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Go Outside and Play!

Abstract

"We know that play is good for kids' mental, emotional, and physical health, but what about for adults?"

Posting about the benefits of enjoyable activities from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

<https://inallthings.org/go-outside-and-play/>

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Comments

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in things

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Go Outside and Play!

Erin Olson

Remember hearing that command from your parents as a kid? I know I say it to my kids— especially now, in the fall, as winter creeps in and I know soon the cold temperatures will keep us inside more. I spent my childhood in the 80's and early 90's living in a small Iowa town of around 1800 people. Our neighborhood had a good mix of families and elderly couples, but plenty of kids with whom my brother and I played. We could walk to the town pool and swim for hours or go to a nearby park. We'd play hide and seek around the neighborhood, and Ghosts in the Graveyard once the sun set. Play was a huge part of our days—even when school was in session, we'd play until the sun set or until it became too cold and our parents made us come inside. We lived to play, and although my childhood was not idyllic, I clearly remember the feeling of excitement my brother and I had as we anticipated an afternoon or weekend of play with our neighbor friends.

It is important for kids to play; however, with safety concerns, busy extracurricular activities, and all the technology available today, many kids aren't getting enough time to do it. Parents and teachers have had to become much more intentional about scheduling in playtime for kids and in some cases, kids are being forced to "go outside and play." We know that play is good for kids' mental, emotional, and physical health, but what about for adults? Is play something we should prioritize? What does it look like to *play* as an adult?

Maybe when we think about playing as an adult, we think about playing with our kids or with someone else's kids. We're playing because we know it's good for them, not thinking about the benefits it might have for us as well. For adults, play likely doesn't mean running around the neighborhood playing Ghosts in the Graveyard, or taking a break from work to go outside for recess and play tag. Play usually looks differently in

adulthood as we think about activities we do that connect us with others, and help us disconnect from other, more stressful parts of our day-to-day life.

Most of us have a list of things we enjoy doing when we have time to relax and unwind, but do we consider those things essential to our well-being or something we simply add on when we have the freedom to do them? Barbara Fredrickson, a social psychologist with a focus on positivity research, found that individuals with high levels of positivity and resiliency are often those that focus on the playful side of life, prioritizing things like “humor, creativity, exploration, relaxation, and optimistic thinking.”¹ Fredrickson says we should aim for a 3-to-1 ratio when it comes to positive and negative situations, emotions, or events. This doesn’t mean denying the difficult or stressful parts of life, but it means balancing those negative emotions with an intentional attitude of cultivating positive emotions using activities that help us create them. Having an attitude of playfulness and joyfulness helps create resilience—in other words, it helps us bounce back more quickly and respond more positively to the sadness and stressors that might otherwise bring us down. According to Fredrickson and other positivity psychologists, we can develop that playfulness and joyfulness by prioritizing play and self-care.

Play builds our resilience in multiple ways, but here are four key connections. Play can:

- Make us more curious. We can try new things, new experiences, and see what’s possible. We can step out of the box and learn new things about ourselves and our world.
- Build new perspective: Sometimes we’re so caught up in our current circumstances and realities that we need a break, and play can provide us with the humor, relaxation, and creativity that we need for a more empowering perspective.
- Help us let go and loosen up. We can see that maybe we don’t need to take everything so seriously. Play helps us enjoy the journey.
- Create connections. Shared playful experiences can help us build and strengthen relationships.

What are some ways that you like to play? It’s not as hard as you think, and we all play differently. What are the things you do that create a sense of lightness and energy within you? What are the activities that give you a new perspective? What are some simple things you can add into your life that might bring you joy? Here are some ideas:

- Create something. Take up painting, drawing, knitting, or pottery.
- Find some live music to watch with friends.
- Read a book from a new genre or check out a book of poetry.
- Sing or play a musical instrument you enjoy or try a new one.

- Try a new recipe. Share the finished product with your family or a neighbor.
- Drink a cup of tea or visit a new coffee shop in town.
- Take a walk or go for a run in a new setting.
- Play a board or card game with a friend, your kids, or your spouse.
- Play fetch with your dog.
- Read your Bible or practice Lectio Divina.
- Shoot baskets or kick around a soccer ball.

Think about the specific things that you've done that have helped give you a new perspective when things have been rough, but don't wait until they're rough to do them. Maybe you're taking yourself and your situation much too seriously. Stress, worry, and anxiety can all take a toll, making it difficult to see the good parts of life that might be right in front of you.

The Bible reminds us how God takes care of the flowers and grass of the field. So, why do we as humans feel the need to "toil and spin" and worry?

See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.²

FOOTNOTES

1. Fredrickson, B. L., & Branigan, C. (2005). Positive emotions broaden the scope of attention and thought-action repertoires. *Cognition and Emotion*, 19, 313-332.
2. Matthew 6: 28b-30; 33-34