

Rough and Tumble Play (R&T Play)

The Importance of Rough and Tumble Play

It is dramatically developmentally important for fathers to play with their children in a rough and tumble manner. In doing this, fathers help their children develop emotionally and socially which positively affects children into their adult lives.

Rough and Tumble Play (R&T Play) between fathers and their children.

When it comes to children, their behavior, and levels of aggression, there are two widely accepted concepts of how these behaviors come about as proposed by Rousseau and Hobbes.

“Children are naturally self-regulating, creative, positive, and good, only the arbitrary forces of culture make them bad.” - Rousseau

“The child is a force of nature, willful, destructive, capable of self-harm, in dire need of careful, cautious, and intense socialization, and damned in the absence of social order.” -Hobbes.

Of these two views of children and their aggression, the vast portion of society gravitates towards the ideas of Hobbes. This is because children have a deep need for social order and the consequences of a lack of a societal pecking order is detrimental to their development. One could also phrase it as “The job of parents is to domesticate their children.”

https://youtu.be/e2pIUfVAnBk?si=I_QRrXdkgDoQ8LU1

Here's a video clip of Dr. Jordan B. Peterson lecturing a college class about the importance of Rough & Tumble Play. "They've become domesticated little monsters." -Dr. J. B. Peterson

"If [parents] do not get them successfully domesticated, tamed, roughly speaking by the age of four, their peers reject them, and that's a big problem. Because your job as a parent is to make your child socially desirable by the age of four."

You want your child to be able to:

- Interact with other children and adults so that the children are welcoming and smile and want to play with him or her.
- The adults are happy to see the child and treat him or her properly.

As opposed to:

- if your child is a horrible little monster because you're afraid of disciplining them or you don't know how to do that properly.
- All the child will face is rejection from other children and adults because of their excessive misbehavior.
- Every face the child sees is either hostile or lying about wanting to be around the child.

All of this, according to Jordan B. Peterson and Joseph L. Flanders, is remedied by Rough and Tumble Play where a father will help a child overcome selfish tendencies, play by the rules of the game, and self-regulate their emotional intelligence to become a properly socially adjusted individual in society.

Guidelines of Rough and Tumble Play:

Fathers generally want to initiate R&T Play with their children, although this generally is the case, mothers usually are the ones to start a soft sort of R&T Play by having infants play, stretch, or pretend exercise as a form of play between mothers and their babies.

As soon as fathers can tell their children are robust or ambulatory enough to handle Rough and Tumble Play will seek to snatch away the baby from the arms of the mother to initiate R&T Play. As demonstrated by this video here of a father gorilla playfully taking his infant from the arms of the mother gorilla.

<https://youtube.com/shorts/j7-PgyiC-Xs?si=QXrcgTDOxlgAquzG>

[The section headings for the following were generated by ChatGPT. Content not bolded is original content.]

Rough and Tumble Play includes:

- Age.** The child is grown enough to handle being roughed around.
- Physical Contact.** R&T Play involves physical contact between participants: Wrestling, chasing, tumbling, and other physical interactions.
- Non-Aggressive Intent.** Participants are not seeking to actively hurt one another.
- Role Reversals.** Displays of dominance cannot be one-sided. If one participant dominates or pins the other in wrestling more than 70% of the time, the less dominant playmate may seek out another, less domineering playmate. This can take the form of a father letting a child win when in reality, the father is physically capable of dominating in every situation. Allowing children to appear to win, helps boost their confidence and this behavior has been observed in many mammal species.
- Verbal Communication.** Playful banter, laughter, and negotiated rules for how to properly play the game.
- Boundaries and Consent.** Participants learn to respect boundaries and obtain consent from others before engaging in play.
- Emotional Regulation.** Engaging in R&T Play can help children regulate their emotions, manage arousal levels*, and develop resilience in the face of minor conflicts and challenges in a safe environment.

*As observed in rats that were denied the opportunity to engage in R&T Play, later in life, they were incapable of mounting their companion for mating purposes.

“Chronically aggressive children, then adults, lack empathy, are suspicious, narcissistic, and self-centered... and are characterized by an inappropriately high and brittle self-esteem.”

This shows the other end of the spectrum of what happens when children cannot engage in R&T Play at an early age. Leading to detrimental outcomes for children later in life.

Quotes from Prominent Psychologists on Rough and Tumble Play:

“Freud proposed that aggression was innate, part of the id. Noting that aggression emerged as a consequence of socially induced frustration in the form of conflict between the pleasure and reality principles.” -Peterson & Flanders on Sigmund Freud.

“Young children appear fundamentally egocentric... They reliably begin to manifest aggressive behaviors such as pushing, hitting, kicking, and throwing around the age of 18 months, peak around kindergarten, and decline with age.” -Jean Piaget

Implications of Rough & Tumble Play:

“Rough and tumble play offers a myriad of benefits crucial for children’s development. Beyond its apparent physical aspects, such play fosters social and emotional skills indispensable for navigating complex interpersonal dynamics. Through engaging in non-aggressive physical interactions, children learn about boundaries, consent, and the importance of communication, laying the groundwork for healthy relationships. Moreover, the flexible and adaptable nature of R&T Play cultivates cognitive abilities, enhancing problem-solving skills and creativity. As children negotiate roles and rules, they develop empathy and perspective-taking, essential for understanding other’s emotions and viewpoints. Additionally, R&T Play provides a safe outlet for emotional expression, allowing children to learn how to regulate their feelings and manage stress. Ultimately, by embracing the spontaneity and joy inherent in R&T Play, children not only build resilience but also cultivate lifelong skills vital for thriving and social and emotional contexts.” -ChatGPT.

Contribution by James Larsen

Sources: Tremblay, Richard E., Jordan B. Peterson, and Joseph L. Flinders. *Developmental Origins of Aggression*. Guilford Press, New York [u.a.], 2005. *CiNii Books*, <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/description/guilford051/2004025158.html>.



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