



The Importance of Recess and Play

Lindsay Brauer Dzielski



**NEIGHBORS
UNITED**

RISKY PLAY is really important for kids - all kids - because it teaches hazard assessments, delayed gratification, resilience and confidence.

When kids get outside and practice bravery, they learn valuable life lessons.

- Caroline Paul



RISKY PLAY is really important for kids - all kids - because it teaches hazard assessments, delayed gratification, resilience and confidence. As kids get outside and practice bravery, they learn valuable life lessons. - Caroline Paul





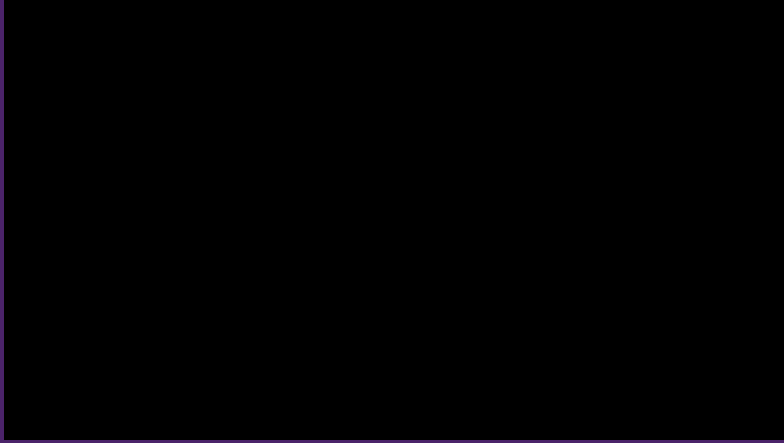




What is Play?



What is PLAY?





Where Did Play Come From?

- Humans — and all mammals — have a biological drive to play that has evolved over millions of years. The biological elements are the **play circuits** buried deep in our midbrain, waiting to be activated.
- When the neurons of our play circuits are activated by playful elements in our environment, they motivate us to engage with those elements.

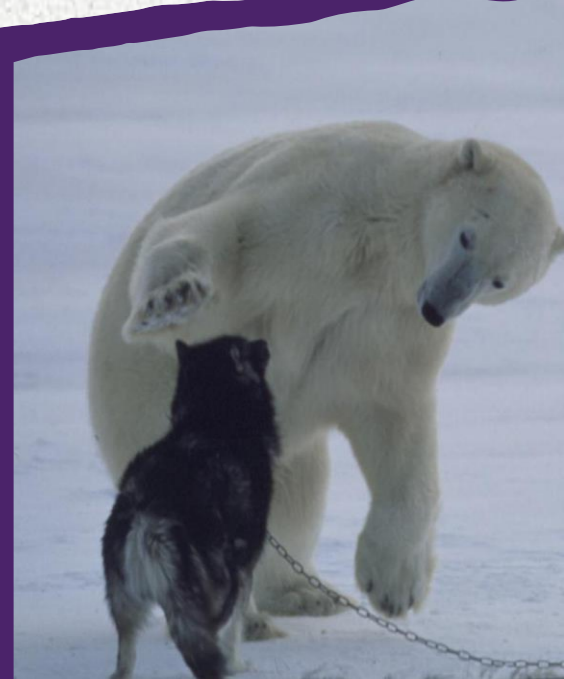
Animals and Play



Animals are even born with
the innate desire to PLAY!



Hudson and the Polar Bear



Understanding Play

- To understand play, we first must look at how each of us played as children – our own play history.
- Did you go on adventures? Were you on top of the jungle gym? Did you play with puzzles? Climb trees? Make mud pies?
- Grab a crayon or two and doodle how you played or your favorite play memory.



Play History

- Research shows children who were fond of puzzles have a high interest in the math world and typically find careers dealing with math or numbers.
- Children who are passionate about art tend to move into roles where their creativity is used.
- What is your PLAY history?



What is PLAY?

Play in our species serves many valuable purposes. It is a means by which children **develop** their **physical, intellectual, emotional, social,** and **moral capacities.**

It is a means of creating and preserving friendships. It also provides a state of mind that, in adults as well as children, is uniquely suited for **high-level reasoning, insightful problem solving,** and all sorts of **creative endeavors.**





What is PLAY?

- **PLAY** stimulates the formation and engagement of neurons in the **prefrontal cortex of the brain**.
- **PLAY** is especially important during childhood because it helps **wire** the area of the brain that controls **executive functioning** (self-regulation, working memory and cognitive flexibility).

PLAY Ball!



What else is happening besides a bunch of kids PLAYing baseball?

Leadership Skills

Observation Skills

Emotional
Intelligence
Skills

Coping Skills

Listening Skills

Creativity Skills

Personal Skills

Self Regulation

Negotiations

Impulse Control

Math Skills

Social Skills

AND

Problem Solving Skills

MORE!

Dr. Stuart Brown

Says that play is critical, not only to happiness, but also to sustaining social relationships, being creative, and finding innovative solutions to problems. What would the world be like without play?

Life without play, Stuart Brown continues, is not merely an absence of sports or games. Without play, books, art, movies, music, dancing, jokes and stories life would disappear. There would be no flirting, no irony, no comedy.

Play adds color to what would otherwise be a dull and boring place. And unfortunately, this is what work has become for many people.



7 Properties of Play

Purposelessness →

Voluntary Nature →

Inherent Attraction →

Freedom of Time →

Diminished Self-Consciousness (flow) →

Improvisational Potential →

Continuation of Desire →

Done for its own sake. Activities that don't seem to have any survival value. They don't help get money or food. They are not done for practical value. It's for its own sake. It's fun. It makes you feel good. It's a cure for boredom and it is psychologically arousing. When we are fully engaged in play - we lose the sense of the passage of time.

We stop worrying about whether we are locked into a rigid way of doing things or open to serendipity, chance. We are willing to include seemingly irrelevant elements into our play. We desire to keep doing it and the pleasure of the experience drives that desire.

Play Personalities

“Play – How it shapes the brain, opens the imagination, and invigorates the soul” – Dr. Stuart Brown

Best Type of Play

- Unstructured free play
- Child led and controlled
- Loose parts
- Active/physical play
- Meaningful to them
- Sociable/interactive
- Adventurous and risky
- Involves Nature



4th Grade Slump in PLAY

Mark Runco, a creativity specialist, studied the creative and PLAY development of children and found that by 4th grade, (8-10yrs) across the globe, play and creativity drastically begin to decline in children.

Society begins to place added responsibilities, demands, expectations and work on children – thus decreasing their available time to play.



This is the problem.

This generation is
PLAYing the least than
any other generation.

United Nations... of PLAY

The United Nations in 1977 even adopted the International Play Association's Declaration of the Children's Right to Play.

- CHILDREN are the foundation of the world's future.
- CHILDREN have played at all times throughout history and in all cultures.
- PLAY, along with the basic needs of nutrition, health, shelter and education, is vital to develop the potential of all children.
- PLAY is communication and expression, combining thought and action; it gives satisfaction and a feeling of achievement.
- PLAY is instinctive, voluntary, and spontaneous.
- PLAY helps children develop physically, mentally, emotionally and socially.
- PLAY is a means of learning to live, not a mere passing of time.

Ohh Phoebe



Do your best Phoebe Run!

What is Recess?



Facts

By the time children are in the classroom, they've been taught to suppress their natural play-based curiosity. Schools reinforce this when they eliminate recess and the arts to make more time for academics.

Dr. Brown discovered that lack of play for children increases the prevalence of:

Depression

Inflexibility, poor adaptability to changing conditions

Lack of empathy

Poor impulse control

Addictive predilections

Mood-driven behavior, and sometimes violence

Fortunately, the awareness that play is linked to positive academic performance is making some policy headway.

Recess vs Brain-break

A brain-break is a fleeting few minute break to give your body a quick jump start.

Recess is at the very least 15 minutes of child-led free play that allows for "flow" to happen.

According to the CDC...

Recess is a regularly scheduled period in the school day for physical activity and play that is monitored by trained staff or volunteers. During recess, students are encouraged to be physically active and engaged with their peers in activities of their choice, at all grade levels, kindergarten through 12th grade.

What is Recess?

RECESS IS A GROUP OF KIDS HUDDLING INSIDE A SLIDE DEVELOPING A PLAN ON HOW TO TO STAY AWAY FROM THE GIANT TROLL WHO BROKE THROUGH THE CASTLE WALLS... **RECESS IS** THE BOY LAYING ON THE GROUND... SILENTLY... LOOKING UP AT THE CLOUDS AND IMAGINING JUST HOW SOFT AND FLUFFY THEY WOULD FEEL ON HIS FACE... **RECESS IS** THAT LITTLE GIRL WHO IS LEARNING HOW TO NEGOTIATE WITH HER FRIENDS WHAT GAME THEY ARE GOING TO PLAY FIRST... **RECESS IS** THAT ONE CHILDS ONLY OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN HOW TO PLAY WITH OTHER KIDS AND HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH THEM IN A GAME OF FREEZE TAG... **RECESS IS** THAT GAME OF KICKBALL THAT NOT ONLY IS LETTING THE KIDS PLAY, BUT LETTING THEM DEVELOP LEADERSHIP SKILLS, PROBLEM SLOVING, RULES, ORDER, FLEXIBILITY AND MORE. **RECESS IS** PLAY AND **PLAY IS** FUNDAMENTAL.

RECESS IS UNSTRUCTURED BUT **PURPOSEFUL** BREAK TIME DURING THE SCHOOL DAY THAT ALLOWS CHILDREN TO ENGAGE IN **PHYSICAL ACTIVITY** AND **SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**.

RECESS IS FREE TIME - WHERE THE ADULTS SIMPLY PROVIDE A SAFE PLACE FOR CHILDREN TO CONTROL THE ACTIVITY, THE ADVENTURE, THE STORY, THE CREATIVITY, THE IMAGINATION, THE SPEED AND THE RESULTS.

But What Does Recess REALLY Do?

Recess benefits students by:

Increasing their level of physical activity.

Improving their memory, attention, and concentration.

Helping them stay on-task in the classroom.

Reducing disruptive behavior in the classroom.

Improving their social and emotional development (e.g., learning how to share and negotiate).

Improving classroom management.

Improving academics... which also means test scores...

But It's Just Play Isn't It?

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY **ENHANCES** NEUROGENESIS WHICH IS THE **CREATION** OF NEW BRAIN CELLS IN REGIONS OF THE BRAIN ASSOCIATED WITH HIGHER-ORDER **THINKING** AND RECALL!

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY **BOOSTS** THE FORMATION OF **SYNAPTIC CONNECTIONS** BETWEEN **NEURONS** IN RESPONSE TO LEARNING AND SENSORY INPUT FROM THE **ENVIRONMENT!**

PLAY BENEFITS THE WHOLE CHILD - NOT JUST ACADEMICALLY - NOT JUST EMOTIONALLY OR SOCIALLY - NOT JUST COGNITIVELY - BUT THE CHILD AS A WHOLE.

THE **NEUROSCIENCE** BEHIND PLAY SHOWS THAT ELIMINATING RECESS IS **WRONG!** ESPECIALLY WITH THE WORK CHILDREN WILL HAVE TO FACE THAT WILL **REQUIRE CREATIVITY & INNOVATION!**

THE EXPERIENCE OF **PLAY** CHANGES THE **CONNECTIONS** OF THE NEURONS AT THE FRONT OF THE BRAIN!!

Okay, But Is There More Science?

- A 2010 Report from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states there is substantial evidence that physical activity can **HELP IMPROVE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT**, including **GRADES** and **TESTING SCORES**

A 2009 STUDY OF 8 AND 9 YEAR OLDS SHOWED THOSE WHO HAD ONE MID DAY RECESS FOR MORE THAN 20 MINUTES HAD BETTER CLASSROOM BEHAVIORS. THIS STUDY REINFORCED A PREVIOUS STUDY FROM 1998 THAT SHOWED 43 4TH GRADERS **GIVEN RECESS**, HAD DECREASED POOR CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR, ENDED UP WORKING HARDER, FOCUSED MORE AND **ACHEIVED BETTER GRADES**.

THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS (AAP) AND OTHER HEALTH ORGANIZATIONS STATE THAT CHILDREN NEED RECESS FOR DEVELOPMENTAL HEALTH. THE AAP RECOMMENDS 60 MINUTES AND THAT "RECESS IS A **NECESSARY** BREAK IN THE DAY FOR **OPTIMIZING** A CHILDS SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, PHYSICAL AND COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT.

A SCHOOL IN TEXAS REPORTED A **DECREASE** IN **BEHAVIORS** ASSOCIATED WITH **ADHD** WHEN THEY **INCREASED** RECESS AND PLAY.

Lack of PLAY

Increased
mental
health
concerns

Increased
Behavior
concerns

Decreased
social skills

Decreased
resilience

Decreased
critical
thinking



What is Recess Not

ACCORDING TO THE **CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION (CDC)** AS WELL AS THE **AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS (AAP)**, RECESS IS NOT THE REPLACEMENT OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION NOR IS IT A WAY TO MEET REQUIREMENTS FOR PHYSICAL EDUCATION. RECESS IS A COMPLIMENT TO PHYSICAL EDUCATION. PHYSICAL EDUCATION IS AN ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE. WHEREAS BOTH HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO PROMOTE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE, ONLY RECESS (SPECIFICALLY UNSTRUCTURED RECESS) PROVIDES THE CREATIVE, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL BENEFITS OF PLAY.

THE **CDC AND AAP** ALSO BELIEVE **RECESS IS NOT** A PART OF THE SCHOOL DAY THAT SHOULD BE OR CAN BE TAKEN AWAY FROM CHILDREN AS A FORM OF PUNISHMENT FOR BEHAVIOR OR ACADEMICS.

Recess Policy

Scheduled into the day

Unstructured outdoor play (weather permitting)

At the very least, 15 minutes twice a day

Cannot remove student for punishment or tutoring

Recess minutes should be separate from physical education minutes

Withholding Recess

**JUST DON'T
DO IT**

Catherine Ramstetter PhD and David Fink PhD conducted research that showed what happened when recess was withheld.

The data from this research indicated that many children experienced anxiety, regret, and sometimes resentment with regard to the practice of withholding recess.

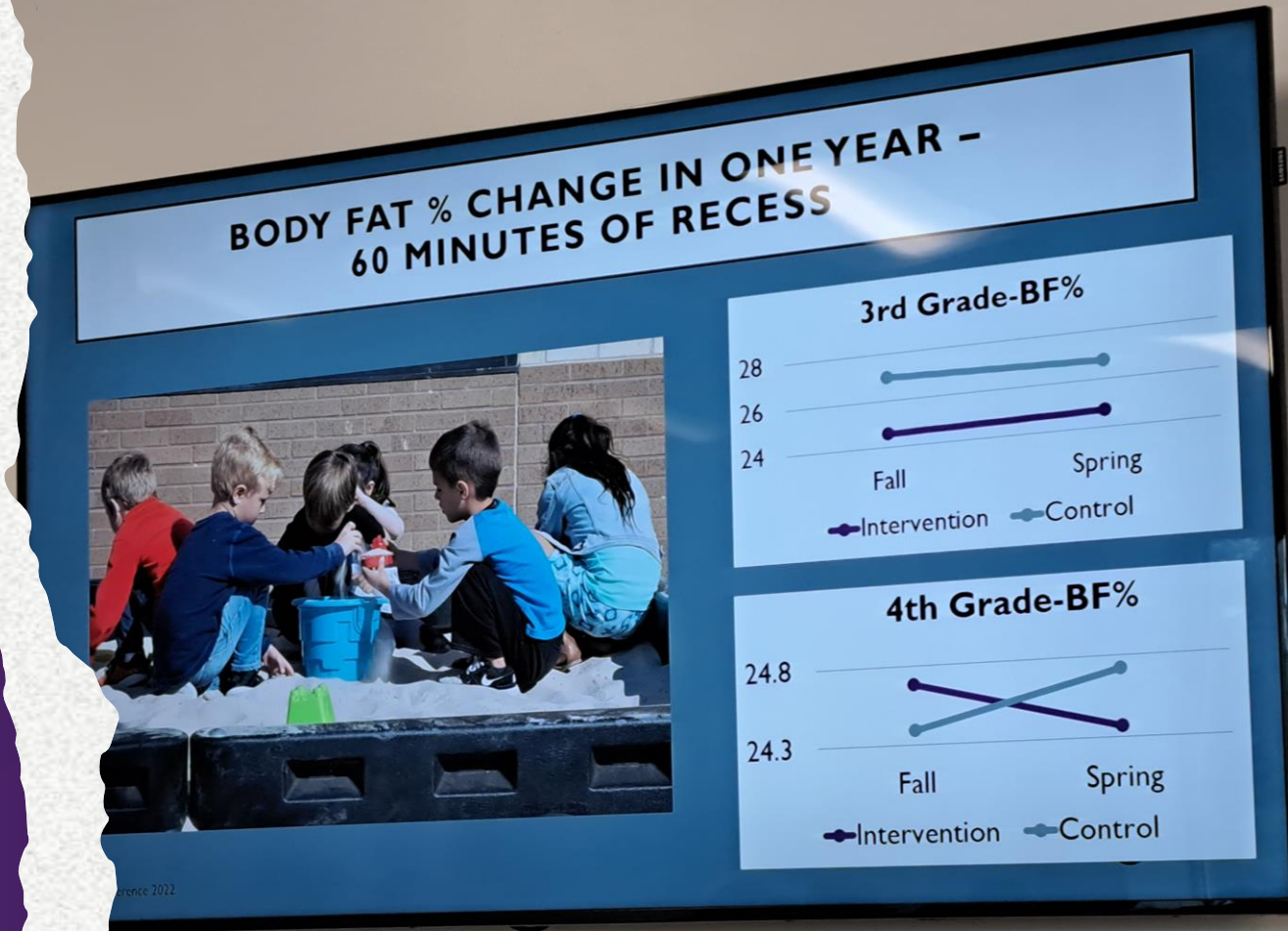
But There Is No Time

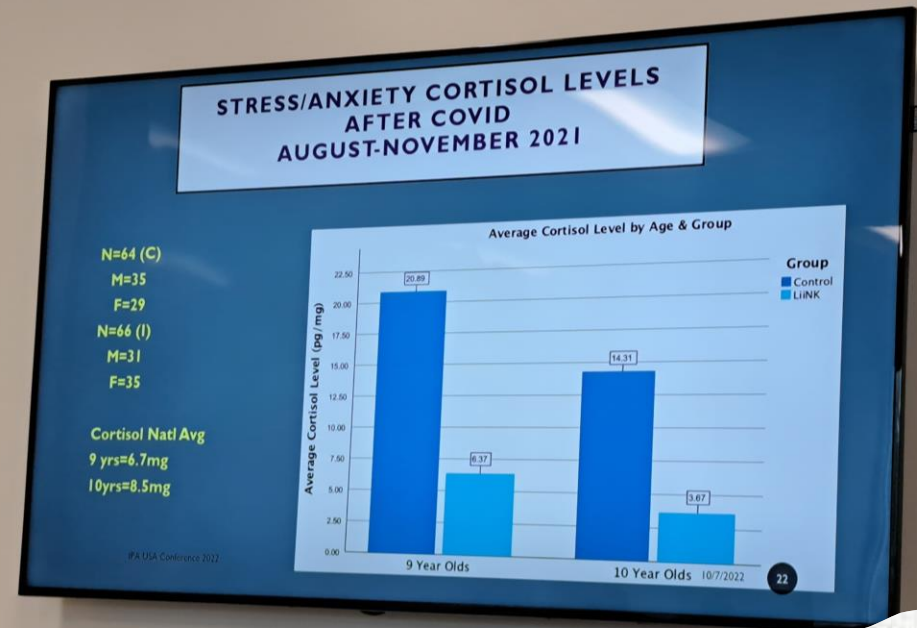
- Since No Child Left Behind began in the early 2000's, recess was cut completely or cut more than half in favor of additional instruction time.
- In 2007 the Center on Education Policy at George Washington University analyzed the change in schools. Their study showed:
 - 62% of schools INCREASED English and Math since 2001
 - 44% CUT time in other subjects (especially arts & music)
 - 20% of schools reduced or removed recess completely
 - This data has only been increasing and got worse after Covid



We Need To Make Time

- 10-20 million children and adolescents in the US have some form of chronic illness or disability
- Technology addiction has risen 37% in teens since Covid (yet we keep using more technology in schools?)
- According to the CDC, 1 out of 6 children are being diagnosed with anxiety and mental health disorders.
- Suicide in young teens is at an all time high.





Is This Serious Enough Yet?

The National Average of Cortisol levels in children prior to COVID were 6.7mg (9yr olds) and 8.5mg (10yr olds)

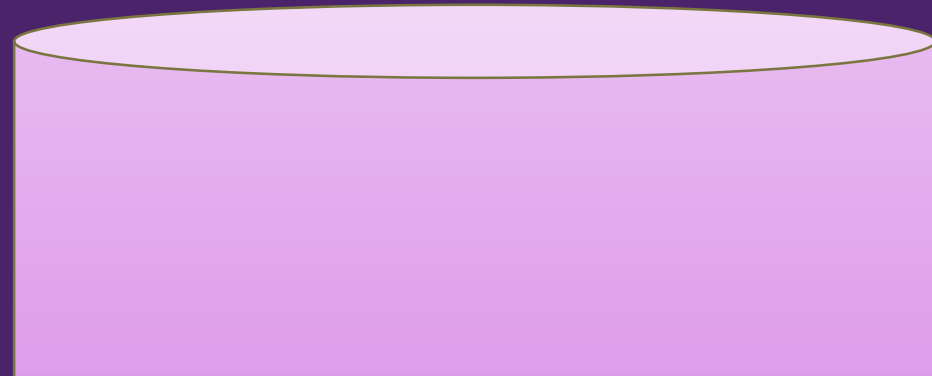
After Covid it rose to 20.89mg (9yr olds) and 14.31 (10 yr olds)

So, Where Does Time Go?

In general, children's schedules are PACKED with different activities throughout their week now more than ever.

Society has shifted over the last 30 years placing more demands on children at younger and younger ages.

A lot of schools are focused more on college readiness of a five year old than teaching how to be kind and have friends.



Dr. Rhea Found Time!

- Dr. Debbie Rhea a professor of Kinesiology and the Director of The Liink Project in Texas, believes 4 – 15 minutes of recess is the best solution – and has successfully implemented an hour of recess into school's daily schedules.
- Dr. Rhea has 8 years of well-documented evidence of what can happen when 60 minutes of recess is adapted.



The Liink Project

HEALTH



12x
more likely to
be a healthy
bodyfat % than
obese

6%
decrease in
overweight and
obese bodyfat %
in one year



PHYSICAL



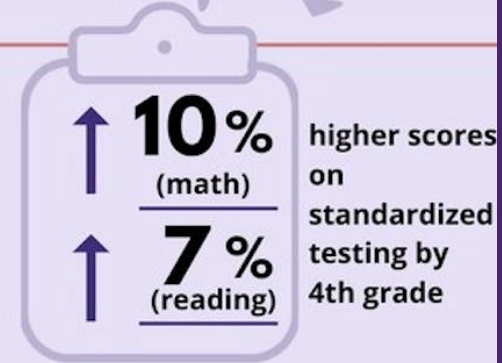
70% of students achieve
age-appropriate
motor skills

97%
of recess time spent
in physical activity

COGNITION



Children spend
67%
of recess time focused on
mid-line crossing physical
activities



SOCIAL EMOTIONAL

17%
increase in
positive
emotions during
recess



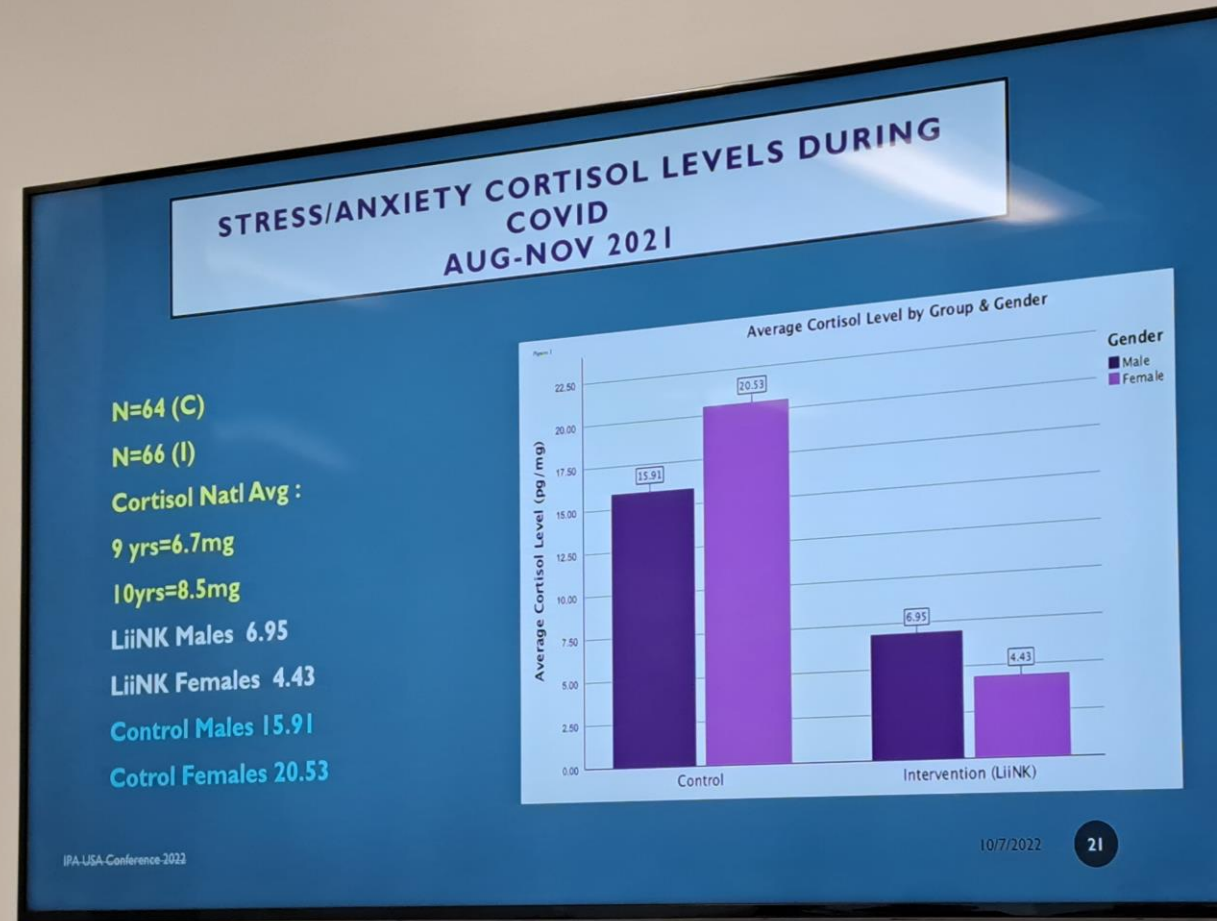
For more detailed
results, scan the QR code
or click [here](#).

70%
less
chronic
stress
and
anxiety

And It's Working!

Remember those Cortisol levels?

- Students who went through three months of the Liink Recess Program saw their Cortisol levels drop drastically. Where the control group, who did not have recess daily or not as often, saw little to no decrease.
- Students who received recess saw their percentage of their body fat go down, where those without recess remained the same or increased.



My Plea to Administrators

- Understand what happens in the classroom when students receive recess. If you don't truly support recess, you set your teachers up for failure. Show them you support it.
- Require play breaks every 60-90 minutes of instruction.
- Less school per day (quality vs quantity)
- Ask our Political powers to support recess in our schools through funding and understanding
- Take a few minutes and ask yourself, why are teachers leaving the field of teaching and in the middle of the year?



You Can Do It – Just Give It Some Time

- Practice makes perfect.
- Get into a routine with the students.
- After a few weeks the transition time will take less and become more smoothly – allowing for recess to come easier.





**A Little Risk
Is OKAY
Too...**

Risky Play



- Risky Play is how our brains develop risk assessment we need as adults.

Kids Need to Play – and Adults Need to Let Them

Play for play's sake has always been good enough for me— it's the natural way humans grow and develop. Play shouldn't need us to describe to others why it's important, right? Isn't it obvious?!

But, sometimes **play does need us**. The adult world prioritizes many things for children and sadly play is not always one of them. The good thing is that play checks every developmental box that "powers that be" care about: brain, language, social, physical, science, math, engineering, emotional, on and on. **It's an easy argument.**

- Rusty Keeler





**Amazing things happen when we
allow kids to play**

Clifford Stoll

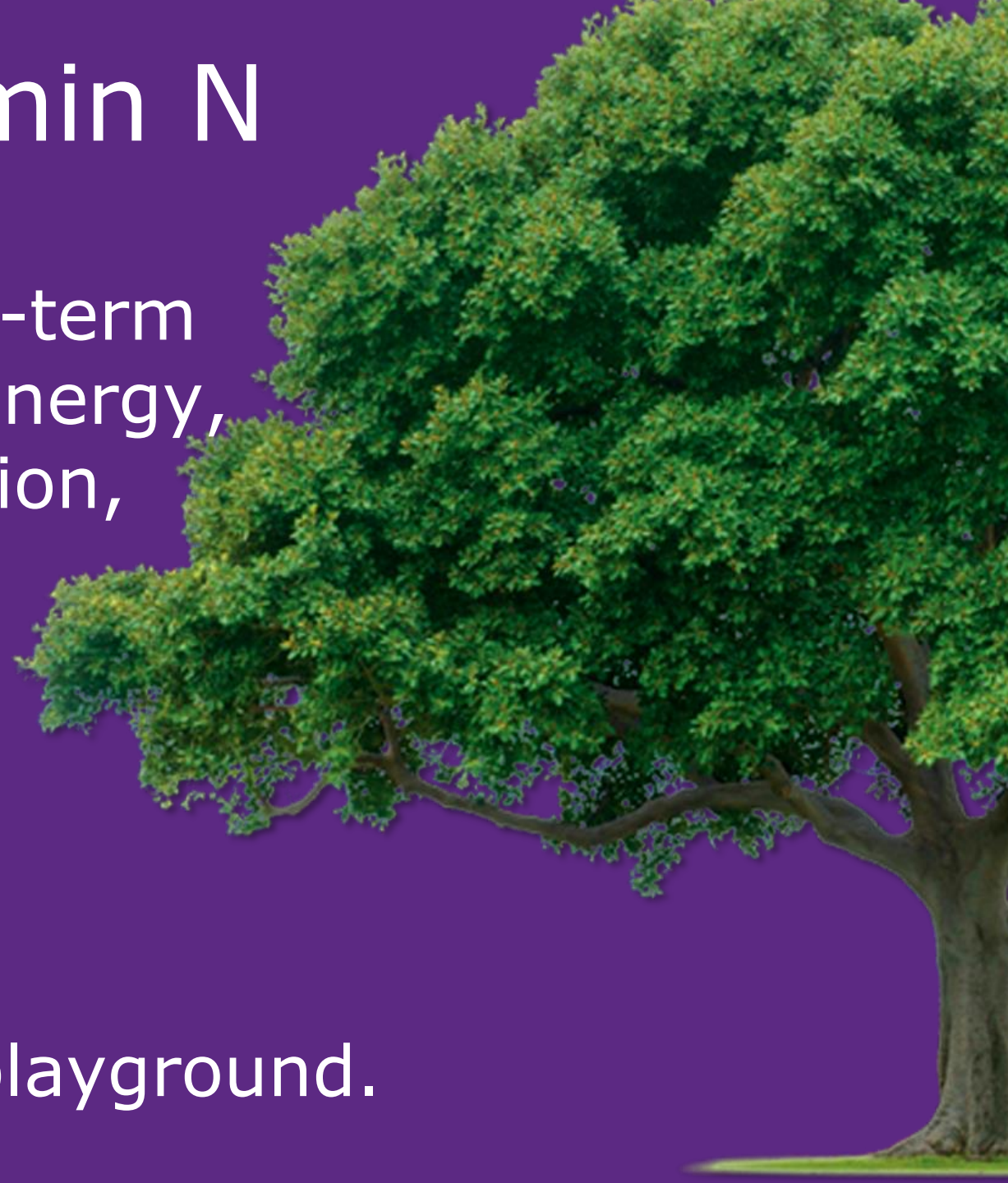
“I don’t wonder what things will be like in the future, I wonder what’s society going to be like when the kids today are phenomenally good at text messaging and spend a huge amount of on-screen time but have never gone bowling together...”

Nature PLAY – Vitamin N

Stress relief, improved short-term memory, increased mental energy, less inflammation, better vision, improved concentration, creativity and over all improved mental health.

It's free.

It's a never-ending natural playground.





Call to Action

- Play more!
- Take classes outside more!
- Participate in the National Walk, Bike or Roll to School Days
- Participate in Global School Play Day
- Participate in the FIRST EVER International Play Association USA Day of Play this September
- Participate in Outdoor Classroom Day
- Make playing outside homework!

Play Advocate

Lindsay Braver Dzielski

(716)440-8827

lindsay.dzielski@yahoo.com

kidsneedtoplay.org

[facebook.com/COTneighborsunited](https://www.facebook.com/COTneighborsunited)

Don't forget to go

PLAY

today.

