

Playtime!

Add more life to your life
by playing with your family

Longevity  Assistant

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Will you PLAY with me?

If your son or daughter comes to you with this question, what is your typical answer?

- Not right now, I am *busy*.
- Sure, maybe later.
- Sorry, I'm *too tired*.
- Go play with your sister.

I've used all these lines in the past. And unfortunately, more frequently than dropping everything and saying, "Yes, let's play!"

Dr. Shelafi Tsabary writes in her books The Awakened Family and The Conscious Parent that we might be misunderstanding our parent-child roles.

Are we supposed to teach our children, or are they supposed to teach us?

I see "*Will you play with me?*" as one of the lessons my children are constantly giving me.

Baked into that question are so many others:

- Do you see me?
- Am I important to you?
- How important am I to you?

And how you respond can reveal a lot of truth, if you are willing to see it.

The Anger Response

Can't you see how busy I am? or worse Quit being a pest!

Most likely, you are frustrated or irritated because the question was not asked at a convenient moment.

How does this make the kid feel? Lousy, I'm sure. Usually when mom or dad gets angry at them it is because they did something wrong.

Is asking to play something they shouldn't be doing? Absolutely not! I often quickly apologize for snapping at them.

There are two truths hidden in the anger response.

1. The first truth reveals **how well you can deal with the randomness of life**. Many things can interrupt your business, and most are not as charming as a little boy or girl wanting to play. Sickness, a family crisis, or a call from your boss can be quite irritating when they occur. How do you want these things to affect you? Should they always be a battle? or **Can you learn to work with disruption with some grace and flow?**
2. The second truth is that **you might be missing out on what is truly important**. What are you busy doing? Work? Reading news articles? Scanning social media? Can you *honestly* not even spare 5 minutes to play? **Perhaps the interruption is actually an intervention in disguise.**

The Deferral Response

Sorry, maybe later or *Go ask your mother*

The second sort of response usually has a tone of regret, and I'm guessing that the return response is likely a mirror. Perhaps the little one even melts into a puddle of tears, magnifying your own disappointment.

How about not breaking hearts in the first place? Realize that your child is coming to you, filled with hope and excitement about the opportunity to play with **you**. Pause, and take a breath and try to mirror them.

Try to see their light, their fire, and respond in kind.

Again, we have to face some truths:

1. **It is easier to respond to something now than it is to do it later.** How often do you make good on your deferrals of the request to play? If you don't do it now, how likely will you do it after you've spent a full day working?
2. **What other commitments do we neglect or postpone?** Perhaps the real reason we feel let down when "Will you play with me?" is asked, it is an echo of the other areas in our life that we could give more attention to.
3. **Deflection is an easy way to avoid dealing with our own issues.** It's someone else's fault. If only X could happen, then I could do Y. And the dismissals continue. Meanwhile, **someone else has all the fun.**

The Excuse Response

Daddy's tired or I'm not in the mood

A more crass term for this type of response is B.S!

Play is a **gift**, and your child wants to share it with you. This is such an awesome invitation. If a stranger were to come up to you and say, "Here's a million dollars," would you turn it away? Would you tell them to give it to someone else? I wouldn't.

Yet, are we willing to make excuses to avoid an arguably even more precious gift.

Truth time.

1. **Most of our excuses are baseless.** Unless you just finished three consecutive ultra marathons, you are not too tired. There are so many ways to play, certainly you can find something that matches your energy level. By the way, by playing *more often*, you may even find you get *more energy* to play more. It's quite a nice feedback loop.
2. **Your autopilot is lazy and lies to you.** The brain is very good at finding ways to avoid work. Patterns, stability, and predictability are cherished. It also may ever reward things that give you a dopamine boost (like binge watching TV or eating cake). Overcoming this takes discipline and practice.

The POSITIVE Response

"Yes, let's play."

Try saying it out loud. Even the word, "yes" makes your face start to smile.

When you can accept the invitation to play, right now, you are opening yourself up to so much more than a little bit of fun.

Accepting the invitation to play means you are saying YES to the following truths:

- You will strengthen the bonds between you and your child.
- You will help your child thrive by playing more.
- You will improve your health (mind, body, and soul) through movement and laughter
- You will start flowing with the absurdities of life instead of fighting them
- You will begin having more fun everywhere in your life
- You will be able to experience the freedom of being "in the moment"

I can remember several moments when playing with my children resulted in a moment of uncontrollable laughter that had us all on the floor in tears of happiness.

Playing seems to be one the easiest ways to tap into this source of pure bliss.

Are you ready?

Will you play with me?

Play at Home

The house is where we spend a lot of time. (Maybe) And when the weather is awful and friends aren't around, we might be stuck here. Rather than spend downtime binge watching the latest shows, or scrolling through social media, perhaps we can rediscover each other through play. The following activities can be done easily at home, if anyone says they are bored.



Levitation

Have the child sit on the floor, legs crossed in a meditation pose. Have the child lift his hands above his head. Take hold of the hands, and try to pull the child straight up. For more fun, call out "OMMM" as you lift.



Mountain Climbing

Face your child and grab her forearms.

Have them start to climb up your body. Keep your knees bent and core tight.



Drag Races

Take turns having a member of the family lay on the ground. The other person will drag them, by the hands or feet for some distance. Then switch. Have young kids work together to try to drag their parents.



Human Sculptures

Use your imagination on this one, you can even have multiple children. The idea is to create some new shape, perhaps even something abstract, by having everyone climb on each other and holding on to each other. It will challenge strength and balance.



Tumble Time

When was the last time you tried a summersault? Have a contest with your kids to see how many you can do in a row. You can also combine this with a squat to start and standing up or jumping at the end. Go forward or backward.



Dance Party

This one speaks for itself. Crank the tunes, move your body. Dance is an ancestral activity. Take inspiration from these dances. They often involve a lot of motion - stomping, spinning, jumping, hand gestures. Bonus - create your own rhythms using a makeshift drum.

Indoor Obstacle Course Did your mother ever tell you not to climb on the furniture? Well now is your chance to do exactly that! Design a course that will have go through the house, climbing over, going around, or crawling under the items in your house.

Kitchen Chair Workout

Step ups. Face chair.

Step up on chair, and step down, alternate the leading foot. Try it backwards for bonus balance work. **Jump on** for more cardio.

Chair Lift and Carry. Lift the chair in different ways - one handed, two handed, from the side, straight on. Walk around the house while carrying the chair. Try holding a chair in each arm. Or have your children sitting on it.

Push it! Try doing push up three ways, with your hands on the seat while facing the chair, while facing away from the chair, and finally lie on the ground and pushing it toward the ceiling. Add kids for weight!



Chair Sits

Sit on the chair at various speeds, as slow as you can or as fast as you can. Put the chair against the wall and imitate it. Have your kids test which is more comfortable, you or the chair.!

Crawl under.

If you don't fit, try setting two chairs side by side and setting a third chair across them, creating an "H" shape.

Crunch it!

Lie on your back, place your feet on the seat of the chair and do sit ups.

Cool Down: Sit in the chair the way it was designed.

However, be intentional about your posture. Keep your back straight. Raise your head. Place your palms flat on your lap. Take ten deep long breaths.

Play Outside

Studies also show that green spaces are immensely beneficial to our well being. Just going outside and looking at nature will make you feel better! Alternatively, our indoor environments can be quite toxic. Play outside and get energy (and Vitamin D) from the sun and filtered air from the forest.

Don't be afraid of nasty weather. Weather is a great natural stress on our body which will strengthen your stress response. Sweat, shiver, and get wet!



Explore

Discover the trails closest to you Hike intentionally. Observe your surroundings, Make it fun with your kids by imagining a quest or adventure. Pretend along the way to be animals that may use the trail. Piggy back rides add to the workout and fun!



Game on!

The outdoors gives you room to run around. There are tons of things to do, from playing toss or catch, to playing tag. Revisit childhood classics like Red Light/Green Light, Mother May I?, Simon Says, or Hide and Seek. Kids especially love chase games.



Playground Passport

Parks and playgrounds are sadly under utilized today. Look for the playgrounds in your neighborhood and start a tour. Visit each one and try all the equipment. No playground nearby? Make your own, or be a human jungle gym.



Dirty. Muddy. Wet

Lakes and rivers and beaches are very different than the local pool but all water locations offer fun recreation. On the next rainy day, find a place you can get muddy. On the next sunny day, find some dirt or sand. Dig holes, make sand sculptures, and have races.



Outdoor Obstacle Course

For the best experience, go into the woods, get off the trail and try to maneuver through it. Climb over rocks, climb up trees, and navigate through obstructions.

For an additional Bonus, build the course. Carry some heavy logs, roll some socks around, or dig a trench with your hands.

Alternatively, you can design or imagine a course as part of the Playground Passport experience.

Play Anywhere

The world is your playground. Make it a habit to play to kill time while waiting in lines. Turn routine items into fun adventures.

Grocery Goofiness. Next time you get groceries, take a cart and fill it with watermelons. Have your kids take turns pushing it around the store. Of course, don't forget to put them back.

Mannequin Challenge When walking through a mall or a store and you see a mannequin display, immediately yell "Freeze!". Everyone must hold absolutely still as long as they possibly can.

Mission Impossible Have some chores you need to do? Set a timer and see how much you can do in 1 or 2 minute sprints. This also works for shopping - can you go in to a store and get out before it explodes?

Battle Royale Play fighting can help develop strength, mental aptitude and resilience. Play fighting should be fun. It can be hard, and may end up with someone in a pile of tears. Done correctly, it will feel more like a game and less like a boxing match.

- **Shoulder Push** - This is like reverse tug of war. Stand face to face. Place one of your hands on the opponents shoulder. Try to push each other back a few steps.
- **Escape!** - Grappling is a wonderfully exhausting way to play. In this game, one player will try to wrap the other player in some sort of hold. Once the hold is set, the other player tries to get free. If any part of the hold breaks, it cannot be reset. After the escape is made, players switch roles.

Time Out!

In the areas of the world where people live the longest, working out is integrated into the fabric of their everyday life. But in addition to working hard, the people in these “Blue Zones” also know how to relax.

Naptime Instead of working out one day, try replacing it with a nap. Take 20-30 minutes, lie still in a dark, quiet place. (You can also try relaxing in a hammock, or lying in the shade of tree as well.) Maybe you will fall asleep, maybe not. Guided meditations can be great tools to help you build the skill for winding down.

Stretching. There are so many benefits to stretching. Yoga is a great practice for incorporating various stretches. For a free form stretching experience, let your child run the stretching session and mirror their movements.

Breathing. Taking just five deep breaths does wonders for our bodies. Air is good for our brains and bodies. Breathing is also a great calming technique when a kid is worked up. Have them hold their hands on your belly and tell them to do what you do as you breathe deeply. You can also pretend to be dragons and have a fire breathing contest to see how many things you can set on fire with one big breath. Another fun way to breath is to lay down and have your child rest their head on your belly. They may laugh a little as they feel you push their head up and down with your breath. That’s ok, laughter is wonderful!

Play for Anybody

The elderly, really young, and those with physical challenges should not be limited in their opportunities to play. Here are some ideas that can help get everyone involved.

Get on the Floor As we age, it becomes important to retain the ability to recover from a fall, or stand under our own power. Children, including crawling babies are oftentimes at ground level. Use play as an excuse to practice going from lying to standing.

Get in the Pool Water allows for more movement. Babies love it.

Treasure Hunt Outdoor version. Take a walk and look for magical or special things. With kids, pay particular attention to the things that grab their attention.

Indoor version. Have the grandparent hide a handful of special items around the house. After the kids find all the objects and bring them back, have the grandparent tell the stories behind each item. **Listening to the wisdom and stories of our elders is one of the most ancient practices of humans across the globe.**

Sitting Games You can adapt many of the proposed activities in this book to a sitting format.

- Play Simon Says with the whole family while sitting in chairs.
- Have a Dance Party - give a drum to grandma for the beat.
- Make grandpa part of the Indoor Obstacle Course - don't let him grab you as you go by!

30 Days of Play

Day 1 Hike and Explore	Day 2 Human Sculptures	Day 3 Dance Party	Day 4 Stretching	Day 5 Game time! Simon Says	Day 6 Fun Day - do something silly
Day 7 Playground Passport	Day 8 Levitation and Mountain Climbers	Day 9 Indoor Obstacle Course	Day 10 Breathing	Day 11 Game time! Hide and Seek	Day 12 Get Wet or Dirty
Day 13 Hike and Explore	Day 14 Escape!	Day 15 Outdoor Obstacle Course	Day 16 Naptime	Day 17 Game time! Primal Tag	Day 18 Fun Day - do something silly
Day 19 Playground Passport	Day 20 Tumbling	Day 21 Mission Impossible	Day 22 Stretching	Day 23 Game time! Red Light - Green Light	Day 24 Get Wet or Dirty
Day 25 Hike and Explore	Day 26 Shoulder Push	Day 27 Dance Party	Day 28 Breathing	Day 29 Game time! - Mother May I?	Day 30 Fun Day - do something silly

Final Thoughts

Playing with our families seems to be something that we shouldn't have to be told do. It should be a natural thing.

In fact, play is a natural thing. **We are hardwired for it.**

But our world is getting less and less natural.

So we forget. We lose touch with the things that helped us evolve and adapt over time. We must be **intentional** about staying engaged with these things in order not to lose them.

Not only that, the world can seem to be growing increasingly more negative. At least our news feeds seem that way.

Physical play takes us from the digital to the physical, from artificial reality to actual reality. **Play is a well of joy.**

I hope that it is not too outlandish an idea, that perhaps by playing more we can even resolve some of the most troubling ills of our societies. *Play it forward.*

Playing can lead to better community because it helps us connect. It leads to more personal contact with each other, and it is a wonderful way to release stress.

Put simply, **playing is healing.**

So I'll repeat the question I started with, **will you play with me?**