

It's Okay If You Don't Like to Play

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SUMMARY

Dr. Becky addresses the challenges many parents face with play, particularly those who don't enjoy it. She emphasizes that it's okay to not like playing with children and offers strategies to engage in play without feeling overwhelmed or guilty.

- *It's normal for parents to dislike certain types of play; acknowledging this can alleviate guilt.*
- *Setting boundaries around playtime (e.g., committing to a short duration) can make it more manageable.*
- *Reflecting on one's own childhood experiences can help understand discomfort with play.*
- *Parents can use playtime to explore different aspects of themselves, not just for their children's benefit.*
- *Communication with children about play expectations can prevent frustration and promote cooperation.*
- *Parents should prioritize their own needs and feelings during play, allowing for personal growth.*
- *The mantra "I don't love playing with my kids, and that doesn't mean I'm a bad person" can help parents engage more positively with play.*
- *The Good Inside membership offers resources and community support for parents navigating these challenges.*

hi i'm dr becky and this is good inside i'm a clinical psychologist and mom of three on a mission to rethink the way we raise our children [Music] i love translating deep thoughts about parenting into practical actionable strategies that you can use in your home right away one of my core beliefs is that we are all doing the best we can with the resources we have available to

us in that moment so even as we struggle and even as we are having a hard time on the outside we remain good inside today's episode is all about play but it's a really important episode about a certain aspect of play it's about what to do if you don't really like playing

with your kids or if you don't like playing at all a couple things right off the bat number one it's okay to not like playing and when we talk today together about various strategies around how to tolerate play or how to kind of understand this in yourself let me also say right from the back you also are allowed to not play with your kid you can say i'm not available you can say huh i need some more time you can say i

know you can think about something on your own there are so many ways to approach play both in terms of not engaging in it and in terms of understanding what comes up for us which might actually change the way we think about play and might end up changing the way we can actually enjoy it so with all that in mind let's jump in [Music]

let's hear from our first caller maddie hi dr becky my name is maddie i live outside of new york city i have a

nine-year-old son and a seven-year-old daughter and i'm calling because i'm having a struggling with play with my children i find that i'm really good when it comes to playing a board game or playing cards or lego my nine-year-old really loves to make up games and wants me to play with it and this is something that i just

dread and i never had play with my parents when i was growing up they sat me in front of the tv and i still want my children to engage and play but i just don't know i don't know how to do it and i am struggling and it makes me sad that i am not excited to play with my children thank you so much have a great day hi maddie first of all thank you so much for this

real raw say it how it is voicemail i promise you there are thousands hundreds of thousands millions of parents who will hear this and think oh i'm not the only one you are not alone a couple ideas for you number one and this by far is the most important one for you or anyone listening to this who also struggles

with play nothing is wrong with you realizing that it's okay to not like play or pretend play is the single most important thing that will help you engage in more play i know that's bizarre there's a huge paradox there so let me explain more we all do things we don't like i don't know about you but i don't like taking out the trash i also don't particularly like unloading the dishwasher i do both of those on the

regular here's what i know if every time i took out the trash and i didn't like it i had a voice that said becky you are so lazy you do nothing for anyone you're so selfish well i wouldn't be able to take out the trash not because i didn't like it but because i was confronted essentially with a self-belief like i was a bad person we can all do things we don't like to do none of us can do things

that bring up a belief that we're a bad person we can do things we don't like we can't do things that make us feel bad about ourselves so let's kind of together say out loud i don't like playing i don't particularly like pretend play i don't particularly like when my kid creates games and made up rules it's not really my thing but i want to go a step further maddie i want to say those same things

with another statement i don't particularly like to engage in play or in pretend play and that doesn't mean anything about the type of person i am i know this is why i can take out the trash i don't like taking out the trash and that doesn't mean anything about the type of person i am now i can take out the trash so realizing that you don't like play is actually the key to kind of liberating yourself from the way that

that can feel so heavy separate out not liking it from the type of person or parent you are next step with your son i'd suggest naming it and limiting it what do we name and what do we limit something like this hey you want to play this game and you want to make up the rules that's so cool you can be so creative here's the thing i want to be honest with you playing games with different rules it's

really hard for me it's really hard for me and i'm working on it because i know you love it and i want to do more of the things you love so i'm going to do it and i want to tell you i can do that for four minutes today and maybe

my sense is four minutes that's nothing i know well four is more than zero and four is less than maybe the 30 you want four is what i have

today i can do four and then maybe another day i could do a little bit more what do you think you're allowed to put parameters on that and i promise you maddie your body will have a sense of ease if you know there's a boundary around it right if you know i don't like to do this type of play i can do it for four minutes now you're going to engage in it in a more kind of interactive present way and also

i think you'll be building your muscle for that type of play which might mean the next time you're willing to do six minutes because it doesn't feel as much of a chore because it's something you've had more experience with a couple other things the next idea is something you're already doing and i really want to just notice that you're already so reflective about kind of how your past maybe comes alive in your parenting our discomfort

is often a sign of a larger story and i think yes your discomfort with this kind of pretend creative play likely does connect to what you said to the fact that you didn't really build your creative play muscle in your childhood probably you had to shut it down why because kids generally love to play it's kind of their work it's their world and so when you were sitting on the couch my guess is there was a part of you

that was thinking uh i would love my parent to play a game with me and how does a kid cope with that well they develop a different part of them that actually looks to protect them even though it sounds kind of mean but just protect them from the disappointment and the unavailability so my guess is you had another voice that would say stop that's so silly or maybe even that's so stupid to play a game like

that that's so stupid oh it's so ridiculous it doesn't even make sense now let's fast forward 30 40 50 years and you're a parent and your child is essentially in the same place now as you were as a kid where there's a part of your child saying hey i want to play a creative game and it makes sense that that voice in you that says oh it's so stupid or doesn't make sense would come up because that's

what you had to do to help yourself when you were younger so what can we do along those lines i think first develop compassion for that child part of you i really mean this maddie maybe talk to her like imagine that couch you were sitting on watching tv and maybe imagine you yeah you today that adult you sitting on the couch next to her i don't know what you'd say you have the best words i promise

it might be something like i bet you wish you had someone to play with you it's okay to want that or huh i bet it can feel a little lonely not having someone to play with right now i get that or maybe it would be hey just because no one's playing with you that doesn't mean play isn't super important remember that i also think there'll be so many other ideas in this episode

that will be really helpful for you so again thank you for calling and keep listening [Music] let's hear from our next caller ashley hi dr becky my name is ashley my kids are eight and almost six and i live in salt lake city utah

i'm calling in response to your question about playing do we like to play how is it going i feel like i'm in a support group my

name is ashley and i don't like to play i like to play some things i like board games and puzzles i can get into some sports but like one thing i really struggle with is imaginative play my younger one in particular she loves to like imagine and when she even if she's building blocks it's mainly about imaginings it's dolls it's all the things i really struggle but then there's this extra kind of layer that i'm struggling

with where so i don't love to play but i say okay i'm going to sit down i'm going to do it for 20 minutes or something and i give myself that goal and then while we're playing she gets really controlling around how we play and i first of all sometimes it's frustrating and i have to just like deal with my own triggers because i feel like i'm here i'm trying and now you're bossing me and so

once i've like kind of taken a deep breath and calmed myself down from that i just feel like am i supposed to parent here or am i just supposed to let her boss me um like a couple times i've like really engaged and had some what i thought was an interesting idea and then she's just like dumped it out or something because it wasn't the way she wanted it to be and i see this also happen in

social relationships with her friends and so i want to help her in that moment but also i don't i'm trying to play and i feel like i have to switch with this switch to like now be the bossy parent or the thoughtful or wise parent and i just don't even know how to tackle this problem and i don't know if other people see this coming up but it's something that happens in my home all the time and

i was wondering if you had any advice thank you hi ashley you know my first reaction is really i want you and maddie to find each other and talk i feel like you would really like each other and i don't know if either of you are part of the good inside platform but if you are please dm me and i'll connect you with each other and so many other parents who struggle with play okay some ideas

first and i think this is good for all of us right now pause and think about the free play you have in your own life yes in our adult life when do i play when do i pretend when do i imagine actually it's interesting i'm asking these questions out loud to all of you but i'm reflecting on them as well and i feel like tearful thinking about this for me too you know

my adult life all of us our adult lives can get so serious so logical so linear so planned that we can almost fool ourselves into believing that this is the important way or the right way to do life although i think there's just like a knowing inside all of us as adults that's saying play matters having a space to explore to experiment to try to create it matters i know that for me too

it's why when i start doing art with my daughter when she asks i find myself a little bit taken away with it and i promise you i have very very very little artistic talent but there's something about essentially just telling myself

you know using these colored pencils on a paper and seeing what happens it matters i'm allowed to have this time and so what's an intervention around that i think all of us could probably carve out a little bit more time in our lives

for free play for telling ourselves it matters whether it's art whether it's baking whether it's dancing it's stuff that's like good for the soul and then there isn't such a big gap between the way we live our lives and the things our kids want to do essentially to run their lives i think we'd all probably enjoy a little bit more play with our kids if we invited it into our life and the moments without our kids okay what else

so you raise a really good question sometimes during play i see kind of brought to light the things my kid struggles with my kids being really bossy or my kids really struggling with frustration tolerance can i just play should i just play and go with it is there a teaching moment here i'm all about optionality so number one let me say if you're playing with your kid and you're thinking i just don't want to get into this right now keep

playing if your kid is bossing you around and you think yes this is an issue and yes i don't have it in me trust that and go with it a different option there's a way where you can allow your child to continue taking on that role and kind of process it with them so let me give an example maybe you're building blocks of the child and your child always kind of tells you what to build and you say something like i

want to build a castle today let's build a castle in your head kid says no no castle there's no way we're building a fire department castles are the worst right okay if i have it in me i might say something like this that allows me to kind of see the play continue and you know kind of process or build some skills at the same time huh there's something about a fire department that feels really important huh i don't even know if it's the fire

department or if it's just the fact that it's your idea huh seems really important we do fire and not a castle now even if i end up saying nothing else right ashley i've intervened i've added kind of a level of awareness right i've done something dan siegel calls mind sight i've seen into my child's mind which helps a child become more reflective and reflection is really a foundation for regulation and change right so i've already done

something maybe i continue huh i wonder if it would feel like it was no fun at all to build blocks and do someone else's idea it's almost like if we did a castle like it doesn't even count as play because play supposed to be fun and now i'm not doing my idea and this is no fun i wonder if it almost feels like that again i'm just putting words to what my child might be struggling with which inherently changes

the moment okay option three use play to experiment with a new role so let's go back to that situation and i'm feeling especially energetic as a parent i say oh i'm gonna kind of use this moment in a teaching way uh while engaging in play i might say this well you know what i don't want to build a fire department i know i don't usually say that but i don't and look sometimes when we play and what i would do here is kind of be

building with blocks as i say this as opposed to locking eyes with my child that sometimes when we play it just

kind of feels like if it's not the thing you want to do then we can't do anything and i want you to listen to my ideas too and that doesn't mean your ideas are bad and sometimes we can do yours and sometimes we can do mine and sometimes we can have a super amazing idea where

we take your idea and my idea and maybe combine it into a different idea but if it's always your idea well i'm just gonna go do something else because that's not always fun for me now ashley is this something you have to do and if you don't do this you're some horrible parent who missed some amazing learning opportunity no and no i like having many options right go with the flow go with the flow and kind of add some

commentary around it or don't go with the flow if you feel like there's a rigidity that you want to kind of help your child experience movement around one more idea for you and this is an idea for anyone where you notice your child in play ends up struggling with things so maybe one of the reasons you don't like to play is because play ends up being difficult talk about it in advance in this situation ashley you might be saying

this yeah i'd love to do some blocks let's do it oh one second one second one second you know what i'm thinking about sometimes when you have an idea of what to do and i have an idea of what to do it feels like the only way we can keep playing together is if it's your idea and i'm just wondering now before we start i don't know we could take a deep breath together and think about how maybe this time we

could do my idea or at least find a way to do both of our ideas so now instead of waiting until the moment comes i'm front-ending it i'm getting ahead of it and one thing i know is that all of us kids and adults do better when we have a little more time to process [Music] let's hear from our final caller brittany

hi dr becky it's brittany from nashville tennessee i have three beautiful children eight five and three and playing with them is not my most favorite thing i oftentimes will begin to play and will work my character in a role of i will be the mom or the babysitter or the maid and i will clean or organize or straighten as we're

playing because it's that's all i think about is keeping my house together or it's easier for me to play when i can do something that's on my mind um and you know i have three of two girls and a boy so how do i play with each one if they want to play something different the girls are usually easier because you know we can play house but then with my three-year-old son he wants to do something completely different

so it just feels very time consuming or slightly torturous i know that sounds terrible but how can i meet each of their needs to have my attention and play and maybe give me some guidance on maybe it's okay that i'm not playing but i appreciate anything that you have for feedback hi brittany thank you so much for calling in and i hope by this point as you've listened to

ashley and maddie you know you're not alone and nothing is wrong with you for not loving play or for playing and thinking about how also to multitask so a couple ideas first of all when i was listening to how you kind of create a house cleaning role during play so you can play and maybe clean up your house at the same time my

first thought was wow britney is one

creative person britney knows how to play she knows how to try things out she knows how to get creative so i would own that and i would maybe encourage you to tweak something here's what i encourage you to tweak in play we get to experiment with parts of ourselves that are smaller that aren't as well developed and my guess is one part of you that probably doesn't need any more growing

or any more attention is your caregiving part is your folding laundry part is your vacuuming part and so i'd encourage you to think about this question and anybody listening i would think about this question right now what part of you might need more attention what part of you is quieter or is more dormant is it a part that accepts caregiving that is cared for maybe

that's the baby part is it a part of you that's in charge and making certain decisions maybe that's the kind of sturdy pilot going through turbulence part is it a part of you that is super brave and there's a firefighter part and instead of thinking about it as something i have to do for my kid uh i'm gonna cry as i think about this maybe it's something we can do for

ourselves maybe as we play firefighter we really tap into a part of us that's more willing to take on scary challenges right maybe as we play baby we become a little more able to call that friend and say hey you said you go in the grocery store today i actually would really love if you could pick up a few items for me thank you so much i'd actually love to hear from all of you around this so anyone listening

if you want to send me a dm or send an email to goodinsidepodcast@gmail.com or send me a message on the platform if you're there i'd actually really love to hear what parts of you you could think about growing and play and kind of repurpose play for yourself in that way okay second a mantra for play here's a now not so secret secret about me i don't always love to play with my kids i really don't and i'm gonna go back to

the beginning of this episode and reference that i don't always like to play with my kids and that doesn't mean anything about the type of person i am one of the reasons i don't love play is i can get very caught up in my own narrative of all the things that need to get done write my checklist one of the things that helps me stay engaged with my kid and not resent it is number one putting my phone away

right because my phone is constantly telling me all the things i have to do it's dinging it's kind of calling out to me always becky there's something to read becky there's an email to reply to right and so if it's there it's impossible to engage and play because i feel like i'm not doing enough after i put my phone away i use this mantra becky there is nothing more important than playing family with your son becky there's nothing more important

that you need to do right now than playing with plato with your daughter there's something about the intensity of that statement there's nothing more important that i need to do there's nowhere else i need to be nothing

matters right now as much as and then fill in the blank with the play you're doing putting my phone away and using that mantra again it doesn't necessarily make me enjoy play or say wow this is the best part of my day it

makes me tolerate it and engage and be more present and everything changes from there last thing brittany you asked me how can i meet all my kids needs and you kind of insinuated can you give me permission to not play with them permission granted you can give yourself permission i promise you you don't need mine words like i'm not available to play with you right now oh you wish i could play i can't oh you have so much creativity

inside you and so many siblings here i have a feeling you all can figure it out i wonder what you're gonna come up with all of those scripts can be your scripts and absolutely feel free to set that boundary and say you're not available [Music] thank you maddie ashley and brittany for putting words

to something so many parents struggle with let's tie it all together with three takeaways number one try this mantra with me right now i don't love playing with my kids and that doesn't mean anything about the type of person i am remember we can all engage in activities we don't like what we can't do is engage in activities

that make us feel like a bad person so remind yourself i'm not a bad person i don't particularly like playing in this way two talk to your kids about play in advance of play this is going to take so many different forms and so many different homes talking in advance might be about how things can get into a not so great place so it might sound like hey before we end up playing this game let's think about how one of us is going to

win and one of us is going to lose it might be hey let's think about doing art and about whether you and i can both put our ideas into our art project or talking in advance might sound like i would love to play with you i have five minutes we can play for five minutes and then i have a feeling you'll be able to continue this project on your own three think about how you can repurpose play

for yourself even the way we talk about it playing with my kid playing the thing my kid wants to do versus what can i get out of play how might play help me what can i work on and play what can i notice in play when we see play as something that we're not doing for our kids but something that we're doing in par for ourselves

the whole dynamic shifts thanks for listening to good inside i love co-creating episodes with you based on the real-life tricky situations in your family to share what's happening in your home you can call 646 598 or email a voice note to goodinsidepodcast@gmail.com there are so many more strategies and

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cecile anderson an executive produced by erica belski and me dr becky if you enjoyed this episode please take a moment to rate and review it or share this episode with a friend or family member as a way to start an important conversation let's end by placing our hands on our hearts and reminding ourselves even as i struggle and even as i have a hard time on the outside i remain

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