

Sir Ken Robinson Explains How Parents Can Know the Four Signs of 'Real Play'

Imagine you send your children outside to blow off some steam. They head to the playground that sits right next to your property. No problem, right? They're in sight and practically in your yard.

The next thing you know, Child Protective Services shows up. Much to your astonishment, you discover that your children are not allowed to play unsupervised at the playground adjoining your house. In addition, they're also not allowed to play in their own unfenced yard without adult supervision – at least until they're over seven years old.

Perfect.

Unfortunately, this is not fiction. It happened to a normal, well-functioning family in my neck of the woods a few weeks ago. And if it can happen to them, it could happen to any of us. Sadly, good ol' fashioned play is going extinct.

The alleged well-being of children is the reason cited for stamping out play. They could get hurt. They have better things to do. Their time is better spent learning than playing.

But isn't play one of the best ways a child can learn?

Famed educator and speaker Sir Ken Robinson believes it is. Penning the forward to the new book, [*Let the Children Play*](#), Robinson explains how play helps children develop physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially.

Play, Robinson says, helps children learn to interact with others, to “practice teamwork, communication, and problem-

solving.” Children also learn to express their emotions properly and think outside the box when confronting various situations through play.

But will these growth opportunities go by the wayside as society becomes more cautious and bubble-wrapped? How can we ensure that children have the opportunity for “real play,” not just structured physical activity?

Robinson provides four criteria that parents can use to measure “real play”:

Real play is not a particular activity: it is a state of mind, in which all sorts of activities are done, such as playing with sand and water, painting, skipping, climbing, chasing, role play, juggling, and hiding games. It involves all the senses and being physically active. These are some of the common characteristics of real play:

- *It is self-initiated and self-motivated: Real play is freely chosen. If children are forced to play, they may not feel in a state of play at all.*
- *It is creative: Children engage in make-believe that bends reality to accommodate their interests and imagination.*
- *It is active: Real play engages children physically as well as mentally.*
- *It has negotiated rules: The rules of play come from the child, including entry to and from the game and what counts as acceptable behavior within it.*

Parents are smart and want what is best for their children. As such, they can easily see that Robinson’s recommendations are common sense. The question is, will the state and others outside the family realize this? Or will they decide to interfere and tell families how, where, and when their

children can engage in the all-important activity of play?

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