



CPD REFLECTIVE PRACTICE WORKSHEET

Episode 28: The Therapeutic Power of Playfulness

Hosts: Tracy Stackhouse · Cory Dundon · Michelle Maunder

LISTENER NAME

DATE LISTENED

TOTAL LISTENING + REFLECTION TIME (MINS)

CPD HOURS CLAIMED



Episode Summary

Play is the work of childhood, so what exactly are we doing when we use it in therapy? This episode separates play, the verb, from playfulness, the attitude, and gets honest about the vulnerability of being an adult on the floor making dinosaur noises while parents watch. The throughline is that when in doubt, you let play win, because it reveals the wisdom of the child's own system. Tracy explains why playfulness earned its own shelf in STEPPSI, drawing on the play research of Anita Bundy and Diane Parham and the social-affective neuroscience of Jaak Panksepp. Michelle and Cory get personal about their own paths to playing authentically while being watched, and the heart of it is the toggle between playfulness and play, the being and the doing, and how easily we slide into a teachery mode that can either help a child or shut their exploration down. Cory's dinosaur-and-fireball story shows what happens when you finally let the agenda go and watch the very skill you were chasing emerge in the play a week later. We finish in polyvagal territory: blended ventral-sympathetic states, chaos and rigidity as the banks of the river, and proprioception and turn-taking helping a child find the stop signal from the inside.



Resources & Mentions

- Anita Bundy and Diane Parham, on the theory and assessment of play.
- Jaak Panksepp, on the PLAY system and social-affective neuroscience.
- Dan Siegel, the river of integration, chaos and rigidity as its banks.



Reflection Prompts

Take a few quiet minutes to consider each prompt and write freely. Add or remove a prompt block to suit the episode.

- 1 Think about your own journey to playfulness. Is play natural for you, or something you've had to reinvigorate, and where do you still feel self-conscious being watched?

- 2 Notice a recent session where you toggled from playfulness into a more teachery, structured play. Did it open the child's exploration up, or close it down? What told you which?

- 3 Recall a time you held onto a clinical agenda when letting the play win would have served the child better. What made it hard to let go?

- 4 Consider a dysregulated child for whom playfulness tips them over their edge. How might you keep the ventral brake alive, through proprioception, rhythm, or the social you-and-me, while still playing?

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For two children whose energies feed each other into chaos, what playful structure could help them find the start-stop signal between them rather than having you impose the rule?
