

Back2BasicPlay - a Registered non-profit organization - 501-c3 status pending

Why do we need to get “Back2BasicPlay”? John P. LaRue, MS - Amy S. Christensen, MS

There is little argument that the United States has advanced significantly in technology, medicine and science in the past few decades. Isn't it ironic that while our nation has been spending so much time, effort and money advancing, we have neglected our most important resource for the future – Our youth. How advanced can we actually be, considering we have nearly one million kids carrying guns to school in a given year? Are we right in thinking we are a cutting edge nation when we have 150,000 students staying home from school every day because they “are sick of violence and afraid of being stabbed, shot, or beaten” (Getinformation.com). It's time we face reality!

All communities, urban, suburban, and rural, have seen an increase in teen violence over the past five years. 1.5 million violent incidents occur in public elementary and secondary schools.

(<http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2004/crime03/7.asp?nav=2>). More than 50% of children report bullying; 68% say they hit someone because they were angry in the past year, and nearly half (47%) said they could get a gun if they wanted (University of Illinois.) 87% said shootings are motivated by a desire to "get back at those who have hurt them" (Get information.com). How can our progressive, highly-developed nation be such a violent place for our youth?

Violence, crime and degradation have become an everyday part of our children's lives. Across the country, our youth has a growing disrespect for parents, teachers and other legitimate authority figures. Inappropriate language, declining personal responsibility and civic responsibility, intolerance, and lack of empathy are on an up-rise. According to Dr. Tom Lickona, founder/director for the Center for the 4th and 5th R's (www.cortland.edu/character), “there has been a growing tendency for kids to engage in destructive behavior without even recognizing that it's wrong”. How did we get to this point?

Is it a far-flung suggestion that there is a direct correlation between this ethical illiteracy and the technological “advances” which we are providing our youth? Children nowadays aren't as involved in social interactive play; instead, they are captivated for hours on end by Electronic Media, Television, Computers, Nintendo, and Play Station (“Understanding Child Development through Play”). This lack of basic interaction must have a profound effect. Children are not gaining a foundation of social skills needed to appropriately and effectively interact with one another and haven't been able to build the emotional strength needed to work through adversity or to develop the cognitive skills needed to overcome problems (“Linkages Between Outdoor Play and Healthy Brain Development” Brown, Sutterby, Thornton). Children are not learning how to resolve conflict, and instead resort to violence. This is a topic that has been addressed at the national, state and local levels.

While we can recognize issues, trends and problems, it is equally important to suggest tools or methods to address these concerns. We do through what we call, "A Personal Engagement Tool" ...we all know that kids learn by doing. Character education tools and game training workshops can be a step toward bringing our youth back to social, interactive play. They will be gaining a foundation of skills that will allow them to interact effectively with one another. They will learn how to resolve conflicts in a proper manner and gain self-esteem and leadership skills. In addition, they will be participating in the physical exercise which is needed to keep our youth healthy and fit.

Children's "work"...is their play. Let's play together, utilizing a tool that allows a child to create a new game...yes, a "game" to create a "new game." Sounds kind of novel? Not really....some of you old-timers might recall The New Games Foundation. Their second publication (More New Games, 1981, Doubleday) has a section on creating games. We believe this method of play is in fact, a "*Personal Engagement*" tool that will enlist the interest of children for hours on end.

Clearly children participate and succeed when involved in a character education program...and once fully immersed a foundation begins to develop....this foundation is a set of building blocks that focuses on core values such as positive attitude; positive behavior; respect for peers and adults; integrity; kindness towards not only themselves, but towards others; increased locus of control as well as opportunities for children to develop leadership skills. These building blocks can only become contagious as children become involved with other activities, whether it be sports, arts or cultural. A child's personality at a young age is so fragile, so tender. Let's give them opportunities to grow, let's give all the children the *same* opportunities to grow, so the attempt at fortifying these building blocks occurs simultaneously throughout this great country. We want these opportunities distributed equally without influence of religion, race or socio-economic barrier.

The benefits of providing a child with problem solving tasks, such as generating a new game, are incredible. By providing this unique opportunity to instill core values and allowing children to practice those values through **play**, there are physical, emotional and cognitive development benefits. We feel confident that the environments established through this activity will in fact result in healthier, happier children of character who are contributing members of their communities.

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