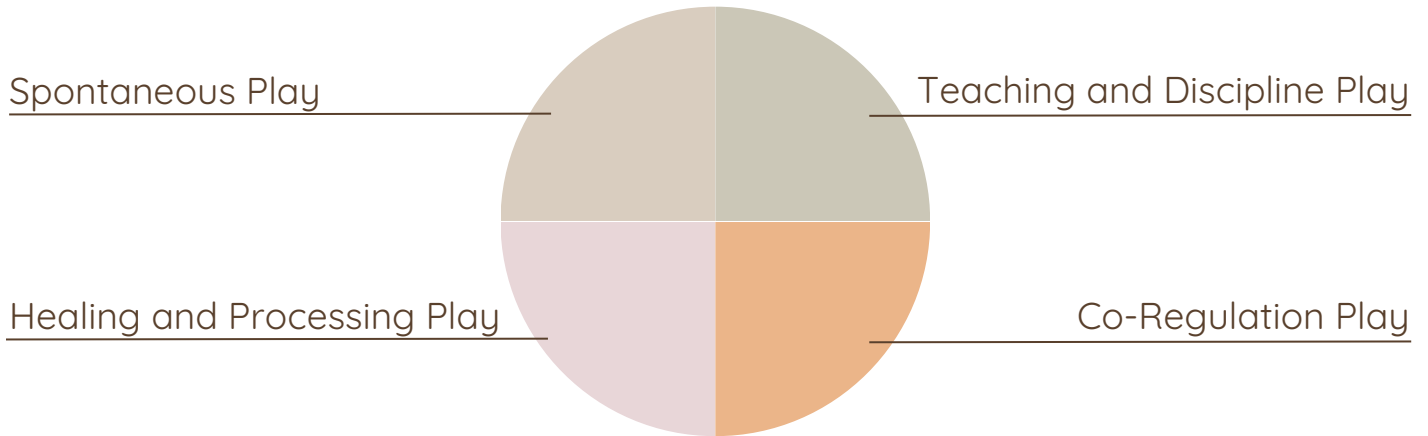


ALL ABOUT EMPOWERED PLAY



1. SPONTANEOUS PLAY

Embracing spontaneous play is a commitment to living in the moment and approaching life with a carefree spirit. It involves viewing the world through a lens where every moment holds the potential for joy and lightheartedness. This doesn't imply ignoring or undermining serious situations that demand a thoughtful response; instead, it's about maintaining a paradoxical perspective. Even in the most challenging parenting situations, there's room to approach them with a light heart. In the realm of spontaneous play, we welcome laughter and silliness to surface like a wave and ride its current with genuine enjoyment.

Examples:

- Your child doesn't want to wash their hands after dinner, how about you hop one tile at a time to the way to the toilet to see who gets there faster?
- Your child doesn't like to brush their teeth? Sprinkle some silliness and pretend that their teeth are being attacked by slimy colorful cavities! "Oh noooo, I see a red germ marching inside and reaching your top teeth! Ahhh, a yellow one is starting to eat your bottom tooth. Open up let me see, let's destroy them!" Exaggerate, get those giggles going! "Do you want to brush them off yourself or do you need mommy to do that?"
- I Spy With My Little Eye! Definitely one of my favorites. Works great for toddlers. Whether you are driving in the car, grocery shopping, or trying to keep them still while putting on their clothes, it works wonders. "I spy with my little eye something square and blue..." It could be a blue book that you see, but it could be a completely different object, like a pattern on their shirt that's also square and blue. It's lots of fun and you will start to realize how wide their observation and imagination is!

2. CO-REGULATION PLAY

This part is all about being completely present and creating a deep connection with your child. It's fully immersing yourself in the NOW with wonders and curiosity: "How can I truly engage with my child so that they feel the deep connection, unconditional love and my attention? How can I make them cherish who they are right now?"

Non-directive Child-Centered Play: According to Aletha J. Solter, author of Attachment Play, child-led play helps them rediscover a profound sense of trust and safety in the company of an attuned adult. In this environment, the child naturally creates their own form of play therapy.

Here, you can ask yourself:

- Are you willing to not interrupt with corrections, judgements, and advise during your child's play?
- Are you willing to devote a specific amount of time (10-15-20 minutes) to saying YES to whatever your child asks for during play?
- Are you willing to set a timer and watch your child play for a short amount of time daily?

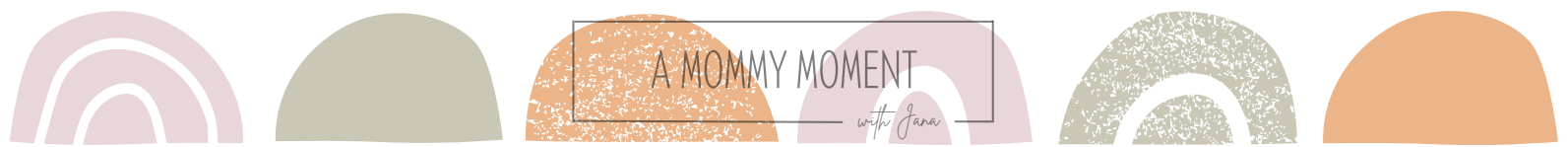
Body-Oriented play: Touch can make us feel loved, adored and connected to ourselves and those we love. And what if touch can be used in play to create an even greater connection? While keeping in mind our child's body boundaries, our body boundaries and consciousness, touch can be a great tool for co-regulation!

Playful touch can increase the attachment between you and your child and fulfill your child's need for feeling loved, safe and a sense of belonging.

Examples:

- Wrestling and rough playing can be great to let extra energy out, any unpleasant emotions or feelings of frustration and anger, while making sure to set the boundaries (no hitting, no kicking, no biting, no slapping, no pulling hair...) and that when someone says **STOP** we completely stop the action.
- Dancing to our favorite songs can be a great way to get the giggles and co-regulate with our children for any emotional release and need of body movement!
- What other body-oriented activities does your child like? and are you willing to engage with them for a few moments?

This type of play helps release, and let go of any pent-up aggression, anger, frustration, or overwhelm our child might be experiencing. And when we join them, this is where the true connection is formed.



3. HEALING AND PROCESSING PLAY

If your child is feeling stressed and is experiencing difficulty expressing their feelings or shaking it off through an activity listed above, this type of play can come in handy.

Engage in a role-playing exercise centered around a challenging experience causing stress for your child. Swap roles to enable your child to understand both perspectives. It's crucial to refrain from directing the role play; instead, provide doorways and allow your child to decide whether to explore them or not. The objective is not to achieve a specific outcome but to create a safe environment where your child can authentically express their emotions, knowing they are supported within the secure presence of their caregiver.

Role Reversal:

Your family moved into a new house and your child is scared scared sleeping in their own room. You ask your child to play a game of "house". You walk into the door, into this big, new, house where you know nothing. There is nothing that you are used to, not even the room you sleep in. It's night time and you have to go to sleep, but you cant. You are scared. See how your child is going to soothe you and understand your fear. See what they are needing. See how they would like to feel seen and understood.

Regression Game: Your family welcomes a newborn. It's new, it's stressful, especially to your 4 year old who had all the attention and care to themselves. Mom and dad pretend to give the toddler a milk bottle because he is very hungry. The toddler loves the idea and pretends to cry to ask for more milk!

This is something very common with families expecting baby #2. The older child would love to be "babied" to feel like they are receiving the same care that their sibling is.

4. TEACHING THROUGH DISCIPLINE PLAY

What better way to teach our children skills and discipline than **modeling**? Regardless of type of skill being taught (social, physical, mental, emotional...) involving a game can seem much more appealing to the child and the message will be received in a fun manner.

Emotional Regulation: sing a song about a gorilla who's fur gets red when they're angry. Let your child hop on your back and go hunt for a calming tool to help the gorilla get back to calm. Knowing your child's sensory calming tool, use that to help the gorilla (and them!)

Conflict Resolution: Your child is feeling stressed for having to leave to school. Instead of bribing, yelling, or threatening, incorporate a little bit of fun. Hold them and turn around in circles until they enjoy it.

Song, Story, Game: Teaching your child how to count to 10 using a song. Or teaching your child how to memorize the planets using things that they are familiar of.

Stress Resiliency: You hear your 2 children fighting over a game (yes, sibling rivalry is inevitable!) you run over to the room and pretend that there is an earthquake going on from the loud yelling and then run away and hide behind the furniture. Your child might actually run and match your energy, or wonder what is going on with you? Either way, you waved away the fight and welcomed the laughter. If what they are disagree about needs to be talked about, an empowered conversation with both children as well as some problem solving can be done from there.

Please note that not all those examples will work for your child. We have to take into consideration their personality, their level of stress in the moment, their level of anxiety and sensitivity as well as their well-being as a whole.