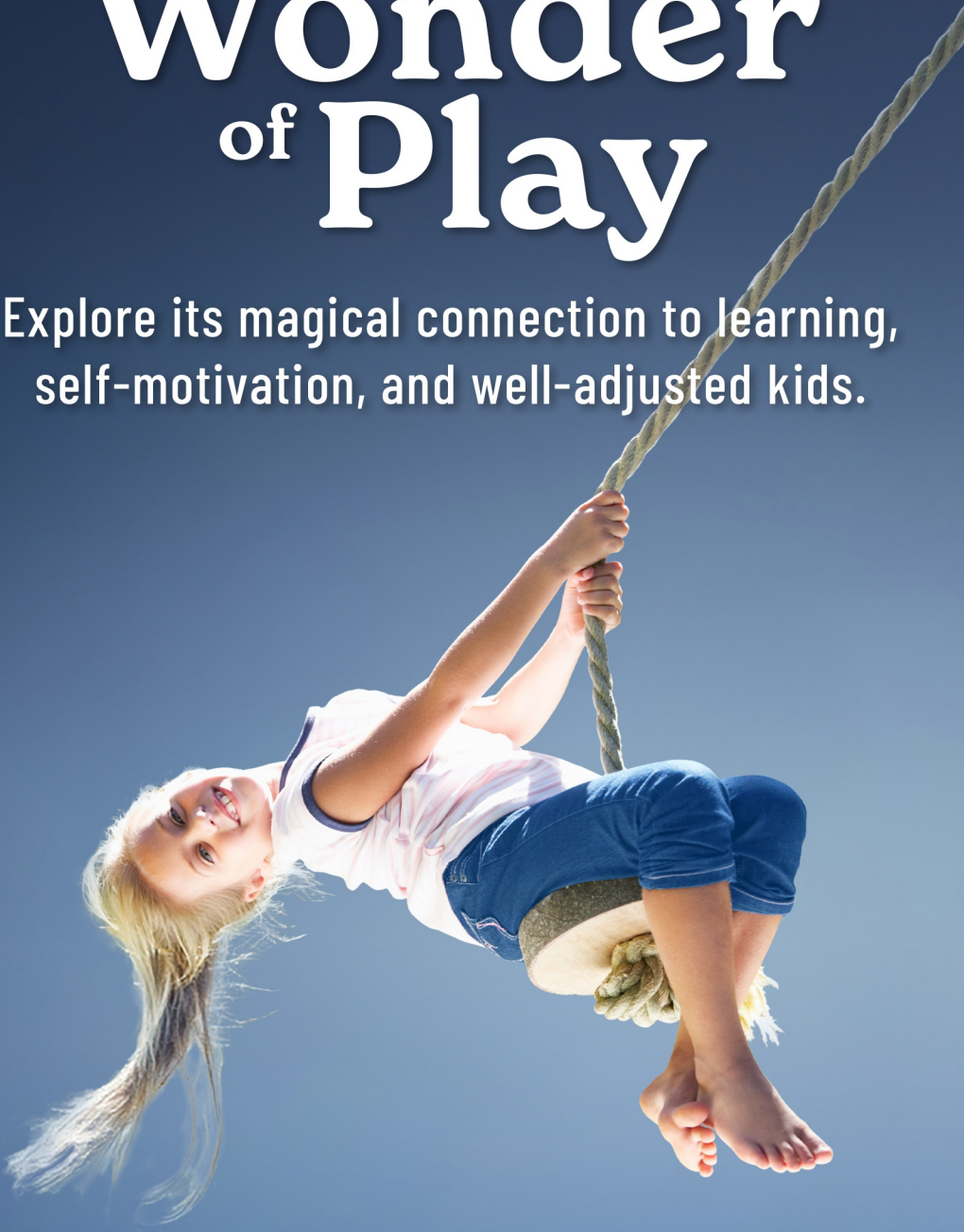


# The Wonder of Play

Explore its magical connection to learning,  
self-motivation, and well-adjusted kids.



STEPHEN ANDREWS  
CINDY FARMER

# Whether you're a parent, grandparent, or educator, *The Wonder of Play* is a must-read for anyone seeking to foster happier, more well-rounded children.

*The Wonder of Play* by Stephen Andrews offers a fresh perspective on understanding childhood development and the essential role that play has in shaping young minds. Delving into how kids' brains change as they grow, this book explores the unique ways children think and process the world around them.

Andrews emphasizes the immense value of free-play, highlighting how it fuels creativity, curiosity, and emotional growth. Through play, children not only learn new skills, but also navigate conflicts, build resilience, and problem-solving abilities that serve them well into adulthood. Unlock the power of play and see how it can enhance learning, strengthen relationships, and equip kids with the tools they need for a successful, balanced life.

## Discover:

- Through play, kids learn and internalize life skills.
- Play is not just physical. It is also an attitude, a mindset.
- Kids' minds are constantly growing. Learn what level of play is appropriate.
- Surprise! Your child's mind probably doesn't work like yours.
- What are Ah-Ha moments and 3D thinking?
- Explore how free-play inspires kids and fires their imaginations.
- Become a storyteller, not just a book reader.



Stephen Andrews is a visionary who constantly seeks wisdom. He studied architecture and taught design as a graduate student, and industrial arts at the high school level. He loves entrepreneur concepts, owns a printing company, and has made children's toys. As a pioneer in the home school movement, Steve has led hundreds of families in their child's education.

In 2019, he and Cindy designed and started building Discovery Park Ohio on their mini-farm. As of 2024, over 10,000 kids have visited their adventure park. Watching that many kids playing hard teaches you a lot about play and how kids learn.

[DiscoveryParkOhio.com](http://DiscoveryParkOhio.com)  
[EarthSongFarm.com](http://EarthSongFarm.com)



## FORWARD

Most of us would agree that children are truly delightful beings. Two of the most gratifying states in which one can observe them are deep in sleep or joyfully lost in play. As a teacher with 20 years of experience and a certification in Waldorf education, as well as a mother of four children aged 18 to 4, I find that this book aligns with everything I've come to understand about children and how they thrive. While I joke about the sleeping part (though it can feel like a small miracle), the importance of child's play is no small matter.

Whether it's an epic battle among a four-year-old's toy action figures, an eight-year-old happily humming a tune while perfecting a drawing, or a group of children bursting into a lively game of tag after finally settling on rules in a meeting as serious as a UN summit, children are at their happiest, most engaged, and eager to work when in their natural state of play. In "The Wonder of Play", Steve and Cindy share their genuine passion for helping parents shed confusion and empower their kids. Let's face it: empowering kids to play is something that only the best teachers occasionally land upon.

In today's educational landscape, the term "schooling" can be confusing. The Wonder of Play helps families seeking a more autonomous path grapple with questions like: Do we pursue homeschooling? Find an alternative school? What about unschooling? Is that really a thing? And what about the self-doubt that leads many of us to question whether we are qualified to be our child's teacher at all? When I first ventured into homeschooling with all these questions in mind, I felt an overwhelming need to control my child's experience, burdened by high expectations.

In the following pages, Steve offers insights into the power of teaching critical thinking and helping children shine as the inspired, creative beings they are. He highlights the diverse ways in which we learn, explains why kids push boundaries, and discusses the value of facing new challenges and engaging with peers of all ages.

This book invites you to trust your child and become their guide; to celebrate curiosity and perhaps rediscover your own

ability to play. I encourage you to explore the insights within and embrace the journey. Trust that there is freedom in allowing our children's passions to shape their daily experiences—free from rigid agendas.

Enjoy!

Carrie Burchett  
October 2024



# Stages of Play...

We often forget that a child's mind develops neuron connections every moment. As the mind starts forming these connections, it can gradually understand the world they were born into. Each child has to go through definite stages of mind growth.

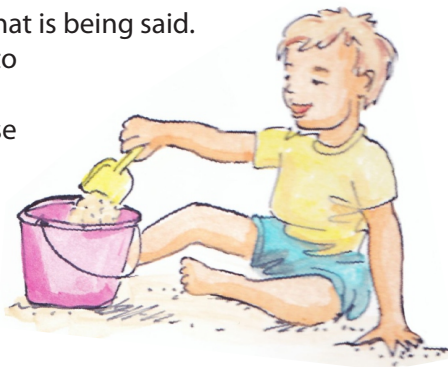
Although the length of each stage can vary and the transition from one stage to the next can be erratic, they still must go through these stages. We tend to focus on the external: are they standing, walking, and talking. However, the internal growth of the mind may be even more critical.

These stages were shared by Richard Dettner, AIA, in his book "Design for Play," written in 1969, on pages 24 through 30. The book may be old, but the stages remain the same.

## 0-2

From birth to two years old, play is pretty solitary. Babies will want to engage in play with older siblings as they gain skills in walking and balance. They want to be just like them, so they will push themselves to be in more control of their body and to understand what is being said. They use many non-verbal cues to understand the world and the interactions. They are in the phase called "practice play," which includes repetition and pleasure as the cause of an external event.

An example is picking up an object and watching it fall. Do it again – same result. In a sandbox, they may use a shovel, fill a bucket, and then dump it. They may do this again and again. If there is a puddle, they will jump in it repeatedly, watching it splash out. Peek-A-Boo is the beginning of recognizing that just because I can't see something now doesn't mean it no longer exists. The joy of Peek-A-Boo is contagious. The squeals of delight are so powerful and happy.



## 2-4

As children move past the two-year-old point, they are still growing rapidly and daily learning how to control their bodies. They are learning the meaning of words, both spoken to and spoken from them. There is an early understanding of symbols. I no longer have to point to a carrot when I want one. I can say "carrot" (word symbol), and mom will get me one even if I can't see it. The child is now moving into symbolic play - commonly called make-believe or pretending. A stick can be an airplane, a truck, or a boat. He will be moving it over his head if it is an airplane. They can become so absorbed in this imagination that surrounding kids seem invisible. They may play side by side, but their actions are only loosely connected or interactive.



## 4-6

Moving past the four-year-old stage, we move into the intuitive stage. This is where a young girl starts to organize her experiences. Logic is still not a strong point. Instead, she relies on intuition to determine what feels right. She is full of questions as she goes through this stage for a couple of years. Why, why, why? She is trying to match her intuition of the situation with the reality. (Or maybe she knows her "whys" bug you, and she just wants your attention or a hug!) She is refining her mental picture of the world. This will eventually build a concept of logic that she can trust as her mind develops.

How  
True



In play, she will significantly enjoy interacting with other kids. Some play may be an imitation of others. Although she knows there are rules to be followed in some play, her logic skills haven't developed to keep track of them. She will change the rules on a whim. Now, she has to deal with conflict with others who

# Different Types of Play

Kids need to develop strong bodies and refine their coordination. So they engage in physical play, including running, leaping, chasing, and rough and tumble games.

Children, on their own

initiative, don't run laps or lift weights to get in shape.

Instead, they chase each other

around, wrestle or have play

sword fights. They will play until they are exhausted and do it all over again later in the day.

## Physical Play



## Language Play

Nobody has to teach language to young children. They learn it on their own. First, it is vowel oriented cooing sounds like ooh-oo.

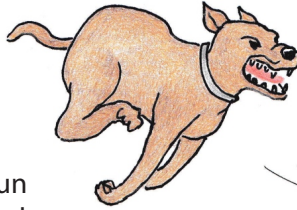
Then it changes to babble sounds as they combine consonants and vowels for ba-ba-boo-ga-da-da. When a baby is happy, these sounds start to flow. It's self-motivated for the pure joy - not to get something. All these sounds fit the definition of play. At about one year the first words start flowing. Soon, they will make phrases

and then full sentences. Then comes the vocal fun of rhymes and puns and silly word combinations.



# Motivation is Everything

Why we do things is important. If we work because we need money, or run because an angry dog is chasing us, it obviously doesn't feel like play. The goal is the paycheck or outrunning the dog. What is important isn't the journey, it's the end. **Play is the opposite.** The goal isn't the end but the fun of the journey. I'm not counting how many times the swing goes up to break some record; I'm enjoying feeling the air rushing by and the sense of weightlessness at the end of each stroke. I pedal my bike because it takes me someplace else. It doesn't matter where; it's the fun of pedaling hard and coasting, going up a hill and the feel of the wind as I go down a hill. Today I feel creative and since there is no traffic, I make wide sweeping curves or ride with no hands learning to steer by just leaning slightly. What fun!



In play, I study deeply because I want to understand how something works, not because there is a test. But that research led me on a different path that looked interesting, so I studied something else. I get tired and stop. Tomorrow, I will continue this exploration. It's fun, and that makes it "play". Think of a kid drawing a picture and coloring it. He doesn't expect it to hang in a gallery, although it may get put on the refrigerator. It really doesn't matter. It was about expressing an idea that he had in his head and seeing how accurately he could bring that idea to



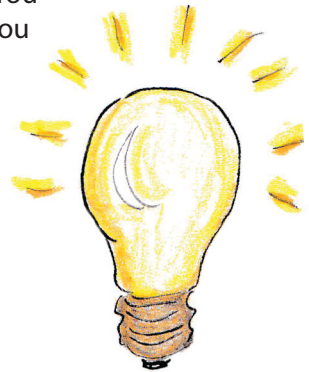
# The power of "AH-HA"

There are things in life we never forget. We struggle to understand a problem, and suddenly, the mental light bulb turns on. You've just had an AH-HA moment! Maybe you said it out loud – maybe just to yourself, but it will stick for the rest of your life. It sticks because YOU put the pieces together, you figured it out. You own that discovery.

Someone just telling you the answer isn't the same. You didn't have to work it through – it's their discovery. Chances are you will forget it. That's how it is with much of school. The teacher or book passes on their knowledge. You memorize it for the test and then let it go – you never owned it.

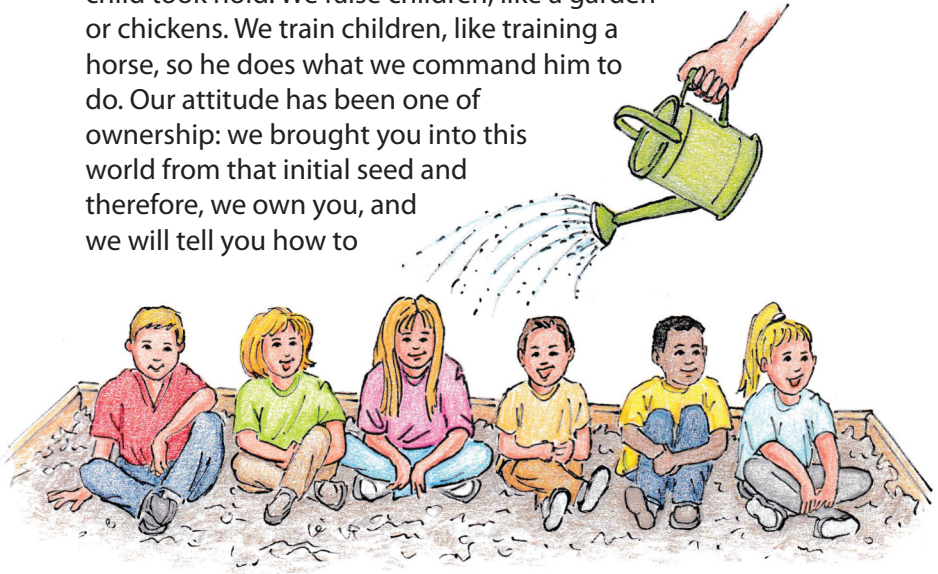
Maybe the above paragraph helped you understand what is happening in your life. Think about what sticks for you. What were your AH-HA moments?

This is how kids learn AND retain best. It's the playful process of discovery. The answers become **your** answers for life.



# On Being the Parent /Adult

Let's challenge ourselves to start seeing children in a new way. Most of our notions of child care and education are founded on agricultural metaphors of the 1800s, the agricultural era, was when the concept of the state educating a child took hold. We raise children, like a garden or chickens. We train children, like training a horse, so he does what we command him to do. Our attitude has been one of ownership: we brought you into this world from that initial seed and therefore, we own you, and we will tell you how to



behave and, what you are going to learn, and even what we believe you should be when you become an adult. If your parents treated you that way, then I'm sure there is some resentment lurking inside. Do I only get to live the life I really want after you die, or are your directives even written in your will?<sup>10</sup>

We are all born with a spirit that also guides our growth. It doesn't force us into a particular path because there is always free will. Spirit knows that many lessons are learned from challenging experiences and mistakes. If a child is allowed to feel/listen to that inner voice, they will move smoothly through life. It doesn't mean it will be bump-free; he just knows that he has the right and ability to choose the life he wants. That may change - often. We learn from every experience, and what we thought we wanted one day may not be what we need tomorrow. Even relationships are like that. Everyone wants to