

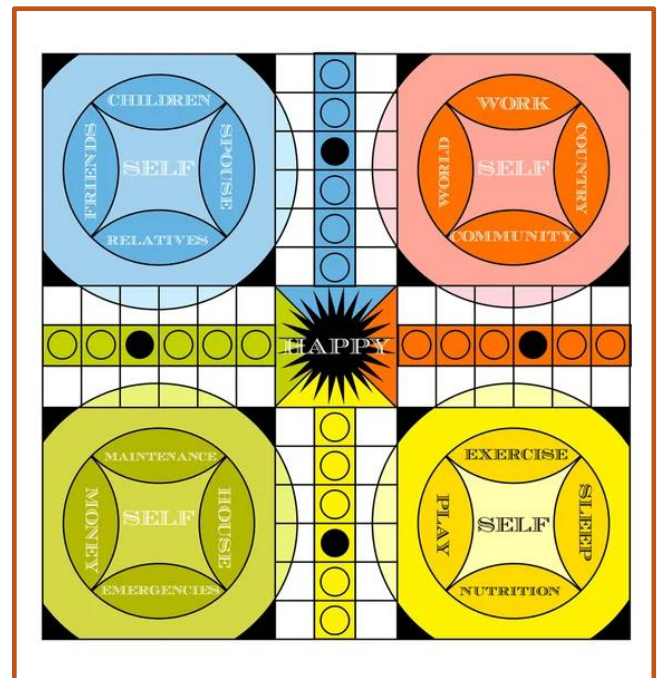
## Playtime is Not Over

As COVID fatigue reaches new heights, people search their arsenal for coping skills. One often overlooked skill is play. When we think of play, we tend to think of children, but play is vital for every stage of life. Play not only relieves stress but it helps us to adapt and grow as human beings.

### What does play do for us?

We've all watched kittens romping and wrestling in the grass, essentially playing. But what is it they are really doing? They are learning to hunt; they're learning to prepare for their future. Play is no different for humans in that it helps us to prepare for our future selves in a manner that comes naturally.

*Aside from the obvious stress relief that play can provide, what are the biggest advantages of engaging in play?*



It gives us the opportunity to practice new skills; new problem-solving skills, coping skills and social skills. No one lives a problem free life so honing and developing new problem-solving skills is essential.

Play gives us an environment where we can make mistakes and try again without serious consequences. It allows us to be creative and experiment with different solutions whether the problem we're trying to solve is a task, a feeling, or a person. Not only do we solve problems with these improved skills, but we tend to have increased confidence and become more adaptive.

Similarly, we can develop our coping skills through the act of play. Play can sometimes be challenging, frustrating, and confounding. It can make you want to give up, but when we play, we are learning, bit by bit on how to tolerate uncertainty, doubt, discouragement, and feelings of hopelessness. Adults can be guilty of watching their teens play video games or skateboard and completely miss the fact that they are developing important coping skills. All the skateboarding tricks that seem pointless required hours of practice as they built up their frustration tolerance, and sense of delayed gratification. These teens developed a sense of tenacity that will serve them well into their adulthood through “play.” It's no different for us as adults; we can benefit from strengthening our coping skills as we are met with new challenges every day.

Adults can also improve upon and build new social skills through the act of play. The Greek philosopher, Plato recognized over 2000 years ago, “You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation.” Through play, we can learn and improve skills in negotiating, dealing with aggression and de-escalation, patience, and tolerance. Play is also a great way to make new friends and strengthen relationships as we learn more about others and ourselves.

Developing these skills through play provides us with a low-risk environment where we feel free to try, fail, and try again. When we lose a real-life monopoly, we're evicted and bankrupt. When we lose the game Monopoly, we're no worse for wear and probably furthered a sense of strategy, patience, and interpersonal skills.

Play is not just for kids anymore! As new challenges come our way, setting time aside for play can be an invaluable tool to confront them and adapt in a healthy, productive manner.

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