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Healthy Play Notes

Play is a natural and highly effective way to learn. Utilizing play, we repetitively learn, practice and integrate necessary skill sets. The learning, which occurs during play, transfers into areas of character education, classroom and playground management, and supports school safety and academic performance.

Play to have **FUN!** If you keep that in mind then all other dynamics derived from play are available to you. It's great for exercise, developing coordination, making friends, and feeling happy, proud, excited and successful. Through play we learn rules, cooperation, empathy, responsibility and more. Through play, we learn socialization and connection. Remember to create a poster for the question, "Why do we PLAY?" With this poster, also ask students, "How do you want to feel while playing?" Write down their answers.

PEOPLE are the most important part of every game! Make this idea public and explore what this means. It's what makes "how we play the game" the vital factor and truly places "winning or losing" in the proper perspective. Use this principle to establish and regularly reinforce a healthy peer culture. Create a separate poster that asks, "What is the most important part of every game?" Once again, write down answers that your students give.

Healthy Play Rules:

1. If anyone gets injured (and this will occasionally happen) the person closest to the injured person or the one who accidentally or deliberately caused the injury, must stay with that person until he/she feels ready and able to play again. This is *the* essential rule for teaching empathy and compassion.
2. Players wanting to argue can do so verbally for as long as they like, but must do so outside the boundaries of the game. Of course, proper language, no threatening or hitting are guidelines that they must follow. When both people agree to stop arguing they may return to the game. With both rules, use good judgment if your presence is needed for specific interventions.

CREATIVE AND IMAGINATIVE PLAY - Remember, all games are made up! Use yours and the group's ideas to frequently change the game when you need to make it more enjoyable. Things you might change are the following:

* Change games/activities regularly to teach and reinforce academics

- * Safety rules
- * The site and size of the playing field
- * The speed of the game
- * Ways to score which can foster cooperation or eliminate scoring completely
- * The type of equipment
- * The number of balls, or "Its," or teams
- * Extra roles for people on the sidelines
- * More bases, different ways to run the bases

As long as the group is having **FUN**, you're on the right track.

TRUST/COMPASSIONATE PLAY - Trust exists at multiple levels during play activities. There is physical trust, i.e.; "Will my body be safe?" This tends to be the most obvious trust concern and dealing with this is important, but only a partial component of the total trust picture. There is also emotional trust, i.e., "Can I, or will others protect my self concept?" Find ways to help the group develop awareness for promoting trust. Complete trust play is achieved when personal, emotional and group social factors are addressed. Kindness, empathy, caring, sharing, allowing for failure, risk taking, being silly, protecting everyone's self image and eliminating teasing are vital ingredients for successful play. Safe games occur when everyone understands the rules, the boundaries, and the need to stay in control and play with a sense of warmth and community. Engage people in acts of loving-kindness. Keep your focus on, "This is how we have to play at school."

Initially, the leader must set the tone. Clearly enlist the group's participation to identify desired expectations, which will build a compassionate play community. Once you have established your emotional and physical guidelines, the next step is to have EVERYONE openly agree to follow them. The leader must model both supportive compliance by group members and demonstrate immediate intervention when these principles are abused. The eventual goal is to empower ALL the participants to constantly monitor their own behaviors and create a safe, positive peer culture.

* Establish the expectation/rule of stopping for an injured player

* After activities, process for 3-10 minutes only the positive things that happened * divide teams randomly

* Use games that make everybody feel equal * Reinforce publicly; kindness, caring, sharing, etc.

* Utilize non-humiliating techniques when addressing players who need to learn healthier behaviors

* Stop the activity when play becomes physically or emotionally unsafe. Empower the group to talk and propose solutions * Openly share your feelings.

* Play games which rely on different abilities to succeed such as humor, honesty, verbal input, dancing, singing, quickness, etc. * Tolerate people not ready or unwilling to play and keep inviting them to join.

SOFT AGGRESSION – Children in elementary school do not need to play aggressive games. However, in an atmosphere of compassion, aggressive games may be useful and fun. This occurs only when it's recognized that PEOPLE are the most important part of the game. A group consciousness must be nurtured at all times. Carefully assess your group's readiness. Empower all players to be referees of their own and other's behaviors.

* Actively be in the middle of the action * Share your feelings and talk about safety - emotional and physical

* Keep the focus on how the game is played and not the score * Use the proper boundaries and play equipment

* Be firm in setting limits before, during and after these games and STOP any game when it is no longer FUN

* Have arguments settled outside the game boundaries * Always enforce the rule on helping others

* Recognize that some emotional behaviors will need more private processing, i.e., fears, over-reaction to injury, recklessness, etc.

BRING THE JOY IN LEARNING BACK INTO YOUR DAILY ACADEMICS! Brain research demonstrates that play and learning go hand in hand. Play incorporates all the Multiple Intelligences (ways in which we learn) and therefore will be a valuable tool in reaching the greatest number of students. Memory is learning that sticks! To remember what you learn you need to practice it. Physical breaks "cement" learning. Positive expectations, a healthy atmosphere and rapport cement learning. Peer feedback is more influential in reinforcing performance results. Processing with children is paramount. Your goal is not to entertain, but to make part of everyday so enjoyable that children will want to learn.

NOMINATION APPLAUSE: (sample) Butterfly, Seal of Approval, Sky Rocket, Spider Doing a Push-up on a Mirror, Sprinkler, Opera, Disco, Hearts A-flutter, Silent, Retro-60's, Dancing Snake, Twirling Pinky, the "WOW", Little Rascals, Bubblegum, the Double Fonzie, Warm Round of Applause, the Standing "O," Train, etc. Encourage students to make up new favorites.

REFERENCES and READINGS

- 1. Learning to Play, Playing to Learn, Curriculum and Activities for Classroom and Playground Management, Revised Third Edition** Steffens & Gorin (Call 1-520-979-7753 for your copy)
- 2. The New Games Book A.** Fluegelman
- 3. More New Games A.** Fluegelman
- 4. The 1st & 2nd Cooperative Sports and Games Book** Terry Orlick (excellent for younger children)

We at CREATIVE SPIRIT™ would like to acknowledge all the playful and creative "spirit-masters" who have been inspiration for our endeavors. Special thanks are directed towards the wizards at the NEW GAMES foundation and Terry Orlick. This handout is intended to promote healthy empathy, self-regulation, socialization and problem-solving through play. Our program is designed to educate people so they may achieve the meaningful benefits associated with play. We encourage participants to use their own good judgment when monitoring their well-being and activity levels. You have it within you to know yourself better than anyone else does. Never stop laughing! Never stop playing!

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