

BUILDING CHIL

through No-Tech, Old-Fashioned,



Anybody reading this old enough to remember fun and games without technology? I'm talking about back in the day before computers and Internet when kids would get together and play "Red Rover, Red Rover," "Kick the Can," or just shoot marbles with each other. Back when imaginative play, physical play, real people, not virtual play was all we had! You know, like the way Apple Guru Steve Jobs used to play when he was a kid. When he was still with us, he limited his children's access to screens and electronic gadgetry; he knew that too much of what he was getting out to the public wasn't that good for his kids if served to them in large doses.

Our traumatized children, many of them with brains that have been compromised by in utero drugs and alcohol, and whose early lives may have been negatively impacted by abuse, neglect and inconsistency in caregiving have already gotten off to a rough start. Many of them have impaired social reciprocity as their social rhythm just isn't quite right. Their common sense thinking and ability to organize thoughts, actions, even their room may be delayed. They may be fast moving and have impulse control problems along with deficiencies in auditory processing and auditory memory. Electronic play isn't going to make those impairments better. The base structures of the brain that the higher parts of the brain build on must be exercised and practiced first, in a variety of creative ways through rhythmic, physical movement, real-life problem-solving, and through non-virtual, in-person give and take interactions so that higher brain functions have something to connect to. No-tech play builds better brains. High tech play is better for those whose brains are already efficient.

If electronic play should become chronic and compulsive, then it isn't good for anyone. It's a great way to be in the world but not if it involves conflict avoidance. If one has addiction in their DNA lineage, then the problem is compounded: The limbic system craving the mood-regulating

DREN'S BRAINS

Interactive Play By Beth Powell, LCSW

dopamine and glutamate high that electronic gaming purposely and profitably provides can happen quickly. Too many gamers game addictively, removing themselves more and more from the real world, from real human interaction and from life's challenges, seeking their "high" not through positive relationships with real others, but through virtual, non-reality.

In Texas, I teach the no-tech "old school" rhythmic, interactive games and activities that I grew up playing (before stores and batteries were invented), to teachers and to foster, kinship and adoptive parents at workshops in various parts of the state. I teach these games and activities because they are needed, wanted and requested by the caregivers I work with since they want to help habilitate the brains and hearts of the children who are in their care. So many of the youthful caregivers I work with don't have a repertoire from memory of the play that gave my generation so much joy and constructive brain practice.

Let me give just a few simple examples, with neuro-behavioral rationale, from my own "bag" of no-tech interactive play:

1. ROPE TURNING TO SONGS OR CHANTS, especially with a long, heavy rope with a person at each end who must get in rhythm with the other for the rope to turn properly. A song or chant is recited by the rope turners that preaches something positive since what we meditate on, we become. The rope should hit the ground at 60 beat-a-minute intervals to help calm the hind part of the brain and to positively impact the cerebellum. The song or chant should be in rhythm with the beat of the rope hitting the ground. This activity also bilaterally stimulates the brain which is great for interhemispheric integration so thinking and problem solving can improve. It may be useful practice for helping children be in better synch with the social rhythm of others, or even make it easier for one to switch off annoying thoughts via the bilateral stimulation.

2. SWING THE STATUE: The swinger (who should be a trustworthy adult) swings the players in a circular manner that does not cause them to come off their feet and fly through the air like flapping birds. The "swinge" is gently released and must bring their body to a freezing stop and hold the position while remaining silent because statues don't talk. The one who moves first is out of the game and becomes a

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spotter to catch other kids moving. This is a great activity for the ADHD, always-moving-and-blurting-when-they-aren't-supposed-to kid. It's also a great activity for kids who need to practice trust for the trustworthy adult who cares for them and keeps them safe.

3. MOTHER MAY I: A movement directive is given for each child to follow by the player designated as the "Mother." The directives should increase in difficulty as the aural memory and aural processing capacity of the child allows them to. The child must not only remember the sequence of movements, but also must remember to say BEFORE moving, "Mother, May I?" The child then waits for the Mother's response of "Yes, you may." This game also practices having the child habitually ask permission from the Mother to do things, obey the mother and respect the mother. In other words, it helps the child learn to let Mom have the control. In fact, it might be a good game for the real Mother to be the Mother in, especially if Mom needs to practice benevolent, hierarchical authority.

No-tech, interactive play also helps children become better communicators, resolve fears and losses and make sense of their world, so that they can have control over at least something in their lives. Dr. Bruce Perry reminds us that the brain develops in a use-dependent manner. No-tech play is not a one-time event. It should be practiced frequently. And maybe the best thing about no-tech, creative play: It's free or extremely low

cost... There's nothing like good, cheap REAL fun to build brains and better bonds!

Beth Powell, LCSW, a Conroe, Texas-based psychotherapist, neuro-behavioral educator, college professor and author, specializes in helping traumatized children and their families heal. Powell came from a "hard place" herself and thanks her relatives for helping her become the professional helper she is today. She has created a unique systems-based, child-in-family therapeutic approach that includes the child's caregivers as part of the treatment team. Powell is a gifted and knowledgeable public speaker whose entertaining and interactive workshops have educated appreciative audiences for more than 25 years. For more information about her treatment services, her workshops and publications, visit www.infamilyservices.net.

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