Playing about with emotions

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Image: Rudy Hartono

Children's experiences of lockdown

Huge variety: some may welcome not being in school, others will be in unsafe homes, some will be mourning, many are anxious

1.8 million families in the UK live in **overcrowded accommodation** and 1 in 8 British households have **no gardens** (Resolution Foundation, 2020; ONS, 2020)

Image: Andrea Piacquadio

Two thirds of primary school children are feeling **lonely** (Cartwright-Hatton *et al.,* 2020)

Playing with friends

Image: Playwork Partnerships

- Friendships and attachments to peers can provide a **buffer to anxiety and stress** (Booth-Laforce et al., 2005)

- For children experiencing social and/or emotional **loneliness**, having someone to play with **makes a big difference** (Qualter and Munn, 2005)

- Playing with friends helps children develop **emotion regulation and empathy** (Fantuzzo et al., 2004)

Play, space and time

Image: www.ravelry.com, deirdre12345

- Play does not only take place in designated times and spaces

- It can emerge **whenever the conditions are right**, in the cracks left behind after adult orderings of time and space

Image: www.ravelry.com, deirdre12345

Play: not an individual affair

The empty space, the pole, the knowledge that her skirt will billow and her shoes sparkle if she twirls, her desire and the anticipated pleasure that offers **all come together** to co-create a momentary play space

#amomentwherelifeisbetter

Image: www.ravelry.com, deirdre12345

- Play represents moments where life is better

- We constantly seek out ways to make life better

- For children this is looking for moments of playfulness

- **The motivation for playing is to make life better**
  (Lester, 2020)

Play may sometimes look like imitation, but its 'as if' nature sets it apart

Image: toddlerstoday.com

Image: www.childrensillustrators.com

In play children can rearrange the world to make it either **less scary or less boring**

(Sutton-Smith, 1999)

# Brian Sutton-Smith (2017): Play as Emotional Survival

ANGER

FEAR

SHOCK

DISGUST

SADNESS

HAPPINESS

Brian Sutton-Smith (2017): Play as Emotional Survival

ANGER	Contests, competitive games, insults, bullying, etc.
FEAR	Deep play, risk taking, horror stories, games of chance, etc.
SHOCK	Pranks, tricks, rude word play, name calling, April Fool, etc.
DISGUST	Toilet humour, fartlore, obscenities, jokes, etc.
SADNESS	Equated with loneliness: rituals for friendship groups, initiation ceremonies, secret languages, etc.
HAPPINESS	Peak play experiences, performance, beauty contests, fantasy games, etc.

"The opposite of play is not work but depression"
(Sutton-Smith, 2003)

Image: Playwork Partnerships

Image: 2newthings.com/
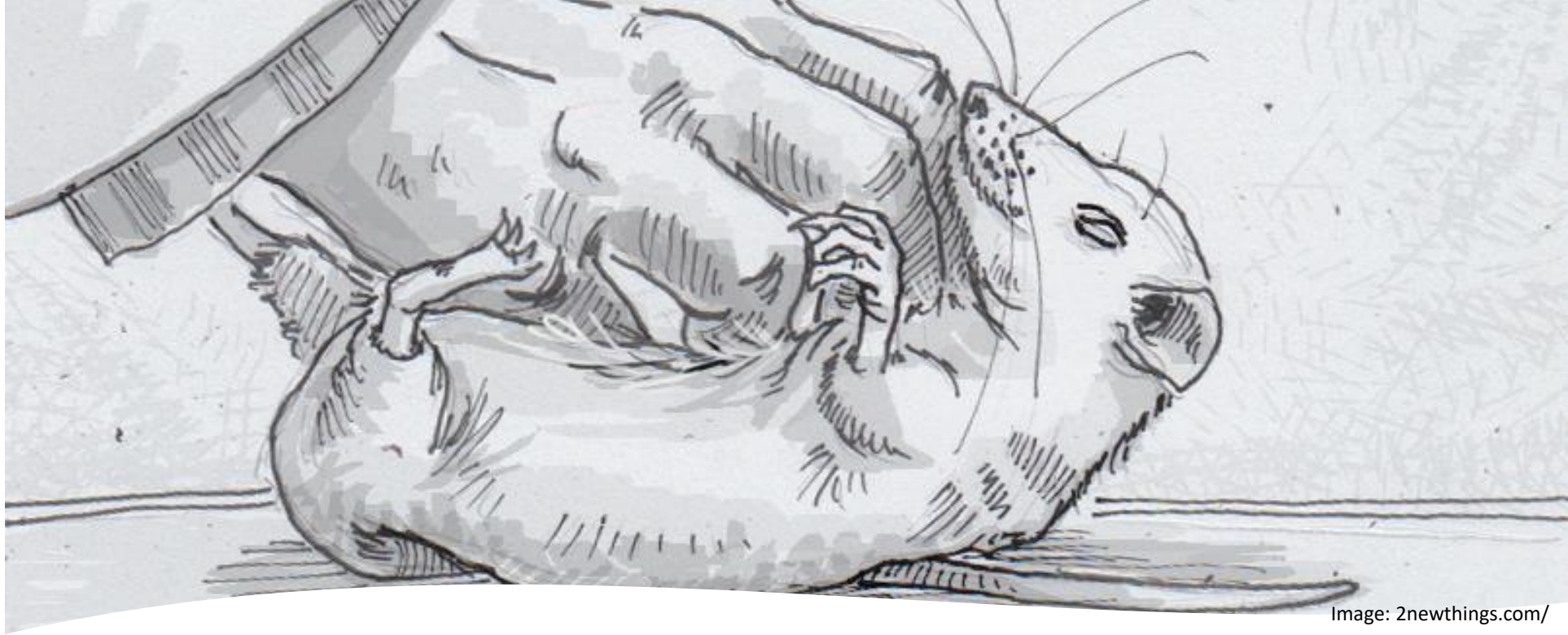
Jaak Panksepp (the rat tickler)

The **social joy** of play is the basis of happiness and good mental health
(Panksepp, 2005)

Image: Playwork Partnerships

http://playfriendlyschools.eu/

Paying attention to the conditions for play

- Playing is a defining feature of childhood, and if the conditions are right, it will emerge of its own accord

- Given this, the role of adults is to ensure that the conditions are right

- This includes ensuring **time, space and permission** for free play

Children need enough TIME to:

- immerse themselves and reach a state of 'flow'

- 'play out' traumatic events, conflicts, feelings of impotence, loneliness, helplessness

- move enough for their bodies to benefit

- spend sufficient time with other children for play narratives to synchronise, time for falling out and coming back together

A quality SPACE for playing should offer

- material richness and physical diversity;
- loose parts and modifiable space;
- spaces to hide and survey;
- space to move around
- opportunities to play with the senses, their identity and concepts

PERMISSION:

- Creating conditions that support play requires paying attention to the culture and atmosphere of the space as well as its physical features; often described as **'an overall playful feel'**

- This is about working proactively to develop a culture that respects and supports children's free play

A tale of two schools

Image: Lionel Top

Image: TV2 Nord

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