

# Unlocking the Power of Play



Stephanie Seidler, Director of We Skoolhouse

# What We're Exploring . . .



**Play: The Brain's Most Preferred Way to Learn**



**How Play Shapes Who We Are and Who We Become**



**Mildred Parten's: Six Stages of Play**



# Play: The Brain's Most Preferred Way to Learn



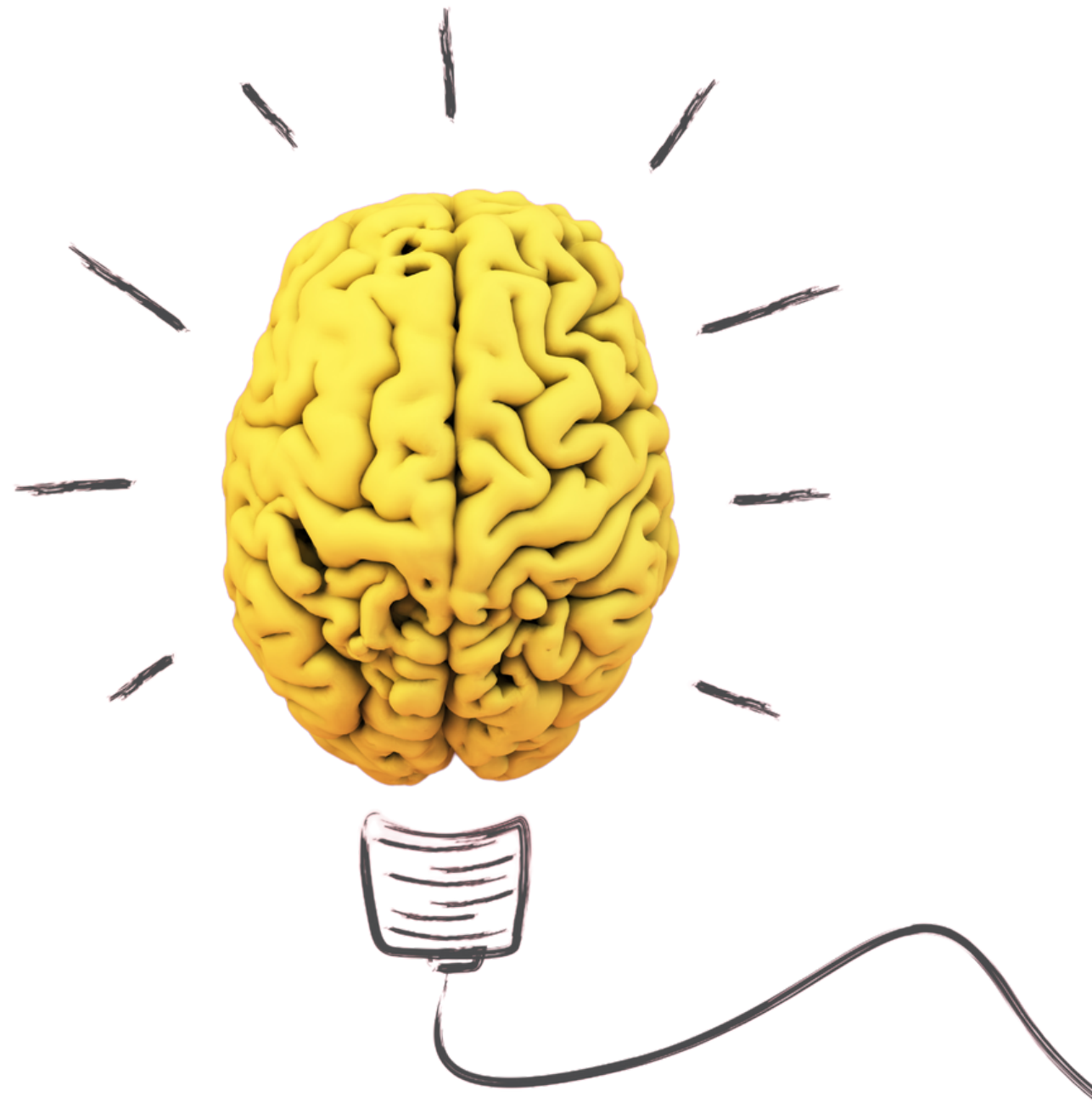
**Children are intrinsically hardwired to play, as it is the brain's optimal method for holistic learning. This is ingrained in human nature and reflects how children naturally explore, discover, and make sense of themselves and of the world around them.**

The brain is comprised of billions of neurons, in which the experiences and interactions during this critical period determine how these neurons wire and connect. The key factor in harnessing this neural plasticity.

### **Neuroplasticity**

**The brain is highly plastic during childhood,** meaning it can form new neural connections and adapt and rewire itself in response to experiences.

Play provides diverse and stimulating experiences, **shaping the brain's structure & function.**



### **Sensory Integration**

**Play engages multiple senses,** allowing children to touch, see, hear, taste, and smell the world around them.

This sensory exploration is crucial for brain development, as it **builds connections and associations.**

Why is this considered  
“real learning?”

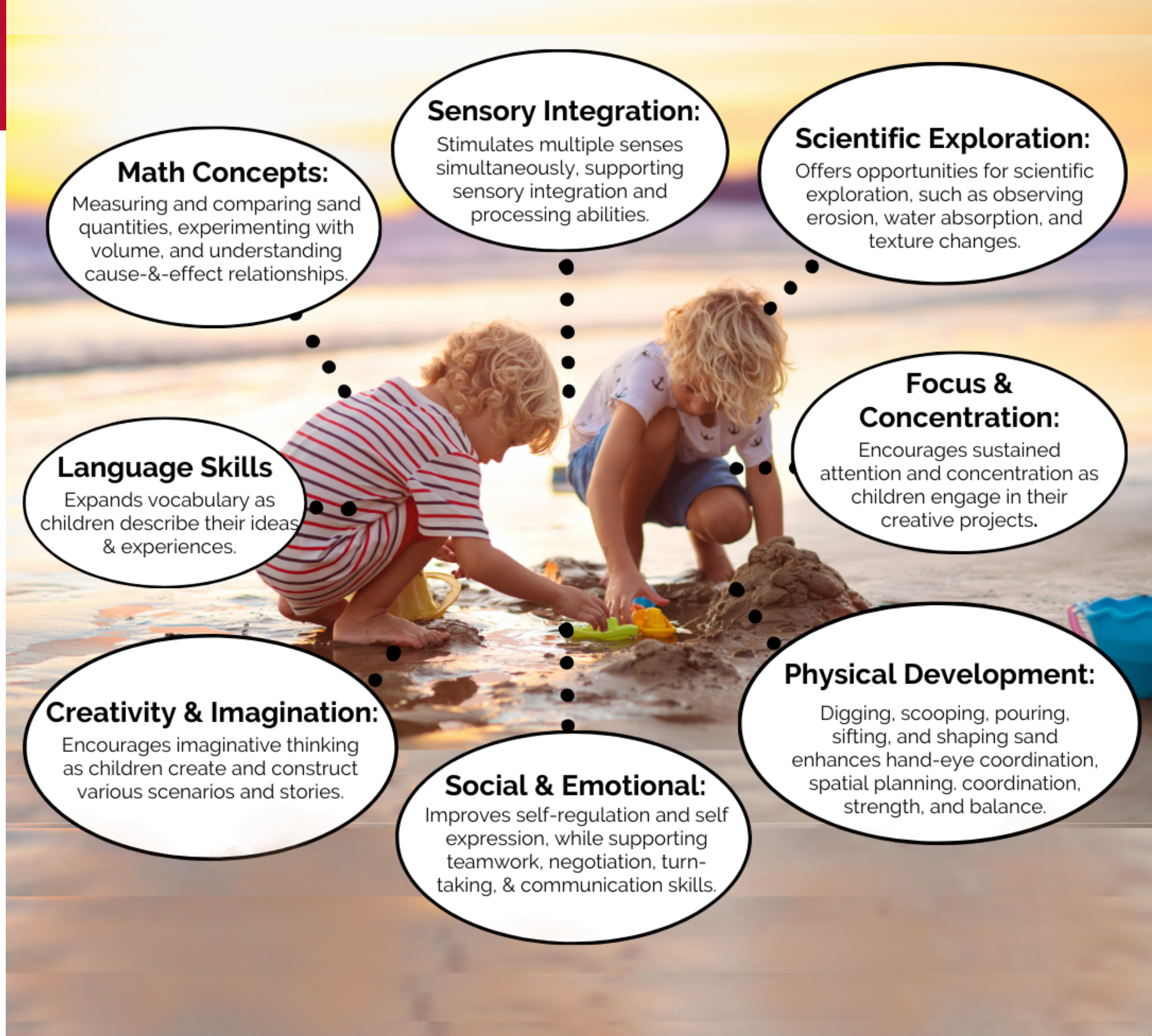


Why is this considered a  
“break from learning?”



# What's in their PLAY?

- Intrinsic motivation and Initiation
- Independence and Decision-making
- Autonomy and Confidence
- Self-regulation and Self-expression
- Improved Focus and Concentration
- Teamwork, Collaboration, and Empathy
- Cooperation, Negotiation, & Turn-taking
- Communication & Language Development
- Sensory Processing and Tactile Concepts
- Problem-solving and Critical Thinking
- Creative and Innovative Thinking
- Imagination and Dramatic Play (Perspective taking, and Storytelling).
- Order and Sequencing
- Math Concepts (counting, sorting, measurement, classification, and volume).
- Muscle Strength and Endurance
- Science Concepts (Observations, Predictions, Physics of Flow, Density, Mass, and Matter)
- Spatial Planning and Depth Perception
- Balance and Coordination
- Improved Sleep-wake Cycle (+ Vitamin D)



## Math Concepts:

Measuring and comparing sand quantities, experimenting with volume, and understanding cause-&-effect relationships.

## Sensory Integration:

Stimulates multiple senses simultaneously, supporting sensory integration and processing abilities.

## Scientific Exploration:

Offers opportunities for scientific exploration, such as observing erosion, water absorption, and texture changes.

## Language Skills

Expands vocabulary as children describe their ideas & experiences.

## Focus & Concentration:

Encourages sustained attention and concentration as children engage in their creative projects.

## Creativity & Imagination:

Encourages imaginative thinking as children create and construct various scenarios and stories.

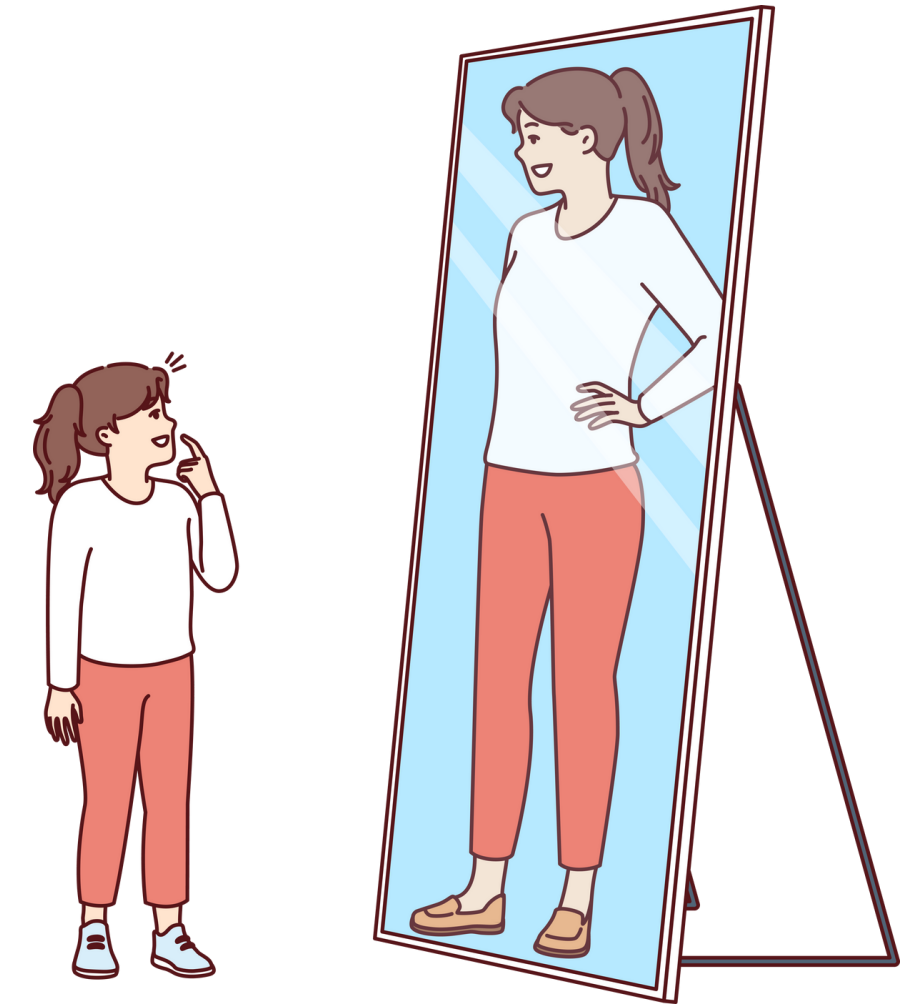
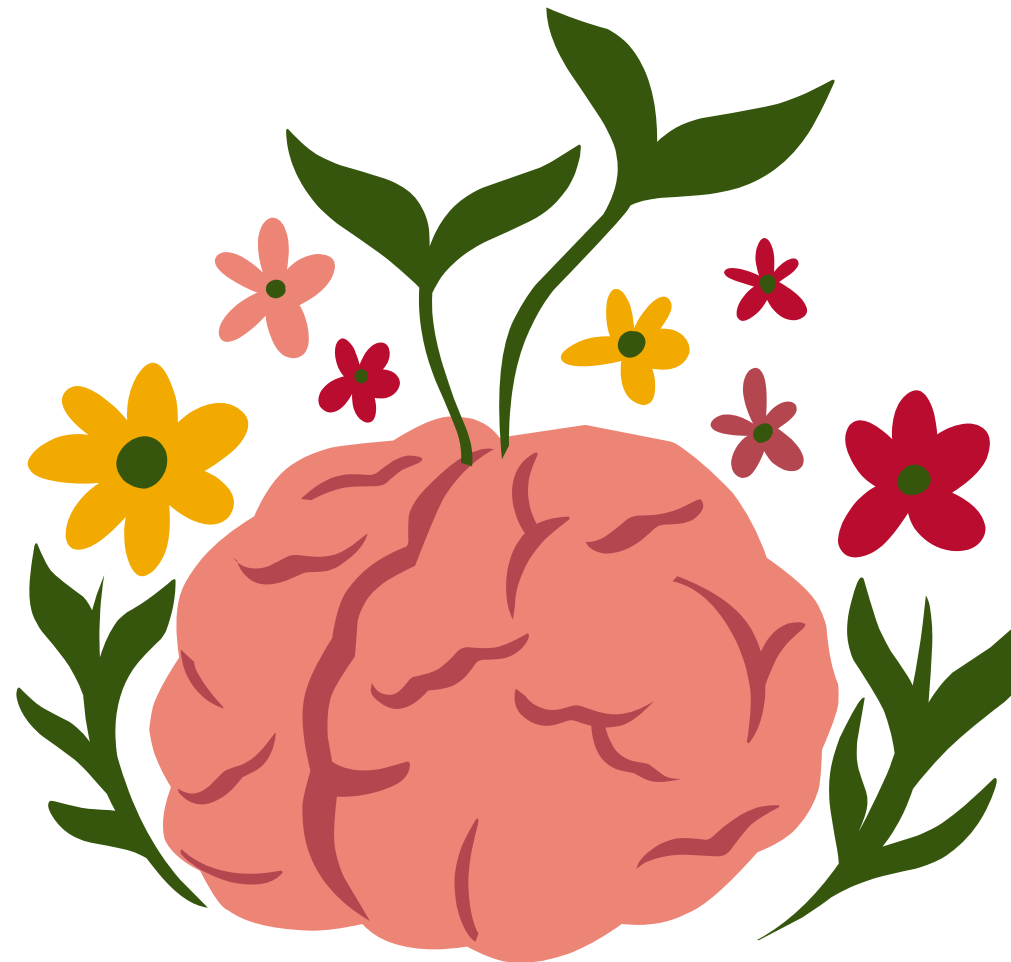
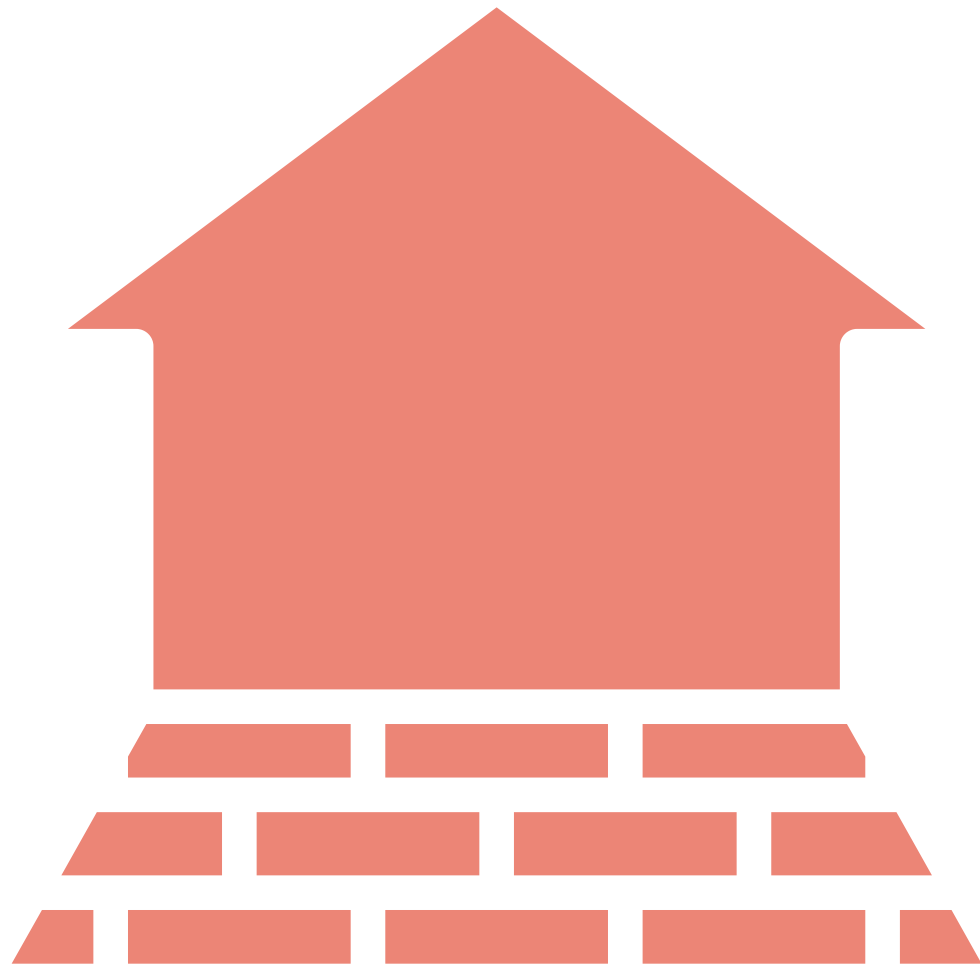
## Social & Emotional:

Improves self-regulation and self expression, while supporting teamwork, negotiation, turn-taking, & communication skills.

## Physical Development:

Digging, scooping, pouring, sifting, and shaping sand enhances hand-eye coordination, spatial planning, coordination, strength, and balance.

# How Play Shapes Who We Are and Who We Become



**Foundation of Learning:** Rapid brain development in the first five years (90% of the human brain) **lays the foundation for various skills**, which forms the basis for **how we process information and interact with others throughout our entire life.**

**After age 5, the brain focuses more on refining and consolidating existing skills and knowledge**, as opposed to the rapid formation of new connections.

# Enter Risky Play (Dun Dun Dunnn!!!)

Risky play involves **challenges of heights, speed, tools, rough and tumble play, and testing limits**, with the possibility of physical injury.

**Through risky play, children improve:** physical development, strength, balance, stamina, risk management, spatial awareness, independence, confidence, resilience, decision-making skills, flexible thinking, problem-solving skills, critical & creative thinking, self-regulation skills, and more!





# 6 Stages of Play (Mildred Parten)

Your child's stage of play is based on several factors, including age, personality, experiences and approach to learning. A stage of play is not "better" or "worse" than the other, just different.



## Unoccupied Play (0-3 Months):

No objective in play & no social engagement



## Solitary Play (3 months - 2 Years Old):

Plays alone while focusing on their own task - not interested in others



## Onlooker Play (2 - 3 Years Old):

Begins showing interest in what others are playing with/doing



## Parallel Play (2.5 - 4 Years Old):

Plays next to others with same materials, may begin copying them



## Associative Play (3 - 4.5 Years Old):

Interacts and plays with others, but play is not organized/coordinated



## Cooperative Play (4.5 + Years Old):

Children work in organized groups, establishing rules & goals

# Additional Tips & Takeaways

- Remember, play is unstructured, child-initiated, and directed. **PLAY IS LEARNING!**
  - Therefore, avoid directing, redirecting, questioning, and “quizzing” children during play.
- Designate several blocks of time daily for play - **get outside more!**
- **Toys - less is more!** Opt for fewer, simpler, open-ended toys:
  - Blocks, paint, legos, magna-tiles, natural materials, fabrics, etc. Avoid electronics!
- Remember **young children have short attention spans** - remove expectations of how long they should work at things, **while also embracing boredom.**
- **No risk, no reward!** Get comfortable with being uncomfortable with your child's risky play.
  - Instead of saying "be careful," you may ask “what's your plan?”
  - Be safe as necessary, not safe as possible.
- Step back & **give children more space to work through their struggles**, including those with their peers.
  - **Don't force children to play with others and don't force sharing (opt for taking turns).**



# Questions?

## Let's Hear Them!



[weskoolhouse.com](http://weskoolhouse.com)



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