

## **The Value of Play: Moving with the Flow of It**

In Canada, as well as many other countries, people often take pride in working long hours and accumulating many unused vacation days. Although there is nothing wrong with working hard, these choices can often come at the expense of other significant areas of life. Taking time for play is often viewed as frivolous, and something that is only suitable or possible for children. However, many essential life skills are honed during play, such as one's creativity and problem-solving abilities. As Fred Rogers said in reference to his famous children's television show, play is often talked about as if it were a relief from serious learning. But, play for children is serious learning. Rogers believed that play is the work of childhood, but I believe it is an important aspect of adulthood too.

As adults, we can forget about the necessity of play. We may work hard, and use our leisure time to work even harder at competitive sports, do-it-yourself projects, or additional work-related pursuits. Even if the activity is enjoyable, we may turn it into a job by pressuring ourselves to make rapid progress and solely focus on the finished result. If we fill our lives up with "important work", then there is no space for the spontaneous nature of play to surface.

Play is commonly defined as engaging in activity for delight and recreation rather than a serious or practical purpose. This type of connection with the world around us can take many forms, but at the heart of it is fun. Play is about experiencing a positive feeling or desire in the moment and allowing ourselves to move with the flow of it, whether it is with ideas, objects, images or words. It is about letting go, and doing what comes naturally without fear, shame or judgment simply because it feels good or right or enjoyable.

Carl Jung, the world-renowned Swiss psychiatrist, said that the creation of something new is not accomplished by the intellect, but by the play instinct acting from inner necessity. The creative mind plays with the objects it loves. I think play can be one of the ultimate forms of self-expression because it can enlighten others about what you truly love, think, believe, or find amusing. It is a vehicle through which the true self can be unabashedly revealed and made known to others.

The summer is a wonderful time to focus on the value of play. There are a whole array of pleasurable activities in which to participate, such as swimming, camping, hiking, and attending outdoor social events or festivals. It is also a time when people are more open to entering a "vacation state of mind". Taking a step away from our everyday lives, and giving ourselves an experience just for the fun of it, can bring a sparkle to all of life. The experience could change you in a myriad of ways, including relaxing your mind and body, learning something new about yourself or the world, and opening up your imagination to new connections. Setting aside some time for play this summer could be the most responsible decision you make for your own self-care. Go for it, and have fun!