

CORNERSTONE 2019 RESOURCE

Kids Can Teach Us How to Play... And Make Us Better Humans

Elective

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| AUTHOR(S): | Chana Rothman |
| SUMMARY: | Children learn and grow through free play: unstructured time and space where they make their own decisions and create their own universes with the support of a trusted adult. This kind of play is very important to children's development. We will experience free play, look at research that indicates the huge benefits of free play, explore what it looks like at different ages, and envision how this looks at camp. - <i>Submitted by Chana Rothman</i> |
| TOPIC(S): | Young children, Development |
| LEARNING OBJECTIVE: | <p>Participants will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience free play • Process different types of play: child-led, adult-led, and mutually-led • Gain understanding of the value of supporting and following children's lead • Gain familiarity with the following terms: child-centered; follow their lead; play-based learning; free play; young people's liberation • Be inspired to create opportunities for free play at their camps and advocate/educate for free play • Acquire tools and language, including Jewish text and framework, for being child-centered in the bunk and other viable spaces at camp |
| AUDIENCE: | Ideally no more than 15 people |
| TIMING: | 90 minutes |
| APPENDICES: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Text from Mishlei/Proverbs 22:6 • "30 reasons why Free Play Benefits Child Development" Poster • <i>A Moving Child is a Learning Child</i> by Gill Connell and Cheryl McCarthy • "Reflecting on Rules and Making Room for Messy Play" excerpt • "The Jewish Education Project Guide to Child-Centered Constructivist Learning" |

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| <p>MATERIALS NEEDED:</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 large poster papers • 20 different colored markers • This program is about open-ended play. That means the materials - toys, tools, games or outdoor settings - can be used in many ways. Some examples of open-ended play environment or toys that might apply: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ the forest (trees, rocks, hills, sticks) ○ the beach or lake (sand, water) ○ playground ○ Legos ○ Building blocks ○ Magna-tiles or other magnetic shapes ○ Found items such as: toilet paper rolls, cardboard boxes, etc ○ Pillows and Blankets ○ Paper and writing implements (pencils, markers, crayons) ○ Costume bin ○ Basket of scarves ○ Play doh or modeling clay ○ Sandbox ○ Water table |
| <p>SET-UP DETAILS:</p> | <p>Ideally, this session takes place outdoors or in a room near the outdoors.</p> |

SESSION TIMELINE & OUTLINE:

0:00-0:25 - Opening

- Introduction (5 min)
 - Facilitator gathers group, points out written agenda on large poster paper.
 - Facilitator introduces herself by name and gives a little background about her reasons and goals for this session. Facilitator shares that we will:
 - Play as much as we can. This play is intentional. Play is a basic human and young people's right which is being taken away in many countries and communities across class, race, etc.
 - Define and model different types of play
 - Process what the playing does for us
 - Frame the play in a Jewish framework and a framework of young people's liberation
 - Gain tools and language to advocate for play at camp
 - Group Introductions (5 min):
 - Participants share name, and their favorite way to play as a child - or currently!

1. Definitions:

Facilitator gives an extensive definition and framing of free play (5 min):

Source: <https://www.pqpedia.com/f/free-play>

- Free play is unstructured, voluntary, child-initiated activity that allows children to develop their imaginations while exploring and experiencing the world around them. It is the spontaneous play that comes naturally from children's natural curiosity, love of discovery, and enthusiasm.

- Playing with dolls, blocks, molding clay, crayons and paper, and other loose parts all allow for unstructured creative play. Outdoor play encourages space for all kinds of physical activity, such as building forts, playing on playgrounds, and climbing trees.
- Play theorist, Bob Hughes, has identified sixteen play types. Some of these play types are role-play, dramatic, fantasy, exploratory, creative, social, rough and tumble, locomotor, and symbolic. These all relate to physical, social, cognitive, creative, and emotional development through free play.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics' Clinical Report on The Importance of Play in Promoting Healthy Child Development and Maintaining Strong Parent-Child Bonds lists many benefits of free play for children. They include: healthy cognitive development, use of creativity and expansion of imagination, interaction with the world around them, development of social skills in learning to share and resolve conflicts, practice in decision-making skills, and confidence building.
- Jean Piaget wrote extensively in his book, *Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood*, about the links between play and intellectual, cognitive development. He outlined a progression of free play activities, such as functional, exploratory, sensorimotor activities (holding a rattle, repeatedly dropping a toy as play) to more symbolic play as the child ages to include building with blocks and pretending to feed a doll. The final developmental stage is when the child can play games with rules, such as tag or marbles.
- Free play encourages children to develop their imagination while using their creativity. Playing with toys that can only be used one way and passive activities like playing video games do not employ creativity.
- Pretending and role-playing are important activities for children to expand their understanding of the world around them and prepares them for the adult world. Children gain confidence as they learn how to solve their own problems and develop other social skills like sharing, listening to other's ideas, give and take, and compromising.
- Free play develops motor skills as children run, jump, and chase outdoors and play on a well-equipped playground. Swinging freely on overhead playground equipment develops upper body strength as well as agility, balance, eye-hand coordination, and fitness. Free play in outdoor activities engages more motor behaviors than in structured physical education classes.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics' Clinical Report stated that the need for unstructured free play in the life of children "is so important to optimal child development that it has been recognized by the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights as a right of every child." The report suggests several societal changes that impact the routine of childhood and reduce the opportunity for free play:
 - Families are smaller with parents busy with work schedules and little free time to care for children.
 - There is an increasing pressure felt by parents to make time productive for children filling it with academic activities and enrichment programs.
 - The No Child Left Behind Act has inadvertently pressured schools to drop creative play activities, such as [recess](#), the arts, and physical education, which will likely impact the emotional and social development of children.
 - The passive entertainment of television and computer/video games decreases the amount of free play activity which also impacts the mental, social, and physical development of the children as well as their future health.
 - Finally, the report acknowledged that in many communities it is unsafe for children to play outside of the home without close adult supervision and protection.

2. Quick Brain dump (10 min)

There are 3 poster papers hung up each reading one of the following:

- “FREE PLAY”
- “FREE TIME/MANDATORY-OPTIONAL”
- “BUNK TIME”.

Facilitator gives out Post-it notes and asks participants to brainstorm definitions for each, putting the notes on the poster that matches.

Facilitator introduces concept of Young People’s Liberation.

0:25 - 0:40 Free Play!

Facilitator strongly encourages participants to go outside for this free play time. Sharing: *“We are going to take time to experience free play ourselves. I encourage you to find a buddy and go together to an area or activity. Feel free to try something you always wanted to try and ask your buddy to come along and support you. We are modeling supportive presence during free play. You can then be a buddy and supportive presence as your partner or partners try something. There are outdoor areas and a few activity areas. These activity areas set up for you to play freely. You are also invited to interact with the others who have gravitated to that area. We will gather again in about 10 minutes.”*

- The invitation is also written on a poster for visual learners.
- Facilitator defines this type of free play as “Child-led play.” Define the play we just did as *child-directed, child-centered or child-led play*. **Notice the term ‘child’ comes before the rest - that is the main focus.**
- Reinforce concept of young people’s oppression and young people’s liberation.

Facilitator visits each group, observing and documenting with photos and taking notes, checking with each individual for permission to take photos.

Here are some possible materials for each activity area:

- Pile of sticks, leaves, rocks
- Paper and markers
- Building blocks
- Pipe cleaners
- Nature area - going into the woods
- Basket of scarves
- Mud pit with bucket of water and sticks

0:40-0:50 - Group Discussion

Group discussion questions:

- How was this experience for you? Did it feel like free play?
- When does free play happen in your life?
- What are the benefits of free play?
- When and how often does free play happen at your camp?
- SELF-REFLECT: What is your role as a counselor in facilitating free play?
- How is free play connected to young people’s liberation?

Read the following text as a group:

Mishlei/Proverbs 22:6 “Educate a child according to his/her way; even when s/he grows old, s/he will not turn away from it.”

Group discussion prompts:

- What does this say about play?
- How would you use this text at camp?

0:50-0:60 - Break into chevrotah for play-based learning (text study).

Instead of sitting and talking, there will be stations around the room. Each chevrotah pair can choose an area to play and interpret the texts in their own way.

Stations:

- Building Blocks
- Magnetic Tiles
- Art area: paper, paint, paintbrushes, water, scissors
- Costumes
- Option to go outside
- Cozy sitting area with pillows and sheets (possible to build a fort)

Text 1:

Mishlei 22:6 “Educate a child according to his/her/their way; even when s/he grows old, s/he will not turn away from it.”

Text 2:

“30 Reasons why Free Play Benefits Child Development”

In play-based, creative chevrotah, explore the following questions:

- What is the difference between *child-led or free play*, *counselor-led play* and *mutually-led play*?
- What is the difference between *free play* and running around wild, driving your camp director crazy?
- What is the role of the adult/counselor in following the campers’ lead?
- What would it look like to be more child-centered in your bunk?
- What would you need in order to make that happen?
- What questions do you have about free play at camp? About the text from Proverbs?
- What is Jewish about free play?

0:45 - 0:55 - Regroup, any chevrotah pair that created something can share and also share reflections

0:55-0:60 - **Ask the group if that was *child-directed*, *adult-directed*, or *mutually-directed* play. Leave time for discussion of that.**

0:60 - 0:90 - Process, plan

0:60 - 0:65 - Review concepts of young people's liberation and how it relates to camp and your life:

- Following their lead
- Play-based activities and learning
- Terms that will help advocate for free play at camp: play is important to healthy brain development. Builds cognitive, physical and emotional resiliency. The less play children get, the higher their anxiety, the less space in their brain for learning new things.
- ASK: How do free play, free time/mandatory-optional time and bunk time intersect? What parts of this perspective can you bring back to camp?
- How can you structure free time better to be child-centered and supportive?

0:65 - 0:75 - Bringing it back to camp

In a group sit and process what this would look like at your camp, thinking about:

- Different age groups (youngest campers, older and oldest campers, teenagers, young adults/counselors, senior staff and directors)
- The continuum of *child-led*, *adult-led*, and *mutually-led play*. Where can you give the children more voice?
- Where can you advocate for your campers and yourself to your supervisors? (reference text study and UN Declaration)
- Outdoor free play - how can we make this more part of camp? When does this happen at camp?
- How can we make free time more meaningful and engaging?

On 2 Poster papers and markers:

- List the play continuum (*child-led*, *mutually-led*, *counselor-led*) and offer participants opportunity to draw or write ideas for where this child-led and mutually-led play happens or could happen at camp.
- Young people's commitment: "I solemnly promise that, from this moment on, I will never again treat any young person, including myself, with anything less than complete respect. This means that..."

0:80 - 0:85 3 Minutes for notes

- Facilitator: *Take 3 minutes to reflect and write down 1 take-away from this session for your own life, and 1 take-away for you at camp this summer.*
Facilitator brings group outside.
- Ask the group to form a circle.
- Ask each participant to share something they are taking from this session together: a memory, an idea, a question, an inspiration.
- Thank each participant for coming, for being a teammate to their campers and all the campers and contributing to young people's liberation. What an exciting project!