



Soulful Home

Finding the Sacred In
Our Everyday Spaces

Play

June 2021

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The Welcome Mat

What Does it Mean to be a Family of Play?

When I first began teaching, in the early 2000s, I was fortunate to work at a school that employed a play therapist, Ellie. I collaborated with Ellie as often as I could on classroom activities, because although she was primarily employed to support a handful of children with special needs, the fact was that whenever she worked her magic (which looked a lot like what was happening on the playground, just with everyone playing the same game together!), all of us learned more, had fun, made new connections, and emerged from the activity feeling terrific. (Side note: that's the secret superpower of inclusive education!) I think of play as the most powerful tool of childhood, the tool that children themselves conceive of and employ to make meaning of the world that they are growing into.

The past year--because many of us enjoyed increased proximity to our children throughout the days, weeks, and months of the pandemic--has reacquainted many of us with the rhythms of our children's play, from making up amusing songs as they rinsed off their breakfast dishes to animating the dust bunnies behind the couch with different personalities to setting up obstacle courses for the guinea pig. Play is delightful to watch, and even more so to participate in! UK play therapist Bob Hughes, in his 1996 book *Taxonomy of Play*, categorized [16 types of play](#). It's worth giving his list a quick look for inspiration and encouragement, because while you may see a few play types that you haven't employed as often as you might with your child, you will recognize several that are in the regular rotation.

I'm not sure we hit all 16 types of play in this month's packet, but as we always do, we aimed for diversity of experience and variety of options. And you'll note that we haven't been abashed about integrating computer gaming into our suggested activities. Gaming provides rich opportunities for connection with our children and engagement with our values, and we've found that embracing gaming often means meeting our children where they already are. Of course, we have ideas for clapping, climbing, creating, and making contact, too.

Joining you this month in releasing our inner imps, in service of the kind of joy and rejuvenation that energizes us for the world's work,

Teresa, on behalf of the Soul Matters team



At the Table

Exploring Play Through Discussions

At the Table questions explore the monthly theme through a discussion for all ages. They are designed for a family gathering - maybe during a Friday night meal, a quiet moment in the living room or before a board game night.

Introducing the Activity

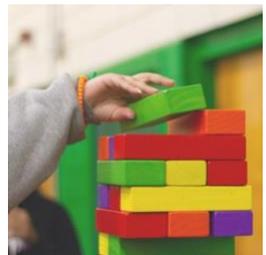
Family members who are readers can alternate who reads the questions. Those who are not readers are invited to share their own impromptu questions. Discussion partners might answer as thoughts come to them or take turns in a circle.

Discussion Questions

1. What game have you not played in a while that you'd like to revive?
2. If you and your grandparent or parent were both kids at the same time, what do you think you would play together?
3. What is the secret ingredient to you having fun while you are playing with someone else?
4. Who is the most playful in the family?
5. Does your family "play with your food"? Does everyone in the family agree that it is fun?
6. Where do you go to play in your own imagination? And what do you take with you?
7. When you see other kids playing, are you more likely to jump in and join them, or hang back and watch for a while? Whichever of these you answered, what would it take for you to try the *other* approach?
8. Who is the most playful adult in your life?
9. How did you learn how to play?
10. If you have to name three of your best family games--board games, word games, physical games, whatever--what would they be?
11. What games do you play in your own mind to help yourself stay motivated to finish chores or schoolwork?
12. Who is someone you used to play with, but you don't anymore? What would it be like to reach back out to them, just to tell them how much that memory means to you?
13. What games does your pet like to play?

Return to the Discussion Throughout the Week

Thoughts develop with time. Find opportunities to bring up particularly compelling questions again during the month, maybe on walks, rides home, when tucking your child into bed, etc. If thoughts grew or changed, notice together how we are all evolving beings, opening ourselves to new truths and understandings as we live our lives and connect with others.



Around the Neighborhood

Around the Neighborhood activities engage families with their surroundings through the lens of the theme. It's about perceiving our well-known world in new ways. As you safely move around your neighborhood during this time of Covid, these suggestions help you transform your everyday backs-and-forths into a family adventure!

Treasure Hunt for Play

Our neighborhoods are full of fun things to play with! Below are some “supplies” along with suggestions for how you might play with them. We are certain you will find exactly what you need to play some great games together!

Find rocks...

- Who can stack them the tallest?
- Build huts and caves out of them
- Make a path to find the hidden treasure

Find sticks...

- Play pick-up sticks
- Make stick pictures
- Tie bundles together with long pieces of grass

Find tall weeds...

- Make flower crowns
- Pretend to cook (*but don't eat them unless a trusted adult tells you they are edible*)
- Pretend hair salon, using weeds as shampoo
- Pretend to be snakes slithering through the grass

Find mud, sand, or other earth...

- Make mud pies
- Bury each other's toes or fingers
- Uncover earthworms (*and gently recover them again!*)

Find seeds, berries, or flowers...

- Make a flower crown
- Make clothes for fir-cone dolls or creatures
- Make mandalas

Find your shadows

- Play shadow tag
- Make shadow animal impressions
- See who can make their shadow the tallest



From the Mailbox

Our literal mailboxes connect us to the wide world outside, sometimes with messages asking things from us (a donation letter or flyer encouraging us to vote), sometimes with messages offering us gifts (a letter from a friend or a special delivery). Our “From the Mailbox” section applies this metaphor to today’s call for families to engage in the work of dismantling white supremacy culture. Together each month, as a Soulful Home community, we open and accept these “invitations” to join some of the many brave, inspiring and wise leaders and organizations who are co-creating a future that is actively anti-racist.

What if self-care were as addictive as a video game?

Have you ever made an in-app purchase to unlock a level, evolve a character, or get access to some other extra content in a video game? If you have, you are far from alone--a whopping 94% of all game users have, too. So game developers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology wondered, what if we could tap into that same impulse not to get people to invest in their games, but to invest *in themselves*?

[MIT’s Affective Computing Group](#) first set out to make an app that would help people with clinical depression to make the daily, life-affirming decisions that are difficult to make in the grips of the condition. But what they realized is that their app could help many more people, too, people who suffered chronic stress from, for example, systemic racism and discrimination. Their game is called The Guardians, and you can read about it [here](#), and download it [here](#).

Invitation: Download [the free app](#), and ask a few friends to download it, too. Set aside a week to give the app a try, setting a goal for playtime that makes sense to you, maybe 15 minutes, four days a week. (It does take a bit to get up to speed on how to play the game, so know that 30 or so minutes will be dedicated to that.) Then, arrange for a get-together--maybe in person, maybe online--to compare notes with your friends. How did it feel to playfully commit to these aspects of self-care? What did you learn about yourself while playing?

Leveling the Gaming Playing Field

“Gaming” is a hugely popular pastime among children, youth, and adults. While it doesn’t exclusively refer to playing video games, it most often does. So if someone you know refers to themselves as a gamer, more than likely you’d picture them in front of a video screen. And while the faces of gamers are as diverse as all of North America, the faces of game developers--or devs, for short--are not. The same barriers that impede the progress of motivated and talented Black, indigenous, and people of color in other fields apply to the world of gaming. But because of the incredible popularity of games, their voices and ideas are needed more than ever.

[The Game Devs of Color Expo](#) has happened every year since 2017, and their event attendance has tripled in that time. They expo organizers are seeking sponsorships and donations to pay for tickets for devs of color who need assistance, to be able to compensate speakers and workshop presenters, to provide quality, live online streaming, and to offer assistive technologies and adaptations for people with different abilities.

Invitation: If you are new to the world of gaming, check out Option A in our At Play section here in your Soulful Home Play packet. You will need to 1) download a gaming platform called Steam onto your desktop or laptop, 2) install Steam, and 3) download the free game, [The Cat and the Coup](#). Play this game, which was co-developed by devs Kurosh ValaNejad and Peter Brinson, together as a family.

Next, [Click here](#), to the GDCEXpo2021 sponsorship page, and figure out how much you, or you and your church or other covenanted community, can contribute to making this awesome event happen!



At Play

Playing Games with...Play!

At Play activities and questions are a way to experience the theme joyfully, playfully, and imaginatively.

Option A: A Serious Game--The Cat and the Coup

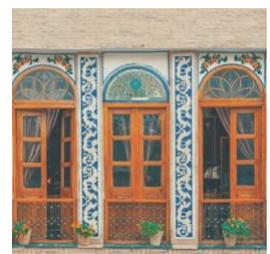
Because games can be so compelling, and can enhance our learning so much, they are a great way to get a body of information or a collection of messages across. The developers of this game wanted people to better understand how the West's relationship with Iran became so complicated.

This game is serious, but it is also deeply moving and compelling. The Cat and the Coup is a free, story-based computer game in which the player--you--are the cat belonging to Dr. Mohammed Mossadegh, the first democratically elected prime minister of Iran, who was also assassinated in a coup supported by the United States' CIA. As the cat, you attempt to guide Dr. Mossadegh backwards through significant events in his life, learning as you go about the United States' and the West's troubling and complex relationship with the Middle East, and Iran, specifically.

This game is visually stunning, employing Persian art forms, rich hues and contrasts, and dream-like images. And through it, you will learn a story as a family that is sad, and hard, but very, very significant.

<http://www.thecatandthecoup.com/>

Note that of the options for playing the game, the game platform [Steam](#) is free to download and install (green button at upper right of that link), and the game can be run there with no cost.



Option B: Clapping Games

[This link](#) goes to a collection of videos demonstrating clapping games, which are super fun, and can be played in chairs, and even on Zoom with a little tweaking. Note that clapping patterns and the rhymes that accompany them are fluid, and often reach across generations and cultures. Doing a little investigating to learn the origin stories of a favorite clapping game or chant can be part of the fun, and help you decide which parts you want to keep as a family, and which you're more comfortable leaving to history.

From the list above, here are two favorites well suited for family fun:

[Concentration 64](#) is a naming-challenge and clapping game which can easily be customized to your family's pastimes, favorite movies, and other categories where shared knowledge evens the playing field and makes this friendly for all ages.

[Say, Say My Playmate](#) is an early 20th century [tune](#) to which [a clapping game](#) has been fitted. Many elder friends and relatives will know the song, and teaching them the clapping game could be great, intergenerational fun. (The clapping game pattern is sometimes taught as a separate game, without a tune, called "Slide.")



On the Message Board

A Monthly Reminder

The On the Message Board section lifts up a theme-related mantra, graphic, quote, or gesture for your family to carry with them throughout the month. Think of these “family sayings” or “family signs” as tools for the journey, reminders that help us refocus and steady ourselves and our kids as we navigate through life’s challenges and opportunities.

June’s Message: “Let’s try a play break.”

This month’s message is all about giving ourselves a break. As a people of the world, we will be carrying the stress of the previous pandemic year for a long time. One of the best ways to process the extra energy (angst, tension, fret) of chronic stress is through play.

You would not want to hear this month’s mantra when you are sharing something deeply troubling or sensitive. But oftentimes, when we are in “gripe mode,” or just seem to be at odds with our circumstances or those around us in small ways that are hard to name, a play break can be really, helpful, not to mention fun!

Here are a few examples:

- On a chore day, in the middle of folding laundry, make a game out of matching socks, or after mopping a floor, everybody put rags beneath their feet and race around drying the floor
- Waiting for something, such as the DMV, or to pick up someone from the airport, have a deck of Uno cards handy for a quick game
- In a grumpy, gripey disagreement over a family choice (such as where to go out to eat or who does what chore or what movie to watch), suggest you solve the debate using a coin toss; rock, paper, scissors; or picking a number 1-10
- To let other family members sleep when an energetic young person is awake early, suggest a quiet game of shadow puppets or charades
- And when you are on a long trip and everyone is starting to get cranky at the end, play one of those classic car games, like I Spy or Find the 50 States of License Plates

As the parent, you might use this month’s mantra more as a reminder to yourself to set up the conditions for play when (or before) moods turn sour. Play is an effective way to interrupt unwanted patterns of thought or behavior and creates a new pattern of meeting challenges with levity and creativity.



At the Bedside

At The Bedside activities engage the theme through storytelling. This takes place during the dreamy, almost otherworldly hour or so before children or youth drift off to sleep. Through stories and the questions and realizations that they prompt, we come to understand the nature of and our own place in the cosmos. But also, these selections invite you to remember, shape, and share stories from your own past, using thoughtful narratives to help your child weave the tale of who they are and whose they are.

The Playful Noise that Brought Back the Sun: Amaterasu & the Cave

Have you ever done something playful or silly in the middle of a tense or challenging time, only to discover that your playfulness lifted the mood and opened space for laughter? Play can be a wonderful tool for that kind of intervention!

This story comes from the Shinto religion in Japan, and different versions of it were recorded in the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon Shoki*, two of the oldest books of classical Japanese history, from the 8th century. It's a story about a goddess, Amaterasu, whose feelings get hurt by her brother, so much that she runs away to a cave and refuses to come out again. I won't spoil the ending, but the climax features Amaterasu's playful friend, Uzume, doing a very silly and very memorable dance!

My favorite version of this story is told in the book *Circle Round: Raising Children in Goddess Traditions*, by Starhawk, Diane Baker, and Annie Hill. The book is [available used](#) for less than \$10, and is well worth the money for other excellent stories, songs, and craft ideas.

In addition, I have [an audio recording](#) of the story for our Soulful Home families on my YouTube channel.

For Discussion:

- Susanowo played in a way that was scary and hurtful when he trashed his sister's home. What are things you can do when someone else is playing in a way that's upsetting to you?
- Uzume helped Amaterasu break out of her sadness by being playful. Has being playful ever cheered you up, or cheered up some of your friends or family members?
- Amaterasu peeked out of the cave because she felt left out of the fun she heard beyond the cave door. What are good strategies for joining in others' play?



On the Porch

Raising a Child of play Together

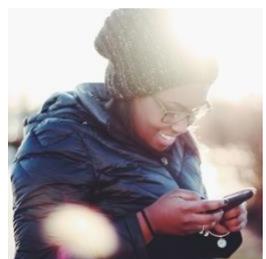
On the Porch supports sharing realizations, challenges and hopes around the theme with other supportive adults. Perhaps this happens on a literal porch or front stoop, but it could happen wherever parents and their circle of support gather and talk (online or in person) over the soulful parts of parenthood. The “A Sip of Something New” section invites you and your discussion partner to take in a new idea shared by someone else. The “Spiritual Snacks” section stimulates personal storytelling and the sharing of your own wisdom and experience.

A Sip of Something New

Games can help us learn new things about one another. So for June’s Sip of Something New, we’re going to get to know our trusted friend or partner a little better through an app called, [How Well Do You Know Me?](#) The app is pass-and-play, meaning one person would download the app, and then that one device would be passed back and forth between two people. The family and friend’s version is free to play, and the partner version--which should more accurately be called the sexual partner version, since most of the questions are geared toward a shared sexual relationship--costs \$3.

One nice thing about this app is that your partner sees immediately when they get an answer wrong, so it makes for a good, “Wait, really? *That’s* what you answered?” moment of fun!

If you can’t or don’t want to download the app, Google “get to know your questions” to generate a good list and pick a handful of questions that you think would spark some great conversation. Remember, the goal here is being playful with one another, so keep it fun and easy!



Spiritual Snacks to Share

Bring these questions with you when the time comes to hang out with your co-parent or buddies. Don't treat the questions as a list to go through one by one. Instead pick the one or two that speak to you the most. Treat the questions less as a quiz and more like doorways inviting you into the world of play telling and memory.

Questions

1. What aspects of your work feel like play to you?
2. What was the moment, as a young person, that you remember not wanting to play with the younger kids? How did that moment feel to you?
3. When you were growing up, who was the "fun" or "playful" adult in your life? What made them seem so to you then, and how do you think of those qualities now?
4. On a scale of 1 to 10, rate your family members and close friends on how playful they are. How do you feel about the score you gave yourself?
5. How do you know when it's time to switch gears and play?
6. What's your favorite way to play with your child? What's your least favorite? (Honest talk here--we ALL have a least favorite.)
7. What holds you back from being as playful as your spirit calls you to be?
8. How are you playful in ways people don't recognize or give you credit for? What is your unique - and sometimes unrecognized - form of play?
9. How has play brought you back to yourself?
10. Some refer to "[deep play](#)" as anything that removes us from worry about the future and regret about the past and instead brings us into the more free space of "the now." with this wider definition of play in mind, what activities do you pursue to free you from anxiety about the past or future and allow you to live in the "liberating present"?



The Extra Mile

The Extra Mile section is for families who want to continue exploring the theme of the month through larger adventures, more complex projects or simply through additional modalities not otherwise included in the packets. The Extra Mile suggestions often surpass what is considered an “everyday moment” in a family, and may involve more preparation, planning, or time to accomplish. A bit more effort, but well worth it!

Risky Play

Ten or fifteen years ago, the parenting literature was full of extolations on the value of “risk play,” defined as experiential and experimental play where the outcome is uncertain. Think tree climbing, woodworking with real tools, wandering without parents, etc. The science suggested that children who regularly engaged in risky play showed better problem-solving skills, abilities to set and hold their own boundaries, and even had fewer play-related injuries, presumably related to that ability to calculate their own limits through trial and error.

This month, challenge yourself to engage in some risky play with your child, or set up situations where they can try risky play:

Climb something high. This could be a tall piece of playground equipment, a tree, a rope, etc. (Note: folks who use wheelchairs might enjoy para-climbing, an option some climbing gyms offer.)

Wander somewhere. This might be a trail, where a young child would be free to be a little ahead of a parent, out of sight (but depending on age, maybe not out of earshot); going to the corner store and back alone; or going through the store, picking out, and paying for goods by themselves.

Enjoy being in a body out in the elements. Go outside on a windy day, or a wet day. Let your child play with fire in a way that evokes risk but is contained. (For example, you might let them light matches and throw them into a lit and contained fire pit.) Play near the water.

Build something big, like a cardboard box city, a fort of fallen limbs and underbrush, or a treehouse.

Try rough-and-tumble play. Some kids love and immediately take to play fighting, wrestling, and tumbling together. But you know your child best; be sensitive if you suspect your child might react negatively to an invitation to play rough. Check out the work of [O. Fred Donaldson](#) for ideas on how to do this safely and fun.

Don’t work too hard at the debriefing but check in with your child after an experience. Did they feel exhilarated? Scared? A little of both? Affirm that risky play often takes us to our limits, which invites powerful and mixed feelings.



Blessing of Play

May the month ahead brim with merriment, with joy, with revelry and experiment and glorious, irrelevant efforts for no particular purpose but play. May we be each other's conspirators in gigglement and glee, in dashing, in daring, in delight. May we remember that children and crows and otters and kittens are wise in ways that we would do well to emulate, that is, in their instinctive impulse toward game and contest and exploration. This month may your body play. May your mind play. May your spirit play. And with the Divine, the Source of all ebullience everywhere, may you dance playfully to the music of your own light heart.



Connect with more Inspiration for your family, and for you!

Parents can Join our Facebook and Instagram pages for
daily inspiration on our themes:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/soulmatterssharingcircle/?ref=settings>

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/soul_matters_circle/

Parents and youth will want to check out our music playlists on the monthly themes.

One playlist is one [Spotify](#) and another on our [YouTube](#) channel

Credits

Soulful Home packets are prepared by
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