



PLAY ADVENTURES

A BRIEF PLAYWORK PRIMER FOR PARENTS & PLAY ADVOCATES of PLAY ADVENTURES!

Hello parents, guardians and players! If you are reading this, thank you so much for being a part of an amazing opportunity for free play! Self-directed play is a multi-faceted activity that does so much for our children, and that is also sorely missing in our commonly hurried and over-scheduled culture, as well as our new quarantined lives. What follows are some ways that you can respond to your children while using the IDEA box.

WHAT IS HAPPENING? Play Adventures (and contributing partners) have sent you a box with materials to help in the creation of whatever your child wants. The materials (commonly known as loose parts) are generally things that are open-ended and leave their purpose up to the person playing with them. Given space and freedom, the children involved will often come up with some truly amazing ideas! And we get to have front row seats to what is happening.

WHAT SHOULD I DO? As a parent, your job is very important, but sometimes hard to explain in simple terms, hence this primer. If you have any more questions on top of what you read here, please don't hesitate to contact us by email at: playadventures2@gmail.com, or by phone at: 217-607-4902. Here are some common things that you'll need to know:

Your lovely job with the IDEA BOX is to be a supporter, not a leader. If there is a child that needs tape, wants to cut a hole, etc., we should step forward and help. If we see that they are going to need something soon (like more string, or another roll of tape) we can anticipate it and use our ninja skills to sneak it into the crafting location. This helps the kids not to break out of their focus. We do not want to suggest what the children should do or play some sort of pied piper role. The play for them should be their own initiative and direction, with us stepping back for their ideas to come forward. Try hard not to offer insight, directions or suggestions. A bit later we give more specific examples of how to achieve this.

Allow the children to figure out their own problems as much as possible. If a child is struggling with how to make something work, let them keep working it out, and only step in if asked. Solving an issue for the child can take away some valuable lessons, which they can truly learn while independently struggling through it. Also, if there is a disagreement between two siblings, try as much as you can to let them discuss and argue into an arrangement without your help. (If physical aggression is imminent, that is the time to step up and let them know that this is not ok). If they come to you to complain about one another or for you to solve the problem, try to use questions like, "what would you like me to do about it?" or even just reflect the situation back to them such as, "It looks like you both want to use the same roll of tape." This simple statement of facts can usually facilitate discussion between the children. The space may often run in stages of: 1. hoarding materials, 2. trading materials, and finally 3. cooperative building. We just need to give space for this to happen.

Play stupid. When you are asked questions, it's better in this context to not always know the answer. Here are a few examples:

Q: "What am I supposed to do?" **A:** "I don't know, what would you like to do?"

Q: "Can you cut me a door?" **A:** "Sure, can you draw it for me so I know what kind you like?"

Q: "What is this thing?" **A:** "Hmmm, what does it look like to you?"

Q: "I want to build a boat; can you help me?" **A:** "I'd love to, but what should we use to make it?"

In effect, you are giving as much of the solution or design of the play up to the child. This forces them to move from vision to planning to execution of their idea. And it's always fun!

Don't be afraid to redirect. Sometimes kids want to destroy things as much as they want to build. That is when it is best to have a space where boxes and things could be knocked over or ripped up (which can be just as valuable as building), and let them take some materials to a spot where this can happen away from those whose projects won't be a casualty to the more rambunctious ones. This removes them from destroying others' creations but allows them to continue their play. If they are adamant about destroying someone else's creation you can challenge some of these players to a game if it helps (eg. you stack 4 or 5 boxes up and have them knock it down).

Risky behavior should be monitored, but not stopped. Let them use scissors or hot glue. Supervise but don't intervene unless there is imminent danger to themselves (or your countertops).

Try not to trivialize the play. As adults, many of us in our day-to-day lives may have forgotten how deep, involving, and necessary play can be in life. But it can quickly be recalled if you close your eyes and think about your favorite memories of being a child and the play that you participated in (and that it was likely outside and with no adults present). Play is a way for the vibrant, joyous, and slightly frantic inner life of a child to be brought out into the world, and it is so important for us to not judge what is happening in their play. The best way we've heard it described is to keep our reactions to what is going on to their level of excitement, or to "mirror" their reactions. This allows the child to lead the way, and they don't become discouraged or confused by any of our reactions.

LASTLY, THANK YOU! We appreciate your willingness to support your child in their self-directed play. We appreciate your help following up with feedback on the IDEA BOX, and supporting Play Adventures by simply talking about us to your friends and tagging (#playadventuresmerced), sharing, or mentioning (@playadventuresmerced) on social media! If you know someone who will be happy to receive the IDEA BOX, please have them contact me directly at: playadventures2@gmail.com

If you have any questions, please feel free to email us. We hope we left you with a bit more comfortability in advocating for and helping facilitate play, as we are not always able to be with your children (especially now,.. boo hoo!).