Podcast for Parents: Parents Supporting Play

Author, Kindergarten teacher, dance teacher, and parent, Madeleine Rogin, illustrates the impact of play for wellness and learning. Memories of joyful and meaningful play experiences help bind families together emotionally, even long after children are grown. A great reward for all involved.

Read Madeleine's article, "Emphasizing the Importance of Play During Distance Learning" here.

Read Madeleine's article, "Five Essentials to Meaningful Play" here.

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PODCAST TRANSCRIPTSteve [Intro]: 00:00 Hello, and welcome to the parents as learning coaches edition of the Steve Barkley Ponders Out Loud podcast. Parents and caregivers play many different roles, at times, even somewhat conflicting roles as they support children's development. The pandemic has shown a light on the importance of parents supporting learners. In this podcast, I'll look to share my experiences as a teacher,

educator, parent, grandparent, and continuous learner that can support your coaching efforts.
Steve: 00:32 Parents supporting play today. We are joined by Madeleine Rogin, a parent of two, a kindergarten and dance teacher in El Cerito, California. I contacted her after reading a piece that she had written about the importance of play during the time of of distance learning. Welcome Madeleine.

Madeleine: 00:59 Thank you. I'm happy to be here.

Steve: 01:01 The very opening of your article, you described how you miss watching your students play during the quarantine and I wonder if you'd just start by sharing a little bit of that with parents.

Madeleine: 01:14 Oh my goodness. I mean, we, so like, so many of us went into this distance learning experience, very abruptly at my school, and didn't really – weren't really prepared for it. One day we were just told we're taking it all home, grab your stuff, go home, teach online. And I had so many questions about how to do that with little kids, but I just found myself missing the experience of being with children in the classroom and what I was really missing was what we call "choice time" in kindergarten. So the time of day where students are just playing. We put out lots of open-ended materials, blocks and watercolors and lots of different things and they are completely immersed in a way that they aren't in any other part of the day at school. It's all self-driven. They are so excited about being together in this playful way and sharing the things that they're creating and their ideas of each other.

Madeleine: 02:12 They have such thoughtful ideas during play, and I missed hearing their dialogue, you know, when they would just create
worlds. And I just sit there and listen to, you know, how the bears are going to guard the castle. And now here comes a big

dragon! And you know, all of this imaginary play that was so beautiful to listen to and in the way that they would solve problems too, you know, when things would happen and they'd be the ones to say, "well, if there's only one purple block, then we shouldn't have a purple block, because then it's not fair for everybody." So they would get rid of the purple blocks on their own so that everybody could have the other blocks and no one felt bad. So seeing them working out like, they're just growing ideas around empathy and fairness and all of it coming from them, I just really, I miss that a lot.

Steve: 03:03 Well, I thought of you this week when I stopped at the at the grocery store and here in Switzerland with all the produce, they have scales that that print the price. So you pick up your produce and you put it on the scale and press the button that tells the scale what it is that you bought and it prints off the little sticker to put on it. And as I was approaching the scale, this little lad, somewhere between two and three came up to the scale and he was carrying a can, which I don't know where he got, but he reached up, it was like up over the top of his head. He plopped it on the scale, but then realized he couldn't reach any of the buttons to push them. So I was watching for a while. So he looked around and he found a sticker that somebody didn't use and he picked it up and put the sticker on and headed off over to the to the shopping cart. And I was just laughing the whole time I was watching him. It was so much fun.

Madeleine: 04:10 Oh, that's great. It's so funny, I see my kids doing things like that in the classroom a lot. We have fake – not fake, we have scales that they can use to, you know, take different little toys or stuffed animals and practice weighing them. And it's really fun to see how serious they are about their experiments that they're creating, you know?

Steve: 04:30 Yeah. Just terrific. So I'm wondering if you could talk about the the importance of play and the impact

that it has on physical, mental, social-emotional wellbeing. How does it plug in there?

Madeleine: 04:48 I think it's so important. I know that social-emotional learning is becoming more and more valued and, you know, adopted by so many schools like, really great robust programs. We have one that we use called the toolbox, which is about giving kids these different tools that they have, you know, whether it's like the empathy tool or the listening tool, and then they practice using their tools in different ways. And I love the fact that schools are adopting this because it's so essential to this, you know, whole child, the wellbeing of students that we really pay attention to what's happening emotionally, and that they start to name their feelings and recognize feelings in others. And I have to say, you know, I worry sometimes just like in all aspects of teaching that when it's too top down, when it's too much about, here's the curriculum, and here's what you need to know, that if we don't balance that with giving kids the opportunity to practice and have a lot of time with each other in play, especially young children, but I think children of all ages need these opportunities to experience conflict, to experience a problem.

Madeleine: 06:04 You know, when kids are playing, they are so self-directed and so motivated to solve their own problems in a way that they're not at other times of the day, because they have these goals that they've set for themselves. You know, whether it's, I really want – we have these beautiful tools in our class called Magna-Tiles, that they all fit together in these different ways and they're very colorful and they're very popular. And so often, there's conflict around them and the students have to file these conflicts with each other and through play, they're able to discover new ways of communicating with each other, and they're able to practice using language around this is how I feel. We teach in our class something called "i-messages," which is when you're

having an emotion, it's difficult and you're angry at somebody to say, instead of saying, "stop it" or "why did you do that?" To say, "I feel sad when I don't have what I need when I'm playing." And, "I would like to have some more blocks," or "I feel sad when you walked away from me." So really practicing, locating the feeling and communicating it to their friends and that all happens during play naturally. So I think that's really important – all these skills that they're working on through play just socially-emotionally are so important.

Steve: 07:25 As I was listening to you, I'm thinking of watching kids play in the yard or on a playground with other kids or playing at home alone. What's the role that a parent – I was going to ask what the role is, but I guess I'm better asking, what's the thinking that that would be doing as they're watching kids?

Madeleine: 07:51 I love that question. So often, I think we can, I've done it as a parent, we want to direct, and we want things to go a certain way. I think it happens because we have ideas about how things should be, whether it's that, you know, we should always be nice to each other, lids should never fight or if they do fight, it should look a certain way or, you know, it makes us uncomfortable. I know for me, I don't like it when my kids fight. And I remember my mom, when I would fight with my sister, my mom would always say, "birds in their little nest agree." And that didn't really work, but we, you know, I understand that feeling to want to kind of direct and then have things look a certain way, but what really is powerful for kids – when parents are present, when they're near, when they're as much as he can be, you know, like, I'm imagining play outside in the backyard or play somewhere where you are sort of near what's happening to be able to listen in and notice when they might need some support or guidance that isn't necessarily telling them, here's what you need to do, here's what you need to say, but saying, have you – first of all, asking questions.

Madeleine: 08:55 Like, “how are you feeling?” Or noticing — giving kids, you know, recognizing that you see what’s happening for them. So rather than saying, “why are you doing that?” Saying, “I’m noticing that you seem frustrated, are you feeling frustrated?” And allowing kids to name their emotions before they get to the next step, which is what they need to happen or what they want to be different. So a lot of listening and watching and observing, and then giving them guidance, you know, whether it’s have you tried telling your sister, “I really am sad because I really wanted to play this game with you” and allowing the other child to also communicate their feelings and needs. Another thing that parents can do that can be really fun is just taking notes on what your children are saying and doing when they’re playing.

Madeleine: 09:51 I mean, it’s really fun to have that just for your own memories and to talk about later when your kids are older, but also because you’re learning all of these new and different things about your kids when they’re playing, because they’re creating these worlds often, especially in imaginary play. And just to notice what’s happening and what they’re interested in and what kinds of characters they develop and how these characters that they develop in play can influence them in non play times. You know, like you can bring that back to your child and say, I remember when you were the queen of the world. You remember that feeling when you were the queen of the world and what you, and how you were so powerful and all these beautiful things that happened when you were playing that game. I think for kids, they feel really valued and seen in a different way when the adults around them pay attention to the way that they play.

Madeleine: 10:40 I think it makes them feel like, really important in a really nice way. And it’s kind of, again, this is coming from them. So it’s a way that you can honor who your child is. And, you know, that’s very child centered. It’s not so much about, you know, what have you achieved or how are you

doing your chores, or, you know, how are you doing in school, but more just being present for this other part of their creativity.

Steve: 11:11 One of the one of the sites that you recommended in an article that that I followed up on, I found this quote, it's really connecting to what you're saying now and as a parent and grandparent, I'm going to hang on to this quote. It said, "memories of joyful and meaningful play experiences, help bind families together emotionally, even long after children are grown." Can you speak to that a little?

Madeleine: 11:46 Well, when we're playing, adults too, because I know when I play, mostly it's with, because I'm a teacher, it's more – it's rare to have experiences with other adults when you're actually playing in the way that kids play. But it happened. I remember when my school did I get an intentional play bonding activity and all the teachers went to this place called adventure playground and we all played together for a couple hours. And to that quote, I remember that forever because I saw things in my colleagues I'd never seen before. Like the kind of silliness and joy and the way that there were these zip lines at the playground and I saw teachers on those ziplines that I never would have expected would do something like that. And we had challenges we had to complete. You know, I think so you're learning new things about each other in play and it can be surprising.

Madeleine: 12:39 And I think those moments, it feels like time stops and it's very rich in a different way than other other times of the day when things are again, more kind of goal oriented and in different way, or you have tasks that you need to accomplish. I mean, this is a time when it's almost like being in the theater. You know, that feeling of being in the theater where it's kind of magical, anything could happen, everybody's an actor and we don't get those experiences a lot outside of play and especially as adults. So doing that with kids, I mean, those are the things I think your children

remember too, when you're able to enter into that world. And whether it's a game that you all play together or some experiencing nature where you're just kind of, you know, children love to go into nature and like make forts anywhere, especially young kids, like in the house, anywhere. And if you enter into that with them, like go into the fort with them and even just read in there or allow them to tell you their ideas about their building. Yeah, I think it does have a magical quality that creates these really beautiful memories.

Steve: 13:49 You're spinning me back to one with my grandkids. And they're separated by by five years, but we spent the day picnicking on the side of a creek, pretty big creek, but we went in and built a hot tub by piling the rocks up and sitting in the tub as the water – and that was probably five years ago and it's not uncommon if we're anywhere near a creek or reexamining a spot that we're at, they'll go back to that story and say something about the hot tub or something that happened that day. So it really did sink in our memories.

Madeleine: 14:38 Right. And for them to see you as a participant in that play, you know, that I think is so meaningful for kids to know that their family members, the adults around them want to go there them, you know, I think it means a lot.

Steve: 14:55 My 13 year old grandchild is a swimmer and just loves the water. I mean, constant water. And they just last week, took two days off to sneak to the shore for some fresh air out of the quarantine. But the picture that I got sent was my daughter going into the water that was way too cold, but she had to go in because her 13 year old daughter was shaming her into play.

Madeleine: 15:32 [laughter] The things we

Steve: 15:32 And I know that that's a precious moment that they'll hang on to.

Madeleine: 15:38 And that's interesting is there always is risk I think involved, especially for adults, it's not necessarily always about getting into cold water, but the risk of seeming childlike or the risk of losing authority in some way.

Steve: 15:52 Trust me, I've been the dragon underneath the sliding board, trying to grab a leg of the of the person going down the board and having to growl from under there and hope that there weren't other adults who saw me hiding there. But you're right, those moments, they do stick with us forever. I'm wondering if there's any last words of encouragement you'd like to leave for parents here?

Madeleine: 16:20 Well, I just keep thinking about – I know like I'm a single parent and time can be full and there's lots of can constraints
in there's stress and so I'm just thinking about like empathizing with parents who, you know, may be thinking, well, this sounds great, but we're busy and you know, how can we actually make play happen at home? And I guess I would just say, you know, thinking back to my own childhood what really works for me as a child with my mom, especially who's an artist and a playwright, was when I always wanted her to kind of just be present for me. And when she would do that and allow us to write plays together or act out scenes, or, you know, just kind of enter into play in this theatrical way, I always felt so loved. And so I guess I would just say for parents, it really is pretty simple to create an environment where children are showing you how they play.

Madeleine: 17:17 And it really is just about being present and maybe taking a moment, like an hour or a half hour to just kind of sit with your kids and ask them questions. Like, what are you interested in right now? What are you doing when you play? And watching, especially with young kids, it's a lot of observing, but with older kids, it's conversation about their curiosity and what they're really interested in. And play

looks different at different ages. And sometimes it is just dialogue. Sometimes it's just, you know, that. But just for parents to know it's complicated and I think it can really, it can relieve stress when you slow down a little bit, especially now with everything being so kind of at our fingertips. And sometimes it involves like leaving the house and going into the yard away from distractions, but just that simplicity of being present for your kids, I think is what I'd say.

Steve: 18:10 Thank you. It's a great connect. I just recorded a podcast this week with a school counselor focusing on middle school kids. And her advice for parents was that conversation was that was that critical spot and play, it actually creates an easier time with older students to have that conversation during a playful moment, rather than an investigatory parent question.

Madeleine: 18:44 Exactly. Yes. And also that reminds me too, as the importance of older kids as being really – and they don't love this all the time. I have two teenagers who are like mom, stop telling us about your childhood, but I still do it because I want them to know stories from my own life. So I feel like for parents of older kids, to be able to just relay times that you felt really excited about your own creativity or playing or learning, whatever that moment is that you want to connect around with your kids to be able to share your own experiences I think is really important too.

Steve: 19:21 Thank you. Thank you. Madeleine, we'll put your we'll put your email address into the lead-in to this podcast along with links to that that article that I mentioned, you want to go ahead and go and share your your email address so that people who are listening can grab onto it too?

Madeleine: 19:42 Yes. So it's my full name, which is madeleinerogin@gmail.com. A lot of the writing that I've done is on Medium. So you can
find that at medium.com and just search under my name and a

lot of the blogs that I've written are on there. Yeah, and I'm coming out with a book.

Steve: 20:05 Oh, terrific.

Madeleine: 20:05 Yes, it's called "Early and Often: An Educator's Guide to Conversations About Race and Racism With Young Children" and actually meeting you has inspired me to propose a book about play.

Steve: 20:21 Alright!

Madeleine: 20:21 So I just put that into the company I work with and then hopefully we'll get this into, I keep thinking about it beause I
really appreciate these conversations. I think it's so important to talk about play right now.

Steve: 20:34 Well let me know when your new book comes out and we'll have you back on the podcast around that book.

Madeleine: 20:40 Yay!

Steve: 20:41 Alright, thank you.

Madeleine: 20:41 Thank you.

Steve [Outro]: 20:44 Thank you for listening. You can subscribe to Steve Barkley Ponders Out Loud on iTunes and Podbean. And please remember to rate and review us on iTunes. I also want to hear what you're pondering. You can find me on Twitter @stevebarkley, or send me your questions and find my videos and blogs at barkleypd.com.