

What is Your Play Personality? Incorporating Play into Everyday!

LESSON SUMMARY

“Play is the Work of Children” is commonly quoted by child developmentalists and experts to reinforce that the optimal way to learn, particularly for young children, is through play. But at what point do we, as adults, start prioritizing life responsibilities – work, caretaking, service – over those activities that spark enjoyment? Can we not do both?

In this 45 minute to 1 hour lesson, the purpose is to overview the importance of play across the lifespan, emphasizing play as equally important for aging adults as it is for young people. Being mindful about ways to incorporate play into your day-to-day through hobbies, preferred activities, or specific strengths or skillsets you enjoy can enhance our mental wellness and physical well-being. Through this lesson, participants will learn the historical significance of play, how play changes over the lifespan, discover their “play personality,” and reflect on ways to re-prioritize play to be in alignment with day-to-day living.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

At the end of the lesson, participants will learn:

- The historical significance of play.
- The varied play types over human development, from infancy to adulthood.
- Discover their “Play Personality”
- Reflect and conclude on how to incorporate play interests into daily living.

LESSON MATERIALS

1. PowerPoint
2. Facilitator Guide or utilize the notes pages on each PPT slide for guidance.
3. Play Personality Screener (printed; one per participant)
4. Pen or Pencil, one per participant.
5. Projector, computer, & screen.
6. *Optional: Calculator; There is minor math in tallying up the play personality screener that participants may find easier to do with a calculator or with assistance from the facilitator.*
³*Note that an online screener is in development, which will streamline this activity. Please contact the lesson originator, Dr. Katie Conrad, kconrad4@utk.edu for access to the online screener. It is slated to be complete by January 2024.*
7. Room Set-Up: A “U-Shape” table configuration or half-circle tables in view of the projector/screen. Ideally, the room set-up should encourage large group discussion or small-group discussion depending on the size of the group. If no tables are available, provide clipboards for completing the screener.

LESSON SCRIPT (45 minutes – 1 hour)

Slide 1: Title of Slide

Read slide and introduce yourself.

Slide 2: Agenda

Today we will overview:

- Historical Importance of Play: a brief history of the importance of play (play-deprived vs. play-filled life, and how child developmentalists have shifted cultural ideologies in favor of play),
- Developmental perspective on play: how play is scaffolded as we age; (**THIS AGENDA ITEM IS OPTIONAL. REVIEW NOTES ON SLIDE 10 FOR MORE INFORMATION. If you choose to skip, remove this bullet from the slide and move on to the next bullet. You'll also want to omit Slides 10-18 if you are omitting this section.**)
 - For example, to learn fractions, we must first learn simpler math skills, then build on those skills to advance our skillset; this is called scaffolding.
 - Related to play, play helps us learn important skillsets across different stages of development. Play is also scaffolded.
 - For infants, play is eye contact, cooing; toddlers it may be fine motor activities like building; preschoolers; social play; whereas adults, it's centered more so on rituals/gatherings and hobbies, etc.
- Determine your “play personality” that emphasizes how you like to “play” and emphasizes ensuring alignment between your work or general life tasks with play in mind.
- Close with reflecting on ensuring balance in work/life when it comes to involving ourselves in tasks that bring us joy.

Slide 3: Play is the Work of Children

Researchers differ on how to define play. Sometimes, play is defined based on the **purpose**, such as whether or not it is *unstructured* (i.e., free play and aimless), or whether it is *structured*, designed purposefully through specific guidance to build developmental skills.

Others define play by the **types of activities or behaviors** that are involved, such as physical “rough and tumble” play (Miller & Almon, 2009).

Sometimes, play is defined based on the **characteristics**, like creative, pretend, independent, or dramatic play.

While there is no single, universal definition for play, a simple definition is this:

CLICK to reveal the statement on the slide.

Say, “Play is the work of children.”

Slide 4: Science of Play: Cognitive Benefits

Yet, while we know that play is essential for children’s development, particularly in the earliest years of life, why do we forget about how important play is for us? Why do we assume that as adults, play is not for us anymore? Have we outgrown having fun?

We know that play is essential across the lifespan. Here’s what several decades of research have shown.

READ SLIDE.

Slide 5: Science of Play: Physical Benefits

READ SLIDE.

Slide 6: Play Deprivation: Impacts

Research overwhelmingly shows that “Play Deprivation” – that is, disallowing time to play in structured and unstructured ways – has poor, even tragic consequences.... (Dr. Stuart Brown)

For example, in the past decade, school districts decreased or eliminated recess time to prioritize academic learning and standardized test preparation.

Removing recess resulted in unfavorable consequences:

- poorer classroom behavior,
- greater violence and delinquency, and
- poorer academic performance.

Ask, ***Does anyone have an idea why these negative effects occurred?***

(ANSWER – Individuals need the chance to take breaks from challenging or tedious tasks in order for their brains to reset to be ready to learn, retain and information, and perform optimally. When individuals do not get that time to decompress, they act out, behaviorally, socially, and emotionally, and alternatively, makes the academic learning environment inhospitable.)

After an uproar by parents, scholars, practitioners, and the media, several states have enacted laws that require schools to offer at least 20 minutes of recess during the school day.

Slide 7: Historical Research on Play Deprivation

To provide an historical example, some of you may remember the notorious 1966 Texas Tower Shooting at the University of Texas, which, at the time, was the largest mass shootings in the U.S. Rather than go into the details of the day, what is important is the understanding gained from decades of research.

A young Psychiatry Professor, Dr. Stuart Brown, who was already studying the Psychology of Aggression, was tasked to research the motive behind the 1966 Texas Tower shooting incident.

Over the next few decades of his career, he would interview dozens of convicted murderers – the worst of the worst – about their childhoods.

Countless hours of interviews with the men, their families, neighbors, school teachers, and more, revealed one common theme: **All were play-deprived growing up.**

Decades of Dr. Brown’s research developed an understanding of how play impacts our lives, both positively and tragically. After, Dr. Brown developed the National Institutes for Play to study the science of play on all developmental stages, from birth to later life, finding that play is central to not simply our mental and emotional health, but our survival.

Slide 8: Play-Filled vs. Play Deprived Upbringing

Here are some examples of the consequences of a play-deprived life, versus the virtues of a play-filled life, developed by leading researcher and play expert, Dr. Stuart Brown.

Probe the group to think about their upbringing.

Ask, “Was play encouraged or discouraged? Examples of how it was encouraged/discouraged? How has it changed?”

Review Chart if time permits, or highlight a few interesting examples from the chart or have the group comment on some of the examples they find surprising from the chart. After, highlight an example from the chart of your choosing, or use the prompt below:

Example: Play-Filled Life – For Children.

- Highlight how **play boosts empathy and emotional regulation** (i.e., important skills of emotional intelligence).
- **Provide the example of “rough and tumble” play**; a type of play in which children use their bodies to play vigorously and in rough, “play fighting” ways. Through R&T play, children learn very quickly how not to hurt others with their bodies, take in the perspective of the other player in how to play gently so not to harm the other player, and adjust their movements in accordance with the other player’s preferences and needs. Children learn when they’ve “gone to far,” learn to own up and apologize for their mistakes, and perform more gently and fairly.
- When play-deprived, children do not get to practice this skillset with others.
- In sum, **rough and tumble play is encouraged by experts to help children learn empathy, perspective taking, citizenship, ethics, social competence, and more.**

Example: Play-Filled Life – For Adults.

To give another example, research by the NIFP has found that when patients with dementia are provided opportunities to play with items or experiences they loved in former years, their need for medication decreases compared to controls.

Slide 9: Quote

READ SLIDE.

Slide 10: Types of Play: Introduction

As we move through the next few slides, consider these questions:

- How do we play?
- Who is allowed to play?
- Do we suppress play as adults?
- Do you participate in this type of play?

¹**NOTE: SLIDES 10-18 ARE OPTIONAL and take an additional 15 minutes.** This segment provides a developmental explanation of how play is scaffolded (or “built”) from birth to our older years. For example, babies need attunement play (eye contact, smiles, coos, and other playful facial interactions with caregivers) to build trust and early communication skills. There are also examples of how we *still* play like this as adults.

²**NOTE: If you choose to omit, skip to Slide 18** to launch into the Play Personality Screener if time is a concern. Be sure to remove the “developmental perspective on play” from the Agenda slide if you choose to skip this portion of the presentation.

Optional Slides 11-18: Play Types

Note these are play types not to be confused with play personalities.

READ SLIDES & SLIDE NOTES.

Slide 19: Activity (15-20 mins): What is Your Play Personality? Screener

Provide the “Play Personality Screener”³ handout & a pen or pencil.

- Provide instructions & scoring. Read Slide. (1 min)
- Ask if everyone understands and answer any lingering questions. (1 min)
- Allow participants time to complete their screeners. (10 mins)
- Assist with scoring, as needed. Remind participants not to share what they’ve discovered until prompted on Slide 21. (3 mins)

³Note that an online screener is in development, which will streamline this activity so no math is involved and will save about 5 minutes. Please contact the lesson originator, Dr. Katie Conrad, kconrad4@utk.edu for access to the online screener, which is slated to be complete by January 2024.

Slide 20: Define the Play Personalities

Define the play personalities (below).

- **The Collector:** You enjoy building collections, such as collecting stamps or vintage cars.
- **The Competitor:** You enjoy playing (and winning) games with specific rules, like playing for a neighborhood soccer league.
- **The Creator or Artist:** You find joy in making things, or making things work. You might enjoy doodling, woodworking, decorating, fixing machinery, or sewing.
- **The Director:** You enjoy planning and directing, like hosting themed birthday parties.
- **The Explorer:** You play by discovering something new, either physically (a new place) or mentally. You might play by going on a vacation to a new place or discovering a new type of [music](#).
- **The Joker:** You enjoy being silly and foolish. You might enjoy improv theatre or simply making your friends laugh.
- **The Kinesthete:** You enjoy moving your body as play. You might practice yoga or take a dance class for fun.
- **The Storyteller:** You play by listening to or creating stories. You might enjoy going to the theater or [writing in a journal](#).

Slide 21: Play Personality Memory Lane

Provide time for the group to reflect on how their play personality “fits” based on their play interests as a child and how it influences how that prefer to play today. Encourage back and forth, informal reflection amongst participants. Have fun with it!

Say, “As you hear about the varied play personalities expressed by the group, think back on your play behavior growing up and up until now. Let’s do a brief reflection and head down memory lane.”

Have a couple volunteers (or time permitting, the whole group) share what their personality is and to consider the questions below.

- **What was your top personality (or two)? Does it fit (if so, how?)**
- **What was your bottom play personality? Does this sound like you?**
- **Do you still reserve time to “play” as an adult? Why or why not?”**

CONCLUSION / LESSON EXTENSION (5-20 minutes)

Slide 22: Reflection & Conclusion

Reflect on the lesson: Ask any or all of the following, time permitting.

1. *Do you feel what you scored on the screener fits with how you like to play as an adult? Why or why not?*
2. *Does your current play personality differ from what you would have said as a child?*
3. *How has your play personality influenced your education/career path?*
4. *What ways could you incorporate more play into your life based on your play personality? In other words, what available activities, resources, or other ideas can enable you to “play” more? What are areas you could delegate to others that enable more time for play?*

Lesson Extension: Have the group brainstorm one or two hobbies that would fit under each personality area that is affordable and accessible in terms of location, time, etc.

Here are some examples:

- **The Collector:** Go through old costume jewelry, tea cups, ornaments, or other vintage items you have saved over the years and share it with a family member or group of friends.
- **The Competitor:** Join a Bridge league, Cricket club, Dancing group, or other competitive hobby and enter into contests, etc.
- **The Creator or Artist:** Find friends or family members who want to learn a new skill or who share your affinity for that skills. For example, if you are an avid baker, swap recipes or record demonstrations (via video, social media, journal, recipe book, etc.) for baking your prized recipes so you document it for the next generation.
- **The Director:** Join a philanthropy group or charity organization seeking volunteers to lead or coordinate events. For example, the annual holiday parade; seek out organizers to ask how you may help in organizing or leading the event.
- **The Explorer:** Explore a new town, park, or area you’ve yet to visit. Or make a list of new restaurants that you’d like to try.
- **The Joker:** Find a local theatre group or comedy club. Or, write up a book of your go-to jokes to share with the next generation.
- **The Kinesthete:** Find a local group that offers yoga, chair yoga, tai chi, or join a local hiking club. Better yet, try something completely new, like Pickle Ball!
- **The Storyteller:** Document the hundreds of stories about your life; work life, family life, lessons learned, or hopes for future generations, in a journal or record on video. There are many online options for helping with such a project, such as Googling “digital scrapbooks” or making your own, in-print scrapbook with old photos.

Conclude: Make point about finding hobbies/work interests that “fit” their play personality to enhance motivation & life satisfaction.

Slide 23: References

1. National Institute for Play - <https://www.nifplay.org>

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2. Barros W, David M, Souza A, Silva M, Matos R. 2019. Can the effects of environmental enrichment modulate BDNF expression in hippocampal plasticity? A systematic review of animal studies. *Synapse*. 73(8):e22103.
 3. Gray, 2013 - <https://www.nifplay.org/play-as-preparation-for-learning-and-life/>
 4. Han Y, Yuan M, Guo YS, Shen XY, Gao ZK, Bi X. 2022. The role of enriched environment in neural development and repair. *Front Cell Neurosci*. 16:890666.
 5. Neal S, Kent M, Bardi M, Lambert KG. 2018. Enriched Environment Exposure Enhances Social Interactions and Oxytocin Responsiveness in Male Long-Evans Rats. *Front Behav Neurosci*. 12:198.