

Benefits of Play

“Without play, learning and evolution are impossible.”

Stephen Nachmanovitch

- 1) **Play brings us into relationship with others.** Play allows us to connect to others in a free, spontaneous way. It dissolves barriers to relating and promotes the therapeutic relationship.
- 2) **Play is spontaneous.** It asks us to be in the present moment. Because of its spontaneous nature, play takes us out of our strong habitual patterns and brings us into the present moment. Play taps us into aliveness and spirit. From aliveness and the present moment we can make current choices.
- 3) **Play is creative.** When we are in a playful state, we are open to possibilities. We can try on new characters, new ideas, new ways of being.
- 4) **Play is a crucial factor in learning.** Play is the predominant way children learn. As adults, when we stop playing, we deprive ourselves of a valuable (and fun) way to continue our learning, growth and evolution.
- 5) **Play fosters curiosity, resilience, awareness and flexibility.** When we play, we de-construct and reconstruct reality. We are asked to look for different responses and to engage our imaginations.
- 6) **Play primes the brain to secrete chemicals associated with pleasure, reward and stress reduction** (serotonin and endorphin). Research has shown that playing will trigger the secretion of these chemicals in the body.
- 7) **Development of therapeutic rapport, understanding, increased self-esteem, problem-solving, emotional release, adjustment to trauma, and practice of new behaviors and insight**(as listed by Anne Schaefer in *The Therapeutic Powers of Play*).

Impediments to Play

- 1) **Fear:** fear of losing control, fear of looking foolish, fear of failing, fear of making mistakes, fear of getting hurt, fear of hurting others (and fear of being sued)
- 2) **Lack of time.** In our society, we have made work our primary commitment and diminished the importance of rest and play. As a result, our mantra has become ‘I don’t have time’.
- 3) **The need to justify our actions.** Many of us have received messages about play being for children or a waste of time. We often internalize these messages and judge ourselves harshly for taking time to play.
- 4) **Contamination of play.** For some people, play has been contaminated by misuse. Play may have been used as a mask for hostility, competition or abuse.