

# THE IMPORTANCE OF A "WHY WE PLAY" LETTER

One of my biggest enrollment obstacles is helping parents to catch the vision of play. They nod their heads and agree as we chat, but the first question they usually ask is related to acquisition of academic skills through traditional means--often interpreted to mean "how will this prepare my child for kindergarten?". They see play as a great way for their kids to make friends and have fun at school, but they don't understand that it is the vehicle by which all of the learning they want for their child is delivered--and that it works very, very well.



Educating parents about the importance of play is an ongoing part of my job, and I always start the year with a "Why We Play" letter, which is a simple way to help parents better understand why play is so important and how it will help their child's learning and development.

I have several versions of this letter and can mix and match the portions I want to use to customize it to the group I will be teaching that year. If I have lots of returning students, I may go a little more in-depth...if most of my student are new, I keep it very basic. Sometimes I even use more than one version and slip the one that I feel fits the needs of each parent into their child's folder.

I feel it is important that a letter of this type should be in your own voice. For this reason, I'm not going to share a file full of letters that you can just print off and use (it's better this way, I promise!). I've offered some formatting suggestions, and even included a skeleton of a sample letter, but your parents don't want to know why play is important to \*me\*, they want to know why it is important to \*you\*. Taking the time to flesh out and share the "why" behind your teaching will come across far more authentically than just using someone else's thoughts.

Drafting a letter like this can feel daunting and time consuming. Tackle it one paragraph at a time if you need to. The end result will not only be a beautiful letter for your parents, but an exercise in self-reflection that will aid and improve your practice as a teacher.

# · FORMATTING YOUR LETTER ·

## SHORT INTRO

SHARE YOUR PASSION  
FOR PLAY & MAYBE  
INCLUDE AN IMPACTFUL  
QUOTE

STICK TO 2-3 MAIN POINTS  
THAT REALLY SELL THE  
BENEFITS OF PLAY

## BENEFITS OF PLAY

YOU SAY PLAY IS GREAT--  
HOW WILL YOU SHOW  
ME?

## HOW WILL YOU MONITOR PROGRESS?

RESTATE YOUR  
EXCITEMENT FOR THE  
BENEFITS OF PLAY

## WRAP IT UP

# · SKELETON OF A SAMPLE LETTER ·

## INTRO

Dear Parents,

I'm so excited to share this school year with your child, and I can't wait to see how much they will learn and grow as they embark on a wonderful journey of play. Maria Montessori is quoted as saying "Play is the work of the children" and I echo that sentiment 100%.

## BENEFITS OF PLAY--HIGHLIGHT 2 OR 3

We have decades of research that show us how beneficial play is for young children. When you see your child <insert social and emotional skills you want to highlight> you can be sure that these are skills they have practiced on a daily basis at preschool. If you pay attention, you'll have the joy of watching those skills improve exponentially over the course of the year.

Play is a powerful way for children to learn not only social and emotional skills, but academic skills as well. You can expect your child to come away with a deeper knowledge of <insert academic skills you want to highlight> simply because play offers exposure to all of those concepts, usually without the child even realizing what they are learning!

## HOW WILL YOU MONITOR PROGRESS?

Because play is open-ended, you will see less in the way of traditional schoolwork coming home this year. Rest assured that I will be monitoring your child's progress through <insert your method of progress monitoring>. You can also expect occasional notes to come home celebrating your child's accomplishments when they master a new skill or try something new.

## CLOSING

Each month in our newsletter, I will be sharing even more reasons why play is the curriculum of choice in our preschool program and I can't wait for you to see all the growth your child will experience through play.

## · A FEW FINAL THOUGHTS ·

Your letter doesn't need to be fancy or complicated, but make sure that it truly reflects your teaching practice. If your school doesn't fully embrace play yet (I've been there!), use your letter to inform parents about your belief in play and how you will weave it into the school day as much as possible. Getting parents on board with play can be a powerful tool for change in programs that need a little nudge in the right direction.

Avoid feeling pressure to make your letter cutesy if that isn't your style. I like to add a little bit of color and fun to mine, but it doesn't change the content, which is the most important part. If adding graphics and borders takes too much time and stresses you out, skip them!

After writing your letter, let it sit for a bit and then revisit it. Sometimes having a little bit of time and space to roll ideas around in your mind will help you express your thoughts in a more concise manner. I will often edit my letter several times before sending it to print.

Save your letters! Keep the original files in a place where you can access and edit them later. It's far easier to cut and paste content from previous letters into a new document to create an entirely new and customized letter than it is to start from scratch every year.

I hope you've found this information helpful, and please reach out if you need a little extra guidance creating your "why we play" letter.

*Jennifer Zollinger*

Play Before Pencils