, and despite being over-scheduled and inundated with technology, they continue to do so. Play brings meaning to kids' lives. It connects them to friends, family, animals, places, and ideas. It's the way they discover and create themselves. Play and youth sports develop social skills and a sense of community, two of just twenty important life skills to be addressed in future youth coordinator newsletters. Be sure not to miss next month: Life Lessons Learned Through Youth Sports-Part 1.

(Excerpts from: [Family Business](#) by Malinda Chouinard and Jennifer Ridgeway and NY Times Article by Jane E. Brody)

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