

Excerpts from "It's Not Just..." by the Riverbrook YMCA Childcare Programs

When I play with blocks, cars, and trains, I am learning...

- Concepts of shape, size, length, and location
- To feel empowered to create my own world with unique buildings and railroad tracks

When I string beads, I am learning...

- Hand-eye coordination
- To create patterns
- Fine motor development

When I play with sand, I am learning...

- How to manipulate tools and problem solve
- To play with others in a confined area with shared materials

When I play sports, I am learning...

- Effective communication
- Problem solving and flexible thinking
- To act quickly in fast paced situations

When I swim, I am learning...

- To overcome fear and uncertainty
- Confidence in learning a new skill
- Stamina and safety

When I participate in dance and dramatic play, I am learning...

- Self expression
- To embrace imperfections and my individuality
- To engage imaginatively with my peers

References:

1. Grey, Peter "The Playful State of Mind." *Free to Learn*. New York: Basic Books, 2015. 141. Print
2. Grey, Peter "The Playful State of Mind." *Free to Learn*. New York: Basic Books, 2015, 140. Print
3. Grey, Peter "What Have We Done to Childhood?" *Free to Learn*. New York: Basic Books, 2015. 18. Print.
4. Grey, Peter "The Human Educative Instincts." *Free To Learn*. New York: Basic Books, 2015. 122-124. Print.
5. Grey, Peter "Lessons from Sudbury." *Free To Learn*. New York: Basic Books, 2015. 100-103. Print.
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7. Grey, Peter "The Human Educative Instincts?" *Free To Learn*. New York: Basic Books, 2015. 112. Print

Dr. Peter Grey is a research professor in the Psychology Department at Boston College. He has delivered seminars at Traskside to the Wilton Community about the importance of free play and the scientific research behind it. He is the author of the book, "Free To Learn: Why Unleashing the Instincts to Play Will Make Our Children Happier, More Self-Reliant and Better Students for Life"

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RIVERBROOK REGIONAL
YMCA- WILTON AND
NORWALK BRANCHES

*Afterschool, Nursery School,
and Camp Programs*

The Importance and Implementation of FREE PLAY



The WILTON FAMILY YMCA is a branch of the RIVERBROOK REGIONAL YMCA serving Norwalk, Redding and Wilton. 404 Danbury Road, Wilton CT 06897

The Importance of Free Play

*"The predominant emotions of play are interest and joy"*⁶

*"...three core aspects of our human nature—curiosity, playfulness, and sociability—can combine beautifully to serve the purpose of education."*⁷

What is Free Play?

Before we talk about Free Play, we must first understand what it is. "Play, is first and foremost, an expression of freedom."¹ Dr. Peter Grey, author of *Free to Learn*, surmises that free play has 5 characteristics, " Play is self chosen and self directed; play is activity in which means are more valued than ends; play has structure or rules that are not dictated by physical necessity but emanate from the minds of the players; play is imaginative, nonliteral, mentally removed in some way from "real" or "serious" life; and play involves an active, alert, but non stressed frame of mind."²

Play serves many important purposes. "In Free Play, children learn to make their own decisions, solve their own problems, create and abide by rules, and get along with equals rather than as obedient or rebellious subordinates."³ "Free play is also nature's means of helping children discover what they love. In their play, children try out many activities and discover where their talents and predilections lie,"³



How Do Kids Play?

Dr. Peter Grey compiled a list of universal types of children's play. They are:

1. Physical Play
2. Language Play
3. Exploratory Play
4. Constructive Play
5. Fantasy Play
6. Social Play⁴

Examples and Possible Outcomes of these types of play are:

Type of Play/Activity	Possible Outcome
Physical Play: 1. Running, leaping, chasing	1. Athleticism, healthy lifestyle, physical job
Language Play: 2. Word games, word construction, language development	2. Interest in poetry, competency in English and language
Exploratory Play: 3. Following a river, observing ants, pouring water on snow	3. Greater understanding of cause and effect, interest in science
Constructive Play: 4. Building blocks, race tracks, sand castles	4. Architects, engineers, software designers
Fantasy Play: 5. Dress up, creative writing, imaginary friends	5. Creativity, interest in the arts, self expression
Social Play: 6. Role playing, starting games, assigning parts	6. Leadership, collaboration, empathy, inclusion, negotiation

How Can We Enable Children To "Free Play"?

- Time and Space to Play and Explore
- Free Age Mixing Among Children and Adolescents
- Access to Knowledgeable and Caring Adults
- Access to Equipment and Freedom to Play with It
- Free Exchange of Ideas
- Freedom from Bullying
- Immersion in a Democratic Community⁵

How Do We, at The Y, Encourage Children to "Free Play"?

In all of our Childcare programs, (Afterschool, Nursery School, and Camp) we incorporate Free Play practices daily. This can take many different shapes, dependent on the needs and wants of our children. It is "Free Play" after all and therefore the play is dictated by them! In our classroom settings, we allot time for them to free roam the room, supplies, and centers to figure out what they want to do, develop games, and interact with each other! In our camp setting, we give them supplies and freedom during activities as well as a free play based activity called Camper Connections and Croc Pot. Our staff are trained and encouraged to let the children explore, socialize, and create play while carefully watching, encouraging, and supplying any additional needs.