



# SPECIALIST SUMMIT

*PRESENTED BY:*

**TEXAS** Infant-Toddler  
**ITSN** Specialist Network

# Learning Through Fun!

The Science and Joy of Play

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# When did you last play?



## **Learning Objectives**

- 1. Identify at least 3 characteristics of play**
- 2. Identify at least 3 benefits of play**
- 3. Reflect on and describe own experience of 2 different play activities**
- 4. Plan how you will apply today's session content to your training or coaching**

## Icebreaker: Table Talk

- What makes something “play”?
- How do you know when an activity is “play” rather than something else?



# Characteristics of Play

- Apparently purposeless (done for its own sake)
- Voluntary
- Inherent attraction (fun, feels good)
- Freedom from sense of time
- “lose yourself” in it, don’t feel self-conscious
- Improvisational potential (can make up or change rules and actions, flexible)
- Desire to continue, intrinsically reinforcing (actions are repeated)

*Stuart Brown, MD. Founder of The National Institute for Play*

# Who else plays?

- Primates (e.g., monkeys, gorillas, chimpanzees)
- Cats
- Dogs
- Rats
- Horses
- Elephants
- Otters
- Hamsters
- Octopi
- Some birds
- Bears
- Frogs?
- Komodo dragons
- Crocodiles?
- Turtles

## Video: Animals at play





## **Video: Komodo Dragon at play...**



# More about Play

- Happens during times when the individual feels safe, not stressed
- Occurs more in juveniles than adults, but adults do still play
- May be solitary/independent or social
- May be structured or unstructured
- May be cooperative or competitive
- May be “silly” or more serious



# More about Play: Social Play

- In social play, elements of safety/control of harm are built in



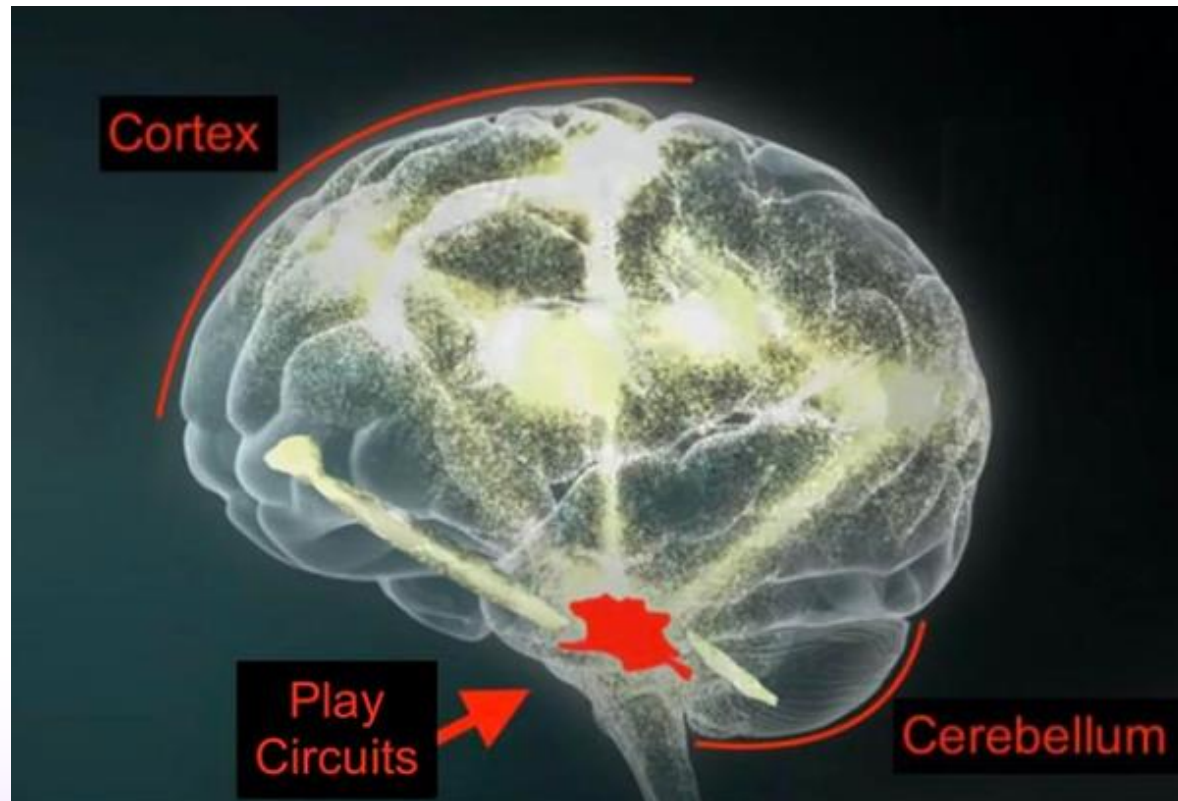
# Types of Play

1. Attunement play (begins in early infancy)
2. Body and movement play
3. Object play
4. Imaginative play
5. Social play
6. Rough-and-tumble play
7. Celebratory and ritual play
8. Storytelling and narrative play

*National Institute for Play website: <https://www.nifplay.org/what-is-play/types-of-play/>*



# What happens in the brain when we play?



*Copied from: <https://www.nifplay.org/what-is-play/biological-drive-to-play/>*

# Video: Jaak Panksepp Rat Brain Research



# Benefits of Play

- Provides opportunities to practice specific types of skills (e.g., fine & gross motor, balance, coordination, communication, visual-spatial skills)
- Builds flexibility and adaptability
- Builds empathy, understanding of others, trust
- Builds understanding of fairness, turn-taking, give-and-take
- Builds problem-solving, creative thinking
- Promotes connection to culture, builds good memories (celebratory & ritual play)
- Learning and memory are enhanced when learning takes place through play

# What happens when we don't play?

- More anxiety and depression
- Poorer coping skills
- Poorer social skills, more antisocial behavior
- Less flexible thinking, more rigid
- Less healthy couple relationships
- Greater cognitive decline in later adulthood

*Brown, Stuart (2009). Play: How it shapes the brain, opens the imagination, and invigorates the soul*



# Adults need to play too!



# Break Time!



# Your turn to play: Balloon Play

- Blow up the balloon
- Can play sitting or standing
- Keep the balloon in the air
- Help everyone in your group have a turn



# Balloon Play: Reflection

1. How did you feel during this play?
2. What skills did you use?
3. Did you make any changes/adaptations during your play?





# Your turn to play: Creative Play

- Can do this activity alone or with a partner.
- Use the materials however you want
- Try to free yourself from expectations



# Creative Play: Reflection

1. How did you feel during this play?
2. What skills did you use?
3. Did you make any changes/adaptations during your play?



# Putting it all together

1. How does what we did during this session, either in Part 1 or Part 2, apply to your work with infant and toddler teachers?
2. What will you take away from this session?



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