

This is **Cup of Sunshine** – your Friday Podcast brought to you by the Phoenix Centre Team of the Deutsche Internationale Schule Johannesburg.

Welcome! I'm Katja Fleck, the manager of the Phoenix Centre, I am a mindfulness teacher and Psychologist. Today I would like to share **some ideas for play and creative time for the whole family.**

Currently we are still on holiday break at the DSJ but whether you listen to this podcast now or some other time - the principles of play and creative time stay the same: It is meant to be fun and it is time to connect!

This holidays might feel different for some of us as we are still asked to stay at home and to not go away see friends and family or to go on holiday. It is important to acknowledge how that makes us feel. There might be feelings of sadness, anger, frustration or boredom. It is perfectly normal to have these feelings. But what would be a kind gesture to ourselves to help us deal with these experiences? For some of us play and creative time, whether on our own or with our family, will help us to relax, uplift our mood, rejuvenate and get energy and creative ideas flowing again – if we are more relaxed and energetic we are happier and our work and family life benefits. In case “having fun” is not a good enough reason to carve out this time of your schedule I will provide some bigger picture views of why play and creative time is good for everyone. Let's explore how we can implement play into our day and what this precious time might look like (by the way, all these suggestions exclude any kind of screens, so best put any devices far away that you are not even tempted):

First, make time! It is too easy to get caught up in all our responsibilities which we priorities over play and creative time. Often it means we actually never get round to having fun. So maybe it is helpful for you to schedule it and be deliberate in making time. On the other hand, it is also very easy to start playing, especially for our children and we just don't stop. In the holidays, of-course that is absolutely fine. But during school time or when there is stuff to catch up, it makes sense to bring playtime into the chart or timetable we have made. Schedule special things to look forward to as well. For example, for the weekend you can plan to build a ford and sleep in it or to have a family games night.

Second, when you play with your child **let him or her take the lead.** This boosts confidence and you learn a lot about how your child sees the world. Go with the flow: sometimes your child will want to play calmly and sometimes wild. To meet this need in the moment will help your child to regulate energy levels and emotions. Just remember to calm down when approaching bed time. Embrace repeating any games or stories. We all learn through repetition and especially our children need a lot of that. Also **encourage playing alone.** You won't be there your child's whole life to make the entertainer. To develop a balanced and integrated brain your child needs to be able to be by herself. If we acquire this skill we have a huge advantage when it comes to resilience and preventing developing mental health issues like addiction, depression and anxiety disorders. If your child is not used to it yet begin with as little as 5 minutes or for example say “I am just going to load the dishwasher then I have time; until then find something to play by yourself.”



Third, relax, don't worry about your "should" and "have-tos". They will wait for you! So park them and allow your inner child to come out to play. Yes, also as adults we have a part in us which still loves playing. What that part of our being enjoys doing is different for each of us: constructing with building blocks, creating furniture and accessories for the doll house out of recycled material, tumbling in the garden, kicking the ball, having a dance competition, digging and building in the sand... everything is allowed. Explore what you enjoy doing with your child and do it! Initially it might be a bit of a challenge to let go of any outcome expectations and to be completely in the moment while playing or creating. Stick to it! The benefits for your well-being and the relationship to your child and his or her development outweigh by far any struggles.

Fourth, playfully we learn best. Our brain needs to be in a calm, focused, yet curious and open mind state in order to learn. This is usually acquired in play. All of a sudden, our child who was just complaining over learning vocabularies, now enjoys playing a matching game. Make use of that! Like this you can strengthen your child's and your brain functions for example memory, problem-solving and concentration. By the way the same brain state is needed in order to get our creativity flowing.

Fifth, play helps us to develop social skills. We learn to stick to rules and to respect our own and other people's boundaries – but in a less structured environment then, for example, in the class room. This requires to learn how to negotiate and compromise. Initially this requires guidance from an adult but with time and patience any conflict arising is a potential teaching moment of changing perspectives: understanding and acknowledging how I and the other person feels and to problem-solve. In shared playtime we also experience time of connection with family and friends. This alone boosts our sense of safety and eases any stress reaction in the body.

Sixth, nurturing our playful side and creativity will benefit the human collective. Do you think I am taking this too far? I don't think so: Our world needs creative problem solvers for tomorrow those people we "our children" today. Maybe that is one of the things the current pandemic can teach us. Our ways don't really work, we need new ideas to answer the challenges and injustices in South Africa and the world. It is time for fresh and creative solutions. Solutions of which we adults are not even able to dream of but our children are. If we allow and encourage them to engage in times of creativity and play and without pushing them in any particular direction or restraining them by putting them into rigid structures they can begin to imagine a new world in play without any actual consequences.

By the way, did you know that a mindfulness practise enhances creativity? Maybe you would like to check out the [Mindfulness Course Online and live for Adults in term 3](#). Also stay tuned in for our next podcasts episodes on relaxation and mindfulness in the next few weeks.

That's all for today. Stay well and hear you next time.