



Play Policy & Practice
CONNECTIONS

*Interest forum for early childhood practitioners
and researchers with a focus on children's play*

Volume 1 • Issue 1 • Spring 2021

Play During the Pandemic

A peer-reviewed journal associated with the
PPP Interest forum of NAEYC

Play Policy & Practice Connections

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Play During the Pandemic

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About Play, Policy & Practice Interest Forum

PPPC Interest forum of NAEYC

In 1985 a group of play scholars led by Patricia Monaghan Nourot and including Judith Van Horn, Ed Klugman, Dorothy Sluss, Lynn Cohen, and Sandi Stupiansky became recognized as the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) Play Policy and Practice Caucus and were given opportunities to present on behalf of the Caucus at NAEYC Conferences. After several years NAEYC restructured the Caucuses to become Interest Forums. The Play, Policy, Practice Interest Forum is a group of concerned teachers, teacher educators, researchers, business leaders and policy makers that examine play from multiple perspectives. Members articulate and debate new ideas related to play research, policy and practice issues focused primarily on children's play.

Our mission statement describes the group's purpose:

- *To connect persons who share an interest in play*
- *To update and disseminate current knowledge about the multifaceted nature and developmental value of play, and*
- *To become a collective voice within the early childhood community, advocating for the value and importance of children's play.*

While we are engaged with NAEYC members throughout the year in NAEYC's Hello platform and through our publications. We are most visible at NAEYC's Annual Conference where members support presenters who offer sessions related to play. PPIF holds a Research Roundtable where participants can present and discuss their current play research or discuss an idea they want to research. Also at this conference we host our annual business meeting and awards ceremony.

About & Scope of PPPC

Play Practice & Policy Connections is an interdisciplinary, thematic, peer-reviewed, biannual journal that provides an international forum for early childhood practitioners and researchers with a focus of play. This journal is of particular relevance to play advocates, play researchers, and practitioners that emphasize play.

Play Practice & Policy Connections publishes innovative ideas, methodologies, events, and strategies that center play based innovations, reviews and scholarly comments on children's play, and original empirical scholarly articles related to play across cultures, generations, and disciplines.

The journal aims to:

- Contribute to the experiential and empirical knowledge related to children's play.
- Highlight the inter-relationships between play, policy and practice.
- Stimulate thinking in key areas of play-based advocacy, research, practice.

News

During the past six years, during my tenure as managing editor & webmaster, we have shared some amazing, themed issues with exceptional article contributions from play enthusiasts.

Each year as the contributions to the field of play evolved in rigor and practical implications, it became clear that the PPP Connections should illuminate this periodical's value beyond a newsletter, rather as an e-journal beginning with the 2021 Issue. The e-journal format provides added credibility for emerging and established play scholars at their respective institutions and in tenure and promotion decisions.

The NAEYC PPP Interest Forum co-facilitators will serve as the seminal Editorial Board charged with policy development, adding board members, work scope, and planning for the e-journal aspirations to become peer reviewed.

We welcome the 2021-22 Co-Editors: Smita Mathur, Past President, The Association for the Study of Play & Associate Professor Elementary & Reading College of Education James Madison University and Sonia Tiwari, Research Specialist at Penn State University.

We also welcome as Webmaster Heather Ha, M.S., Early Childhood Services Program Manager, St. John Neumann School for Children and Families Lancaster, PA.

Lynn-Hartle, Ph.D.,
Pennsylvania State University,
Brandywine

PPPIF Awards & Recognitions

Play Legacy Institute

PPIF offers the Play Legacy Institute honoring senior scholars for their lifetime of scholarship, research, and continued contributions to the field of early childhood related to play.

Walter Drew was inducted as the first member nominated by Edgar Klugman.

Do you have someone in mind for either the awards or our Play Legacy Institute?

Contact Robin Ploof: rploof@champlain.edu

The Patricia Monighan Nourot Award

In 1985 Patricia Monighan Nourot was one of the founding members of the Play Policy and Practice Caucus. She was one of a group of play scholars who conceived the idea and she invented the title for what would in time become the Play Policy and Practice Interest Forum. In her honor The Patricia Monighan Nourot Award is bestowed upon a person who has made creative contributions in their area of expertise.

These areas include: Theory and/or research, practice, and policy.

Recent past honorees include:

Lisa Murphy
Kelly Donnelly
Michael Patte
Marica Nell
Olga Jarrett

The Edgar Klugman Award

“Ed” Klugman is a professor emeritus of Wheelock College in Early Childhood Education and Care. He was also one of the founding members of the Play Policy and Practice Interest Forums. At 94 years of age his bright spark of humor and quick wit is still evident as he continues to be a mentor, a visionary, and an inspiration to the field. In his honor the Edgar Klugman Award is bestowed upon a person in recognition of their leadership and research in the field of early childhood and play and human development.

Recent past honorees include:

Myae Han
Baji Rankin
Bobby Brown
Debra Lawrence
Lynn Hartle
Dorothy Sluss
Jim Johnson

The Emerging Scholar Award

This award is given to an outstanding graduate student in recognition of their scholarship, professional service, and leadership who is dedicated to promoting play in the lives of children, teachers, and parents.

Recent past honorees include:

Tugce Burcu Arda Tuncdemir
Pool Ip Dong
Lindsey Robey
Mary Mahoney-Ferster

Editorial Note

Smita Mathur & Sonia Tiwari

Approximately 1.4 billion children worldwide are experiencing the lockdowns caused by COVID-19 (UNICEF, 2020). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children's play is currently undocumented, unknown, and therefore the impact of the pandemic remains unaddressed. Children's access, quality and frequency of naturalistic play and play environments has been significantly altered due to the pandemic.

While the context of play has turned and twisted into complex knots, the value of play remains intractably present! The nature of play remains universal, innate, player-centered, and player driven. Indoor play in classrooms probably transformed. into play among siblings in family rooms, outdoor free play probably showed up as play on decks, yards, and patches of open space in and around homes. Playing with friends probably looked more like solitary play; but the core creativity remained all the same.

During the prolonged periods of the pandemic lockdowns, the task of educating and keeping children engaged fell on parents and other caregivers. Teachers, schools, and other community-based services for young children were placed on the periphery. Therefore, their impact on children's development and well-being was diminished. It is also clear that as a society we have experienced the pandemic in waves. Early lockdown periods were marked by a strong sense of social responsibility where folks pulled together to flatten the curve in large cities in America, while rural America watched with anxiety. As the coronavirus made its way to the smaller towns and rural communities, public responses reflected grief, anxiety, disbelief, denial, outright rebellion, and psychological exhaustion. How did children's play evolve as the adults in the children's life organized around the pandemic-driven new normal?

A glaring question now lingers: as the pandemic altered our lived realities, has it also altered the impact of play on children's learning, physical growth, social-emotional, and cognitive development?

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children's play is unknown and therefore currently unaddressed. Clearly the impact of COVID-19 is experienced differently by children based on the family income, geographical location, the mental-health of parents, and the children themselves. How do these mediating factors influence children's play and the benefits of play?

How did the pandemic alter the play behaviors of young children? What toys and materials did children use? What was the impact of pandemic-based isolation on the social relationships' children forged during play? What were the themes that emerged during dramatic, pretend, and solitary play? Did play mitigate the negative impact on children's mental health? In what specific locations/settings did play unfold during the lockdown? What are the participation structures of play? What role did older siblings, grandparents who sheltered together, and caregivers take on while engaging children in play? Did children's play look different before and after the lockdown? Did the pandemic revive interest in traditional games? There are myriad unanswered questions. The following months and years will likely keep us busy with inquiry projects.

Play Policy & Practice Connections, a popular newsletter published by the PPP Interest forum of NAEYC morphed into an online peer-reviewed journal in the backdrop of a rare pandemic. As we conceptualized the first issue of the journal, we were hard pressed to find research-based information. This issue is focused on gathering anecdotal evidence from children, teachers, and other practitioners. Future issues will bring empirical and evidence-based research articles that are blind, peer-reviewed.

Themes for future issues of PPC will based on the following themes.

Play Memories Fall 2021 Volume 1 Issue 2
Play & Identity Spring 2022 Volume 2 Issue 1
Designing Play Environments Fall 2022 Volume 2

Bathroom Swings, Raptors, and Skullasaurus: A Journey from Sibling Rivalry to Sibling play During the Pandemic

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Negotiating the different play needs for a seven, and 2.5-year-old meant that pandemic sibling play was a rollercoaster of challenges, growth, opportunities, and bonding. I am grateful for the opportunity to reflect on these past seven months as an academic mom who juggled academia demands with staying home with two young children during a global pandemic.

Bringing the Outside World Inside (the Bathroom)

"Mama, I can see the inside of the toilet when I swing!" This exciting proclamation from my 7-year-old son, Vincent, has kept me chuckling during the pandemic. If you had told me in February that I would change our main floor bathroom into a play structure in March, I would have laughed at the thought. Who would willingly make their main floor bathroom unusable in favor of an indoor playground? Yet, here we are, even with the playgrounds reopened. As I write this, a swing dangles from the top of the doorframe, but other days, a rope ladder or gymnast rings hang down, waiting for David or Vincent to climb.

The children swing from inside the bathroom over the bottom of the steps with joyful glee at the butterflies in their stomach and the silliness of swinging over a commode. I consider this purchase one of the best of the quarantine and silently thank a mom from my local Facebook group for the idea when playgrounds were closed, stress was high, and our kids needed big body play. With such different play needs for a seven and 2-year-old, the pandemic play was a rollercoaster of challenges, growth, opportunities, and sibling bonding. I am grateful for the opportunity to reflect on these past seven months as an academic mom who juggled academia demands with staying home with two young children during a global pandemic.

Part I: March-July Jurassic Park Taming of the Raptors and Nature Escapes

I divide the pandemic play in our house into two periods. In the first part, I felt like a stressed-out referee of two children who had very different play needs and could not figure out how to play together inside in ways that worked for both of them. I often felt like the Jurassic Park scene meme, where Chris Pratt is trying to tame the raptors. When I look back at that time, sibling play in our house was not fun; it was full of tears, biting, throwing, jumping, and screaming. (If I am honest, some of the screaming and tears were mine.) In order to avoid stress, we started hiking several days a week and spending a lot of time playing in creeks. The beautiful creeks were usually empty, and the children could throw rocks, gather sticks, jump and splash, climb, balance, and explore. It was heaven for the three of us. While it was difficult to experience the stress of in-house conflict, I am grateful that it pushed me to find spaces we could play outdoors, so the children could have their play needs to be met. Being in the woods with a creek babbling by me was calming and re-centering during a chaotic time of balancing kids, work, and the stress of the pandemic. Watching them play together in a tranquil creek surrounded by sun-dappled trees restored my balance and joy from referee to silent observer.

Two and a half year old David, was hiking longer and longer each time we ventured out as

he sought to keep up with his big brother. By the time he turned 3 in August, he was hiking 2.2 miles, spotting colorful mushrooms, jumping off fallen trees, examining insect holes, finding the perfect sticks, and running the trails adroitly despite the many roots and rocks. He developed his brother's love of tree-hugging and often stopped to do so. He also learned to develop theories about nature from our "talking walks" by wondering aloud which insect ate a leaf or used a certain mushroom as a table or umbrella, or why a tree fell down.

Walkie-talkies also added an additional thrilling element to hide and seek among the trees and boulders. Our hiking bag was often full of little bits of nature brought home for further investigation under the microscope. From creek water and leaves to dead insects found on the trail, it was clear that science, play, vocabulary, and exercise were just some of the natural outcome of these escapes.

Afternoons and evenings were (and continue to be) full of rowdy pillow fights and a thrilling game of Skullasaurus. While demands for Skullasaurus permeate throughout the day, honestly, I had to muster the strength and desire to play this invented game I created when Vincent was three. As the Skullasaurus, I live in a lair (our couch), and I want to eat little boys. The boys run away and hide but enjoy taunting the Skullasaurus and inevitably love being captured and brought to my lair. The boys enjoy tricking the Skullasaurus into a nap and then help each other escape. They hide and giggle loudly until they repeat the story sequence again and again. This is always a loud ruckus, and the kids love to direct the play while sticking with the same storyline. Hearing a 2-year-old use the word "lair" appropriately shows the power of vocabulary development through play. If they had their way, we would play it for hours every day, but thankfully, the Skullasaurus sleeps most of the day and does not emerge until 5:00 PM.

Part II: Late July- present Respectful Rough and Tumble (finally)

I am not sure there was a specific date, but rather an evolution in their play that created the beautiful sibling play that we see now. Whether

it was the maturing of our 2.5-year-old to 3 or the brothers learning how to negotiate, resolve conflicts, compromise, trade, and respond to each other in respectful ways, or a little of both, a new sibling synergistic play developed. Whatever the developmental or contextual reasons, I am grateful for the opportunity to witness how they can rough and tumble respectfully. In the early days, I had to be right there watching, coaching and reminding, so that Vincent could remember he was bigger than David.

Likewise, I had to remind David of advocating for himself and his bodily autonomy with words and not biting, hitting, or throwing as a response. Now, I can rest assured that they are wrestling and having pillow fights in ways they need for body and emotional regulation while also respecting each other's boundaries.

Negotiations, advocacy, bodily autonomy, consent, and communication have grown exponentially during this period. I love when they sneak off to one of their rooms for a pillow fight or rough and tumble wrestling match. Inevitably, I hear loud thumps as they start jumping on and off the bed onto the floor, yelling, "Cannonball!" and "Brother Jump!". I am so happy to relinquish the role of coaching their play and allowing them to make decisions that work for their big body play.

Similar to the playground-in-the-bathroom Covid response, another random but seemingly necessary survival change was allowing them to jump off our marble coffee table onto the couch. Pre-Covid, this was a no-no, but desperation for big body movements allowed for bending of rules. Each day and night, you can find a steady flow of fancy jumps and twists from the coffee table to the couch.

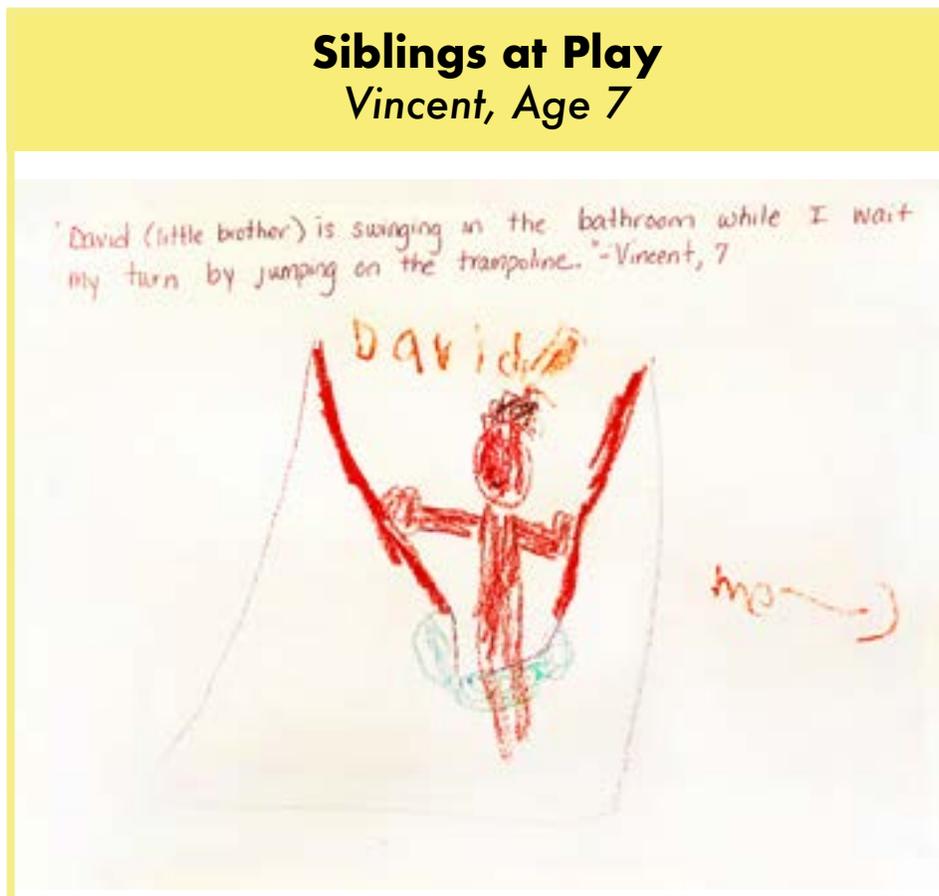
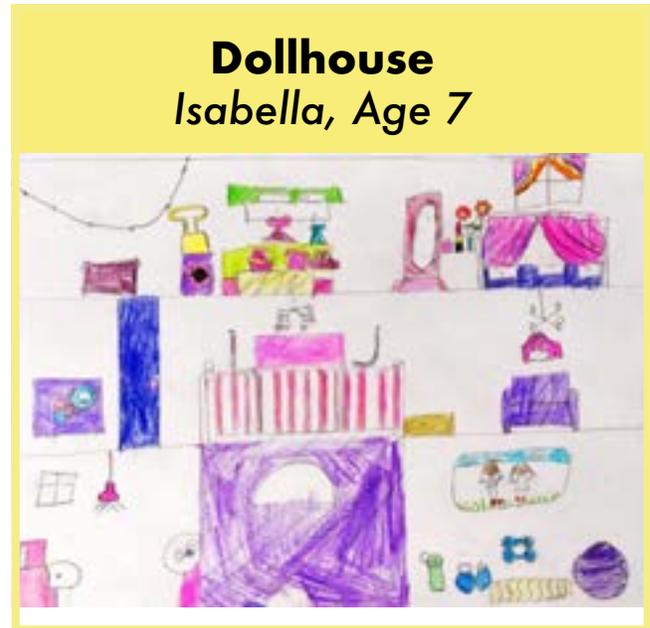
My mother and mother-in-law would not approve of this desecration of furniture, but again, they never parented during a global pandemic! I do not feel bad for one second as I watch them take turns jumping the changing span from the table to the couch or other times doing a simultaneous "Brother Jump" holding hands. Their joy, laughter, and shrieks of happiness give me more pleasure than any expected furniture norm ever could.

In closing, this glimpse into this sibling rivalry-to-play phase during the pandemic showed how the two brothers could work through their differing play needs in order to meet their own needs and each other. From developing their own "Brother Signal" to asking for a hug or comfort from the other when no one else's love would suffice, it is clear that this special time has helped them grow as brothers, play partners, and communicators.

While the taming of the raptors Part 1 was hard to endure, I believe that the hard part pushed us towards new opportunities for growth, and it deepened our relationships. When the raptors appear in a later phase, I will need to remember the parenting lessons learned in 2020.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Vincent and David for their resilience during this stressful time. Even when the stress of pandemic parenting was palatable, you managed to help our family find joy in simple ways. To my wife, Laura, thanks for supporting me through the valleys and mountains of this pandemic.



A Time for Play in Covid-19: Perspectives from a Professor of Early Childhood Education and Parent

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The impact of Covid-19 has been detrimental to school systems across the country, leaving many to shut down and forcing teachers to conduct instruction using online learning platforms. Perhaps the most significant loss, or concern, is the lack of creative and meaningful play opportunities for young children. Research indicates the imperative developmental benefits of play for young children. These include, but are not limited to, socialization, problem-solving, and overall mental and physical well-being. With these benefits in mind, teachers and parents must be imaginative to ensure children can engage in meaningful play and reach these developmental milestones. This paper seeks to explore possible and creative outlets for play from the perspective of a parent and Early Childhood Education Professor.

“Children need the freedom and time to play. Play is not a luxury. Play is a necessity.”

- Kay Redfield Jamison (Montessori Rocks)

In March of 2020, it seemed like the world stopped. The majority of the country was under strict lockdown due to the effects and spread of the coronavirus (or Covid-19). While restaurants, retail shops, and other businesses were closed, perhaps the most significant setback was the shutdown of schools. Children were no longer allowed to attend in-person classes leaving them at home to work through computer modalities. For middle and high school students, this was less of a challenge. These students are accustomed to technology. Younger children, preschool and lower elementary, faced a greater burden.

Not only did they need to learn to navigate technology online, but one of the most crucial aspects of their development was suddenly altered: the opportunity for play. The following vignette was created from a real-life scenario during the time of the school shutdown. Following the vignette, I will provide anecdotal experiences from my perspective as a professor and parent.

The goal is to offer hope by exposing some of the creative ways I have personally witnessed play for young children during this time (including internet example links for easy access).

Amy and Hannah rush to grab a muffin and water before they turn on their iPads. “It’s almost time for our meeting!” Amy says to her twin sister. After a month of online school, their mom still thinks it’s cute she calls her school day “meetings.” Both sisters find their respective place at the kitchen table, open their iPads, and sign in to their respective classes. Their mother rushes around frantically, trying to clean up behind them and brush their hair, so they are “camera appropriate.”

Class starts. Both girls have their headphones in and cameras on for the next three hours. Their mother can go to the living-room, nearly 10 feet away, to teach her online class to college students, but no further. What happens if something goes wrong in Amy or Hannah’s “meeting”? After a month, this should be the new normal. “We will play when the workday ends” their mother thinks. “We will find something fun for the children to do (without leaving the house due to quarantine).”

Is this sustainable? How creative can they be in their play during this unprecedented time?

Amy and Hannah are fortunate – not only financially but because their mother is an early childhood professor and understands the importance of play. The negative impacts of financial concerns and misunderstandings about the significance of play could fill up thousands of subsequent papers. Instead, this paper intends to discuss the overall importance of play and then look at how teachers and parents have been creative during this time.

Importance of Play and New Creativity

“Play is so important to optimal child development that it has been recognized by the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights as a right of every child” (Ginsburg, 2007, p. 182). Children benefit socially, cognitively, physically, and emotionally from face-to-face play with others (Barnett, 1990). Research has indicated children who engage in any type of play with another child, teacher, or parent obtain several benefits, including developing new competencies, navigating the world around them, understanding how to solve problems, and practicing decision-making and conflict resolution skills (Ginsburg, 2007). When play is taken away, these attributes can be detrimental. This is the reason why teachers and parents must be more creative now than ever to engage young children in play. Traditional methods of play are no longer available. Most children are at home on their computers, and those who are not are often wearing masks in school but mandated to stay six feet apart. The following two perspectives offer ways I, personally, have seen a) teachers become creative with play, and b) parents engage their children in types of play they may not have previously considered.

Teacher/Professor Prospective

As a former early childhood teacher and current Assistant Professor of Early Childhood Education, I have devoted my life to researching, understanding, and disseminating information to future teachers on the importance of play. There is no dispute that the benefits of play for young children impact all levels of development (Ngan et al., 2018). I currently teach three classes: Contemporary Family Issues; Creativity, Play,

and Representation; and Child Development. Each of these courses is strongly rooted in the theories of Piaget, Bronfenbrenner, Vygotsky, Parten, and many others. Although it is imperative my students understand these theories and the research that outlines the importance of play in their future classrooms, perhaps their biggest gain comes from their field experiences. At my University, students in Inclusive Early Childhood Education have a practicum or field experience every semester. This ranges across their time in the program, but it always includes face-to-face interaction with teachers and students in the field (from birth to age 8). Research has shown the importance of field experiences for college students (Liakopoulou, 2012), and feedback from my students indicates the most effective measure of applying and understanding course knowledge is first-hand classroom experience (Williams & Brown, in preparation). As of March 2020, this changed.

You see, instead of working with students like Amy and Hannah in the above vignette, my university students are now on their Zoom calls. Essentially, they are extra students in the class. They do not engage with the students, and they especially do not get to observe or participate in the play. Similarly, early childhood teachers are facing the same challenge as they navigate teaching online. With children on computer screens, instead of in the physical classroom, they are besieged to find inventive ways to engage in play.

With the aforementioned challenges, this is not to say it cannot be done, but as mentioned, teachers are forced to be more imaginative than ever. In my experience with my students’ practicum teachers and my own daughters’ teachers, I have seen two extremely creative examples of engaging in virtual play.

Show and Tell

Show and Tell is a classic game. Young children love bringing their favorite object to school and telling classmates all about it. In Hannah’s class, I witnessed a teacher change this classic game in an eloquent way. Each Friday, she has different themes for Show and Tells. The first week it was stuffed animals. Each student held up their favorite stuffed animal to the screen.

The teacher then produced a class play. Hannah chose her favorite rabbit. In the play, her rabbit's role was to discuss what foods were healthy to eat. Each student had a different animal and a different role. It was intriguing to watch a class of 12 six-year-olds create an imaginative story using their stuffed animals. A short clip of this idea in a Kindergarten classroom can be found here: [Kindergarten Show and Tell](#)

Project-Based Materials

Perhaps one of the best and simplest ways to express play and creativity is through the arts. During one of Amy and Hannah's class sessions, as I scurried to get on my computer to observe my college students in their practicum classrooms, I witnessed a very engaging lesson. An art teacher asked a group of second graders to run around their house and grab four objects that could be thrown away.

The students all left their screens and came back with various materials, including toilet paper, soda cans, popsicle sticks, and countless other items. The art teacher then told them they had 10 minutes to build an invention of their choice, and they could talk with their friends while they built.

Although the students were not together, similar to parallel and cooperative play, students constructed their inventions and asked one another for advice. At the end of the 10 minutes, they each took turns talking about their invention and then requested feedback from their peers. This lesson was engaging, creative, and cooperative. For larger classes, this could also be done through break-out sessions on Zoom. The following is a video of my daughters' extraordinary art teacher engaging preschool students in a lesson: [PreSchool Art Lesson](#)

Parent and Child Prospective

Teachers are not the only ones who should encourage play in children. The parent-child play has a direct impact on the child's development (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). The main setback with this becomes extremely clear in the above vignette. While children are at home, engaging in school online, many parents are forced to quit their jobs or find some form of child-care. This

creates not only financial stress but emotional and psychological tensions in the home. Many studies and psychiatrists are reporting an increase in family disagreements, abuse, and neglect (NSPCC, 2020). With this in mind, it is clear many parents cannot put creative play at the forefront of their minds.

Amy and Hannah are fortunate, as I mentioned. I have a job where I can work from home, and I acknowledge the importance of play. Not to mention, Amy and Hannah have each other. Many children without siblings are experiencing even more detrimental effects of the lack of socialization.

It is important to remember that the Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommends social distancing and avoiding in-person play dates inside (Children's Health, 2020).

With this in mind and the majority of outdoor playgrounds closed, parents also must be extra ingenious. I have found two resourceful ways parents can help their children engage in meaningful play.

Online Play Dates

Online play dates are perhaps the simplest way to allow a child to connect with another child. In my experience, Amy and Hannah have each other, but they also want to see their friends. Because this is not possible during this time, I arrange "Online Play Dates." For these, I simply coordinate with their friends' parents and choose a time for my children to meet with their friends online via Zoom.

Sometimes they just meet and talk. Sometimes we, as parents, are more creative and play online dance parties or come up with a mutual craft they can do together. Either way, this is a simple form of engagement and socialization that always makes my children happy and requires little effort. Some examples of things to do during these online play dates can be found here: [Online Play Date Ideas](#)

Neighborhood or Home Scavenger Hunts

Many children love scavenger hunts. During this time, teachers are utilizing numerous materials, including online zoo tours, virtual scavenger hunts, and entertaining clue games on the computer. At home, this is a time parents can engage in actual scavenger hunts and include friends. Amy, my oldest twin, had the idea to do a scavenger hunt in our neighborhood. I talked with my two neighbors who have children of a similar age, and they agreed to help.

To maintain social distance, we each developed and distributed clues and sent our children out to “scavenge” the neighborhood. Amy and Hannah were both engaged.

After the hunt, they met with the neighborhood friends on Zoom to talk about what they found. It is important to note that if parents cannot do this in their neighborhood with other kids, they can do it in their home. For example, parents can make rhyming clues for holidays like, “A turkey’s feathers are brown, the next clue is where you keep your _____” (and draw a picture of crayons). Then, other families can do the same thing, and children can still speak about the activity on Zoom. This is a great way for children to engage in creative fun and practice reading skills through play. A good example of how to make a home scavenger hunt can be found here: [At Home Scavenger Hunt](#)

Conclusion

We are well aware of the benefits of play for young children. This paper has discussed some of those in-depth. However, at this unprecedented time of online schooling and isolation, many children are not obtaining the benefits they need. The good news is there are many, many ways both teachers and parents can keep the play alive.

Whether it be extravagant or with limited resources, everything counts. Just a little time to increase creativity and play with peers, teachers, or parents can make a world of difference. This paper listed just a few, but there are countless ideas. As a former teacher, professor, and concerned parent, my goal is to keep the play alive! We can do this and help our children grow

during this time.

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Building a Snowman with family Belle, Age 6



"This is a picture of me and my sister playing in the snow with my mom and my dad. The virus means we can't play with our friends as much, but I am glad I have a sister to play with, even though she frustrates me sometimes. We love it when it snows because we can make snowmen, go sledding, and my mom is happy because she loves the cold. My dad helps build a perfect snowman. I also love to draw, color and paint during the virus. It makes me happy and helps me be calm."

Scaffolding Play Interactions: COVID-19

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The dynamics of children's play interactions have shifted a bit when considering the availability of playmates and perhaps locations of play due to COVID-19. In addition, one may argue that adults hold an even greater role now in scaffolding these play interactions due to these modifications in children's play. This anecdotal piece focuses on the importance of play and scaffolding that adults may provide to their children for the purposes of fostering their overall development.

Play is considered to hold a significant role within children's lives, as participating in play activities is associated with fostering children's social-emotional, cognitive, language, and physical development (Ginsburg, 2007). For instance, play has been associated with children's acquisition of emotion regulation, social competence, negotiation, and engagement in critical thinking skills. Language development also may be promoted due to children's interactions with others. Thus, play is truly an important component needed every day within children's lives, regardless of COVID-19.

One may ponder how participating in play activities may be achieved due to the presence of COVID-19? This question may be further spurred by the fact that traditional play settings may be significantly altered due to the pandemic. For instance, engaging in play activities at recess may not occur in some areas of the United States. Or, if it does, face coverings would probably be worn in certain locations. One may wonder whether a lack of collaboration and sharing during play interactions may result in less scaffolding among playmates, or one may consider whether an emphasis on scaffolding may now be shifted to adults. Thus, play interactions occurring at home may rely more heavily now on guidance provided by caregivers and parents, rather than collaboration between similar-aged children. Personally, I find myself holding a larger role in

my 5-year-old son's learning experiences due to COVID-19 and the cancellation of in-person classes.

Scaffolding During Play

My family and I participate in many different activities that foster my young son's higher-level thinking skills by utilizing the principles of scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978). An example includes nature-based curriculum opportunities that we frequently participate in, since play settings may be taken outdoors, provided that social distancing and health precautions are taken. Specifically, my family and I frequently go on nature walks.

On these walks, I find myself engaging in scaffolding opportunities with my young son. For instance, while on a walk, I frequently pose questions to him that encourage his critical thinking skills while increasing his interest in exercise and being outdoors.

Examples of how I promote scaffolding includes posing questions, such as:
How many leaves did you collect while we were walking?

What habitats may be the best for insects or animals that we notice on the trail?

If he answers incorrectly, I provide positive guidance strategies by asking him the question again while providing aids that may assist him with correctly responding. For example, if he incorrectly answers a numeracy question, we count the leaves together and expand counting to using addition to count the leaves.

Significance of Adults

Engaging in physical exercise outside; specifically, within nature has positive health benefits as well. For instance, it reduces depression while encouraging healthy lifestyle choices. This may especially be important in the era of COVID-19 when anxiety may be increased for children due to the unknown associated with the virus as well as significant changes they (as well as their families) may experience due to shifting of routines or schedules. Children also may feel a bit isolated if they are unable to play with their friends. Therefore, the role of parents or caregivers becomes even more highlighted.

Even though my young son is not currently attending school in-person due to COVID-19, we consistently engage in play activities that foster his curiosity in learning while deepening his concept development in subjects such as math and literacy.

Another example includes engaging in pretend play at home. My young son enjoys astronomy and pretending he is an astronaut. Thus, the backyard is frequently the location of his spacecraft launches, where he pretends a section of the backyard is the space shuttle. He brings pieces outside that encourages his participation in the pretend play, such as sidewalk chalk, an astronaut costume, as well as items decorated to mimic cockpits of space shuttles.

Within the safety of the backyard, his imagination soars. While he pretends to be an astronaut, I find myself further scaffolding his play activities by asking him open-ended questions that foster his critical thinking and higher-level thinking skills. For example, I ask what planet he is traveling to. If he is unsure, we research the different planets as well as what life may reside on those planets or specific characteristics of the planets. I also ask him what he would bring with him on his

space shuttle if he were to travel for several days to his destination. Furthermore, I ask what gear he would bring or attach to his spacesuit.

If the weather is unfavorable, my son's pretend play setting becomes the place where he sets up his space shuttle in that location. Instead of using boxes, he uses smaller pieces to mimic cockpits that may be on space shuttles. Again, I find myself engaging in the play with him and scaffolding these play activities by probing questions that promote his thinking.

For example, I ask him questions about the destination of his space shuttle while probing questions that encourage him to use mathematical concepts. He can correctly identify and recognize numbers up to 40, so I ask him what time his space shuttle will launch. Or we count down a rocket launch together from 50, instead of 40, which is the number that he comfortably counts to and identifies.

In sum, play is truly an essential part of children's lives. Even though the settings and traditional dynamics of play may be somewhat altered due to COVID-19, the important benefits of play, as well as the engagement in play activities, is still achievable with positive guidance and scaffolding provided by caregivers or parents.



Play-In-A-Box: Bringing Play Home

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Anthill Creations is a not-for-profit organization in India Anthill started in 2017 with our first playground at Disha Seema Care Centre at the Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur



Anthill Creations aims to revitalize public spaces. Anthill aims to bring back play by building interactive, sustainable playscapes, using contextual designs and local resources.



By the time of publication Anthill Creations had built 203 playgrounds covered 18 regions impacted 101500 children. Anthill Creations specializes in affordable play spaces.

Play Philosophy



Playgrounds are a place filled with joy and laughter, where children learn while at play.



Play is the best part of childhood and no child should have to go without it.



The local community is involved in the construction of the playground, which cultivates a sense of ownership, responsibility, and pride. Children come to school early to play, resulting in more consistent school attendance.

Covid-19 Pandemic hit hard in March 2020!



The pandemic brought it all to a halt leaving schools and playgrounds empty.



An absence of play and learning in this environment of uncertainty impacted children.

Play-In-A-Box was Developed!



No matter where no matter what, every child has a right to play. The materials are developmentally appropriate.



Bringing play home: With schools closed, it is more important than ever!



Play in the box is an initiative for a child's holistic development while at play - a solution to a very important problem statement

Play-In-A-Box Modified to Align with Children's Culture



We have been constantly taking feedback from our users and updating the boxes to ensure that play-in-the-box bring joy, creativity, & learning!



We distributed the first version of the Play-in-a-box to over 100 children and saw their faces light up with smiles and understood the need is much larger



Play-in-a-box is full of possibilities and aspirations that give them the resources to keep their curiosity and creativity alive.

Mission 10k: A Ray of Hope



Mission 10 K is just the beginning of the journey of reaching out to 10,000 children and leaving behind a positive impact in their lives amidst very difficult situations.



We are so happy that the smile on his face and so many children like him has returned.



With Mission 10K we have been able to create a second, third, & now fourth version of the box.

Pandemic Play and Trauma Recovery

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This true anecdotal story focuses on a six-year-old child and his cautious desire to get a dog during the COVID-19 pandemic quarantine. Previously fearful of dogs because of a traumatic experience, he gradually eases into having a canine companion. As he plays with her, he notices what makes her happy and seeks to engage in play that causes joy for both of them. This playtime and change in caring for a dog contribute to healing from early childhood trauma. When the new school year begins, he demonstrates that social and emotional progress is not the only areas of healing. His play and attachment to our new dog also help him with his academic progress.

"I think I'm ready for a dog." This statement from my six-year-old came two weeks into pandemic homeschooling. It also came with great personal risk. At the age of three, he was attacked by a dog, an event that created a worldview that dogs are dangerous. He developed PTSD and a hypersensitive awareness of nearby dogs. When he sensed a dog coming, he would literally climb up his dad or me, start to shake, and say "no, no, no, no" repeatedly. Even hearing the word "dog" would change him from a happy, playful child to fearful and dissociative. The trauma even appeared to alter the way he learned. His learning curve in preschool and kindergarten was painstakingly slow. I tried hard not to worry about the "below average" or "needs intervention" marks on his assessments through those years.

Over time, with gentle responses from us and with play therapy, his symptoms decreased, and he appeared to transition from a deeply ingrained fear to an abundance of caution. When a dog was nearby, he would stop his activity, make sure he was close to us, and focus all attention on watching the dog's behavior.

In first grade, an emotional support dog would come into the classroom and lay down as the

kids took turns reading to him. My son could occasionally pet the dog but could not sit next to him or try to read to him. Then, the pandemic sent him home from school and separated him from his friends, teacher, and the gentle support dog. As an incredibly social child, he tried to swap playtime with friends for playtime with siblings, especially his older brother. They would run and wrestle, make up stories and draw, build worlds in Minecraft, play tag, and color. It was during this time he expressed the desire to get a dog. Surprised but recognizing the significance of his words, we began to research all things dogs. We learned about animal shelters struggling with an increase in stray animals and a decrease in funds to provide for them. We discussed the pros and cons of getting a shelter pet, trying to expect what a visit to the shelter would be like.

Our first shelter visit was difficult. Seeing, hearing, and smelling multiple dogs at the same time seemed to cause regression of fearful behaviors. Yet, he wanted to stay. We took the first dog, Sadie, out to the play yard, and he tried to pet her but withdrew. The rest of our family took turns engaging with the dog while I held onto my son. We returned this dog and chose a second one, Addison, to take to the play area. My son again tried to engage but did not feel

comfortable and withdrew. The rest of the family played with her for quite some time. When my son stated he wanted to go home, we returned Addison and left the shelter. On the way home, he shared his desire to try again. We went weekly to the shelter, each time staying longer and longer with Addison. After four weeks of visiting her, we nicknamed her Addy and brought her home for a week's trial visit on May 1, 2020. My son began this trial cautiously. He would watch her and hesitantly pet her if she was nearby. He seemed to want to interact more closely but would stop himself and withdraw.

He began to recognize that when she was happy, her tail wagged. This discovery led him to engage her in different ways to see if he could elicit a tail wag. He tried throwing a ball, which she would chase but not bring back. He ran along next to her, finding her tail staying straight up but not wagging. He tried to swim with her but found she wanted nothing to do with the water. He took her on walks, noticing her tendency to charge towards wild bunnies, but her tail seemed rigid, not playful. He tried to jump out at her and surprise her but found it caused her to retreat back and put her tail down.

He discovered a tug-of-war rope toy, which he held onto one end and put the other end in Addy's mouth. He then pulled the toy to see what she would do. This activity was the winner! Addy rapidly wagged her tail. My son was thrilled to see he found the secret to the tail-wagging happiness. However, quickly realizing he was playing with a dog's mouth, he jumped back, dropped the toy, and looked like he was about to run away. He paused when he noticed Addy pick up the toy with her mouth, wag her tail and look at him expectantly. He moved closer and attempted to grab the other end, but Addy moved too quickly towards him in excitement. He jerked back fearfully, trying to put space between him and her. She dropped the rope toy and waited. He hesitantly moved towards the toy, watching her and ensuring she was going to stay in place. He slowly picked up the toy, allowing Addy to put the other end in her mouth. They each tugged. She wagged her tail, he laughed.

This was a triumphant moment for him. He expressed pride in himself for playing with a dog and only being "a little" scared. He could engage with her more and more during this week's trial. With each attempt to play, he could stay involved a little longer and a little closer. He appeared more and more comfortable, even to the point of hugging her. His natural, playful self-emerged slowly but confidently around her. He and his siblings knew at the one-week mark that we would hold a family meeting and vote on whether we would adopt her or return her to the shelter.

As the week drew to an end, they began thinking up ways to convince their dad and me that Addy needed to be a permanent member of our family. They created a slideshow presentation entitled "The Reasons Why We Should Keep ADDY!" Each of the kids declared what they would do to help with her care. My six-year old's slide stated he would "work extra hard to train her, to walk her, to feed her, and pick up her poop." He would also "play with her a lot and a lot and a lot." The next slide had a picture of my son frowning and stated, "If we do return her, this is what will happen.... [we] Will be devastated."

The kids ended their slideshow with, "We for sure think that she is our perfect pet, The Pet That We Have Been Searching for. Mommy and Daddy, Thank you so much for adopting her, we love her so much, and we deeply hope that we will keep her forever! Without Addy, There would be a big, giant hole in [our] hearts. It's Time To Adopt Her Forever!"

As we held our family meeting to make the big decision, I was particularly interested in my six-year old's perspective. I asked him about his fear of her. He replied honestly, "I still get scared sometimes, but it's just a teeny, teeny, teeny bit." To prove his point, he got down from the table and picked her up. We permanently adopted Addy that day. My son has kept up his end of the bargain to "play with her a lot and a lot and a lot," although the promise to pick up her poop has waned. We've now had Addy for six months.

The kids have returned to school with strict pandemic precautions. Addy seemingly is lonely without them and somehow knows the time of day when they should get home from school. She goes to the windows and watches for them. When she spots my six-year-old, she wags her tail. When he comes into the house, she rushes to him. He hugs her, calls her by her name, gets in her face, and laughs as she licks him.

They jump around and play. He no longer is hesitant to play tug-of-war. They play tug-of-war with about any object they can find, a sock, a hat, a stuffed animal, and sometimes a pandemic-created mask. My son, through his time at home with siblings and playing with our quarantine dog, has worked through many of his fears. The result of him being sent home from school for a pandemic is a new worldview: Some dogs are safe, and I don't have to be scared.

With his return to school and beginning second grade, I was nervous about what his learning curve would be like. After all, he's been out of school for five months during a critical developmental period, when he was already lagging behind his peers. After a month in school, assessments were given to the children. This last week, the results of those assessments came home. For the first time, his assessments show that his academic skills are "on track." I cannot empirically state that playing with our newly adopted dog has changed his brain. Yet, in the future, when we look back at this time, we will always believe that he used pandemic play to recover from trauma, which resulted in a positive impact on his academic skills and in a strong attachment to an animal that once brought much fear. Play, with secure animal attachment, has turned his personal risk into a triumph.

Wishing for a Pet Ishika, Age 7



Has Children's Play Changed During the Pandemic?

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There is a lot of talk about children's play and how it has or hasn't changed during Covid-19. There is great concern about early childhood educators wearing masks and the effect of this on the children we care for. Through personal observations and experiences with the program I operate, I had found children play and interact the exact same as they did before they were in lockdown and returned to our program.

There are so many questions around children's play during the pandemic; has children's play changed during (what everyone seems to be calling) this new normal, do they play differently, has their play taken on a new 'tone,' or is there a different manner or style of play?

I have been able to stay open since Covid-19 arrived in our area, which was in March 2020. When all our regular families decided to stay home and follow the directive that came from the government and our public health authority, I decided to offer child care to essential service workers. By June, our regular families were back, and we had pretty much returned to full capacity, spending the vast majority of our time outside and enjoying being together again. The children were happy to be back and seeing their old friends again. We did all this while helping to flatten our curve, maintaining quality, and not having to wear a mask as we were told we were low risk. All was happy in my world until September hit!

We have to WHAT? By September, the curve was not flat anymore, and there was a growing concern over rising numbers of positive cases. All staff working in child care programs and all children nine years of age and older were now required to wear a mask in child care programs and schools.

As a strong supporter of sitting back and observing children, I am actually surprised by

what I have observed. The children's play has not changed. They are still playing the same types of games and pretend to play they engaged in before; horses, puppies, science experiments, caring for baby dolls, chasing Zombies, catch the bad guys, cooking in the mud kitchen, etc. There has been some doctor play and vet play, but it never involves Covid.

The doctor play is usually more about slivers and sore tummies. We have always spent a large amount of our time outside, so this is just a continuation of that. The children still have access to all the natural and man-made loose parts in our yard, such as sticks, sand, water, logs, planks, stumps, PVC tubes, bowls, etc., and continue to use them in their play. Even when we are inside, the play has stayed the same. They still engage with what is available and use their imaginations to bring it all together.

The themes have not included talk or play around 'the virus,' and it hasn't involved wearing masks. The kids have just seemed to take it all in stride. They left on a Friday with everything the same as they have always known it here and returned after the weekend with us greeting them in masks, and they just walked in and carried on like usual. I am sure they have been seeing others wearing masks in public places long before we had to do it here, so this would not be completely unfamiliar to them. Lunchtime talk sometimes includes asking if "the virus" is gone yet. Occasionally when a child sneezes, they

are quickly reminded by another child to cover because 'you don't want to spread the virus.' The information and language the children use have always been "bang on." They are obviously listening to family members, siblings, the news, or others. There is never a feeling of fear or uncertainty in the conversations. They are all very matter of fact about it.

My adult brain thought there would more covid play or uncertainty of us in masks, but the children have not displayed this at all. This includes the infants we care for. I am sure this might be a different conversation if we had to put masks on preschool children, and I certainly hope it does not come to that here. We often talk about how resilient children are.

There are a few people who want to challenge that. There are many who suggest children need to see ALL of our faces. I don't disagree at all with those ideas, but I also know from being in a mask for a few weeks now that children can still understand our feelings even with them on. They see our eyes. They know when we're smiling or when we are displaying that "what are you doing?" look.

They can still hear our voices, understand our tone, and we are still able to make those important connections. We continue to talk with them, read stories, sing songs, all with our masks on. I think it is important for our child care programs to have early childhood educators who are able to support their play, maintain Covid safety protocols and provide the care and continuity that the children and their families need. When these things are in place, even the children who are a little more anxious but maybe can't verbalize how they are feeling will be a little more at ease.

Children need consistency from us. Early childhood educators know children work through their feeling through play. They need to be able to do this as organically as possible. We know children are capable, and they are proving it right now in the midst of this pandemic! They are handling it. (with more grace than the adults' someday)

I feel like adults are the ones who are struggling more. Maybe it is because we are more set in our ways, and we know what we are missing, like all the sensory play we used to have inner

programs. I think we are mourning the loss of what it used to be.

Has children's play changed during the pandemic? From my personal experience, I would say no, it hasn't changed. They are still finding joy, using their imaginations and creativity, and playing as they always have.

Pet Play Brooke, Age 7



"The best part of Covid was getting to adopt my new dog Guster. Me and him go for walks and watch television together. We also read books together. We spend a lot of time playing with my sister and doing art projects. I love to do art. My hope for the new year is that Covid goes away and we can do more things"

Play Configurations During the Pandemic in an Extended Family

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I live in central India in a newly developing neighborhood with 18 family members, including 3 generations. While most families around us are nuclear, we enjoy our rare-but-special living arrangement, that mediated the stress of the pandemic in beautiful ways. My children (ages 8 and 4) have had the opportunity to experience play in multiple configurations – as siblings, with cousins, with parents, with uncles and aunts, and with grandparents.

Play with Parents

The pandemic has, for a considerable amount of time, rewritten the meaning of this playtime. It has shifted to being more mental, sedentary, and observational than physical. Our role as parents involved trying to facilitate play in new ways to make up for the lack of the freedom our children were used to. During initial months of the pandemic, my children would spend most time of the day watching TV or playing video games like me, and my husband was adjusting to our new routines of full-time remote work besides more household responsibilities in absence of in-person school for children.

Eventually, to curb our children's growing amount of screen-time and lethargy, my husband gave them interesting mathematical problems to solve or do sudoku and jigsaw puzzles (before the schools started virtual classes), and I would read books or do some storytelling sessions for all the three kids of the house with toys as props.

Play Among Siblings and Cousins

My children and their cousin (age 6) loved throwing house parties. They would arrange plates with potato chips, and fill their glasses with orange juice, wear party hats, and invite other family members to join in the fun, with handmade invitations.

They would camp on our terrace garden where they would, sometimes use a mosquito net to create the tent structure. They would make

sandwiches for each other and would tell each other jokes in the play tent.

All three kids pretended to be shopkeepers at Indian Saree shops – trying to drape themselves in sarees, admiring themselves in the mirror, and making pretend purchases of their final selections.

Children also utilized household items, and other random items found within the many rooms of our house - to improve and expand the scope of play. They would incorporate their found objects into new games with made up rules. They used a box of bangles as the main prop to pretend-play Alibaba and the 40 thieves.

Play with Grandparents

The children became interested in traditional games during the additional time they got to spend with the grandparents during the pandemic. My father-in-law would tell them stories about his own childhood spent on climbing trees and playing 'Gilli Danda' (a traditional sport similar to bat and ball games) with friends in his neighborhood, and the children began exploring the games and activities narrated by their grandfather.

Their grandmother would give them dough to roll it out into different shapes on the rolling board with the pin and would then cut it into a star or a cap and roast it on the tava (a traditional Indian cast-iron griddle). This boosted their interest in eating home-cooked food, fresh and warm.

Play With the Entire Family as a Group

Our living room became the hub of intergenerational play, gossip, and music. Our coffee-tables and dining tables became the table-tennis tables; the corners of the living rooms became areas to play card games, and the circular floor-mat served as a dining area. In the evenings, our family would play charades. To celebrate family birthdays, we would setup a party in the terrace garden. In the morning we would arrange plastic chairs and my sister-in-law would bake some desserts. Our entire family of 18 members would sit in a circle, and play 'pass the parcel' with a twist. We would pass a pillow around, and when my elder son (in-charge of turning the music on and off) would turn the music off, the family member with the pillow could choose to sing, act out a character of their choice, or imitate any one family member. We shared a lot of laughs as a family and our children enjoyed these experiences as if they were part of an extended summer vacation.

Indoor and Outdoor Play Anvita, Age 5



Quarantine Bubble with Best Friend Mir, Age 7



Before vs After Naisha, Age 8



"Before COVID-19 me and my friends played together and shared things and had tons of fun. Now, during COVID-19 only a few people play outside. We mostly play board games with our family at home. We have to wear masks and stay 6 ft because we don't want to risk it. We also can't share stuff with our friends but we still have fun. We play with only few set of friends and not all of our friends during covid."

Big Mind Imagination Town Asa, Age 5



"Big Mind Imagination Town - They are underground tunnels to be safe and to get the the rainbow castle gate. The tunnels can be there if there is too big a battle in the castle. The underground tunnels have everything we need there and they keep us safe. Everyone who was in my castle will be safe. They just have to be quiet for a long time or watch tv with their headphones on."

Keeping Busy Yuvaan, Age 7



In covid 19 I attended virtual chess, karate, art and dance class. I baked cakes. I made 3D puzzles, played board games and did science tricks. I watched TV. I did gardening.

Friendships during the Pandemic Samayra, Age 5



Samayra shares on the top part of the art - an online play date with a friend. The bottom part is playing with friends in the backyard while wearing masks