

Kristen

[00:00:00] Welcome to the Peaceful Parenting Podcast. I'm your host, Sarah Rosensweet, mom of three young people, Peaceful Parenting Coach, and your cheerleader and guide on all things parenting. Each week, we'll cover the tools, strategies, and support you need to end the yelling and power struggles, and encourage your kids to listen and cooperate so that you can enjoy your family time.

I'm happy to say we have a great relationship with our three kids. The teen years have been easy and joyful. Not because we're special unicorns, but because my kids were raised with peaceful parenting. I've also helped so many parents just like you stop struggling and enjoy their kids again. I'm excited to be here with you today and bring you the insight and information you need to make your parenting journey a little more peaceful.

Let's dive into this week's conversation.

Sarah: .

Sarah: Hey, all welcome back to another episode of the peaceful parenting podcast. My guest today is Kristin Peterson. Kristen is basically a champion of play and of children's play. She educates educators on what play is and how to bring it into [00:01:00] the classroom. And based on some things I've seen her share online.

Sarah: I thought I really have to get her to come in. And talk to all of us about how important play is and really to assuage our anxiety. About that, about those early academics and about kindergarten, kindergarten prep. Whether you have children that are, that are little and aren't there yet, or you have children who are. You know, getting into the elementary years play is still so important.

Sarah: And Kristin's gonna talk about that. She's so passionate about play and why it's so good for our kids. And really honestly, if we want our kids to get ahead, this is what we have to let them do. If you're wondering about that and about why give a listen to Kristen, she is just as you'll see, so filled with passion and so many great stories. About play and why play is important.

Sarah: So let's meet Kristen.

Sarah: Hi, Kristen, welcome to the podcast.

Kristen: Hello, thanks for having me. Tell us a little bit about who you are and what you do. So my name is Kristen Peterson, Kristen R. [00:02:00] B. Peterson, and I am a retired early childhood educator. That might sound kind of funny. You, you can't see what I look like, but I definitely don't look maybe like retirement age, but I am a retired founder of a nature based preschool that I opened in 2014 here in Minnesota, and now I am Full time play advocate and public speaker.

Kristen: So I travel

Kristen: around the world and teach people about play based learning in early childhood and why children need play, why play is essential, what play is and what it's not. All the things about play. So that's what I do now. And I have a podcast too. It's called the play based learning podcast. Do a lot of stuff online.

Kristen: So. That's me in a nutshell.

Sarah: You have a lot. I watched a bunch of your Instagram reels, too. You've got a lot of fun reels on there showing all the play in action, too.

Kristen: Yeah, absolutely.

Sarah: Yeah. I think of you as a champion of children through letting them play and champion of children's play.

Kristen: Absolutely. I think of myself that way as [00:03:00] well.

Kristen: I kind of feel like sometimes I'm the Lorax of early childhood. Like I speak for the children and sometimes that can make adults feel uncomfortable because I'm pointing out. Things that we do with children or expect from children that aren't developmentally appropriate and That's just it's like there's a lot of things that are done in early childhood that are just done because they've always been done that way It's a watered down version of like a kindergarten curriculum and we know that that's not developmentally appropriate for young children So I'm here to speak for the children Sometimes that can make adults reflect Reflection often leads to like questioning and that can let that can make people uncomfortable.

Kristen: So

Sarah: you and I have the exact same mandate, but through different different arenas, because I consider myself a champion of children through helping

parents, you know, Treat their children better by helping them understand life from their children's point of view, right? Yes, behavior through that their child's lens So, I love that we're complimenting each other that way and it does make [00:04:00] people uncomfortable to the work that I do sometimes Okay I told you before we started recording that the reason why I wanted to have you on is because I hear so much parental anxiety about Academics.

Sarah: Yeah. And early academics and wanting their kids to be, you know, oh, my kid's not reading yet. Or, you know, they don't know all their letters and like, should we be working with them? And just basically like a lot of, from the sort of preschool, kindergarten, early elementary years, I hear so much parental anxiety.

Sarah: Absolutely. And I'm not a, I'm not an expert in that area, but I always wanna tell them like, play play is what they need. That's the most important thing. Yes, absolutely. I know that's what you teach. So tell us, just to get us sort of oriented, tell us about the study that you were just telling me about in terms of play.

Kristen: So there's a study, came out in 2023, so very, very recent, and it, it's exploring parents beliefs about play and kind of the differences between play based and academic based preschool. So I'm just going to read a little snippet here, a quote from this [00:05:00] study. So it says, Studies that compared the performance of children attending academic preschools with those attending play based preschools showed no advantage in reading and math achievement for children attending academic preschools.

Kristen: However, evidence did suggest that children attending academic preschools had higher levels of test anxiety, were less creative, And had more negative attitudes towards school than did the children attending play based preschool. So we know that young children need play, and we can kind of talk about what play is and what it's not, because I think a lot of people think that just, you know, if something's fun, it's Play.

Kristen: And that's not the case. Play is so much deeper than that. Play is the work of children. Play is the learning. And just because a teacher thinks something is fun or a parent thinks something is fun doesn't mean that it's actually play for children. So there's different characteristics of play and what play really is.

Kristen: There's a lot of play based early childhood programs out there that disguise [00:06:00] themselves as play based because they know that People are

looking for that. But in reality, it's very teacher directed. It's, it's not child led at all. And there might be activities that look fun and there might be games and things like that.

Kristen: But if children aren't actually choosing. Who they play with, what they play with, what they're interacting with, how much time they spend on those things, then that, like, those activities aren't actually play. So we kind of have to maybe define it a little bit. Would you like me to kind of like give the characteristics of play?

Kristen: Yeah. I hear

Sarah: child led is one part of the definition so far. Yeah. So,

Kristen: yes. So I'm going to give you the down and dirty definition or the characteristics of play as per a play psychologist named Dr. Peter Gray. So Dr. Peter Gray kind of outlined five different characteristics of play and the first is, is that play is self chosen.

Kristen: So, the child has to choose. What they're doing who they're doing it with and like what they're [00:07:00] interacting with it has to be child led child chosen. The next one is that it has to be intrinsic. So intrinsically motivated. So if a child is made to, you know, they show up at preschool and they have, you know, Rotational centers.

Kristen: So like we have our centers out, you know, like a science center and a math center and a literacy center. Those are popular things that show up in many early childhood classrooms. If children are forced to go from one place to the next and they're given like a sticker when they complete their little center That's not intrinsically motivated.

Kristen: It's extrinsic. That's an extrinsic reward for doing a thing. So it has to be intrinsically motivated by the child. They have to want to do it. The next is that it is guided by mental rules. So the teachers aren't putting rules on the play. The parents aren't putting rules on the play. The adults in the space aren't putting rules on things.

Kristen: The children are coming up with their own rules in their own way [00:08:00] playing with things. And then it's process based. So it's all about the journey of the play and not necessarily like an end result. And this one is interesting because a lot of times parents myself included, like I look at certain

scenarios of my, like my youngest son in play and I'm thinking, well, here, I'll give you an example.

Kristen: So he had. Some friends over, and they were playing a game outside. And I went outside just to sit in my lawn chair and read a book, and was over listening. And they were just standing in the middle of the yard, and they were talking about how they were gonna play this game. Like, they were doing this imaginative scenario, and so they're like, And then you're gonna say this!

Kristen: And then I'm going to take my stick and I'm going to stab you with my stick and then you're going to fall down. And they like played this whole entire, like they talked this whole scenario out. It was like 20 minutes of this giant play scene that they were like, it was like they were creating a [00:09:00] play.

Kristen: And I was like, Oh, this is gonna be fun to watch. And then all of a sudden one of them was like, I'm hungry. Let's go get a snack. And then when they came back outside, they didn't play it. And I was like, aren't you going to play it? You like played this whole scenario out. You plan this whole thing. Aren't you going to play it?

Kristen: And they're like, we already did. That was the thing. That was the process. Like that was the game. That was how they did it. And to me, my adult goggles looking in on them, I'm thinking you didn't even do anything. You and talked! But that was the play for them. That was the game. That was what their mental rules were making that game up.

Kristen: They were intrinsically motivated to do it. It was all about the process. There was no end product. So it was all about the journey. And another example of that that we often see in early childhood programs is there's a lot of craft projects, you know, like the cute things to hang on the refrigerator that we had to We all think that the at home caregivers want, but usually those things aren't [00:10:00] created by the children.

Kristen: They are said, they are given the materials and say, here, make yours look like mine. And there's a lot of adult help that probably goes into those things. So in like a child led play based program, we want to see a lot more process based. experiences, process based art experiences, open ended art where they just create their own thing for the sake of creating.

Kristen: It's all about the process. So those are the kind of the four biggest self chosen, self guided. I think I said self chosen, but self guided is the last one. So

it's all guided by the children. Adults don't put their noses into the children's business and say, Oh, I think you should play it like this and kind of stand back.

Kristen: And we are more like hummingbirds. Versus like helicopter teachers in a play based learning space. So those are the five characteristics. Self chosen, self guided, intrinsic, guided by mental rules, and process based.

Sarah: It reminds me of parents who say to me, what should the natural consequence be? And I say, if you have to think about it or do anything, it's no longer a [00:11:00] natural consequence.

Sarah: And so this is like, If the teacher is involved, teacher or caregiver is involved in what the children are playing, it's not really playing anymore. No, not at all. Nope. Yeah.

Kristen: Cause you just stuck your adult nose in there and you put your own ideas into it. And like I said before, our own ideas are so different than, what children's ideas are.

Kristen: So another thing I think, like something to point out is that there's things called play schema that we see a lot in young children. Play schema are patterns in children's play. And one of the biggest ways that you can see this as an adult at home is like when you have a nine month old baby and you have all the food on their tray.

Kristen: And then when they're done eating. What's the first thing that that nine month old baby is gonna do?

Sarah: Trajectory schema. Trajectory, they're gonna throw

Kristen: all of the food off the tray, right? So, like, a lot of times adults get you know, frustrated when children take all of the baskets off a shelf and just dump the baskets out.

Kristen: They're like, why, why are you not [00:12:00] playing with the things? That's our own adult goggles. Like, you're just dumping them out. Like, that's annoying. Like, Don't dump them out anymore. However, they're practicing like trajectory schema or the fill and dump schema They're dumping things out. That is play but a lot of times adults don't understand play.

Kristen: So It's just it's really Trying to just stand back And just watching and observing and not sticking our noses into things because a lot of times, well, and the

Sarah: point, like how I understand schemas is those are how children learn, right? That's how they learn about how the world works, about gravity, about, you know, the physics, physics, and the relationship between things is through that, that unstructured play.

Sarah: So. You know, and I think, I think that this is a little bit of a segue, but I think this is part of the reason why it's so important to have toys that are open ended, right? Mm hmm. Or, or not even toys, but. Have materials, let kids play with the things that they want to play with, [00:13:00] because oftentimes with a lot of those like sets and things, there's only one way to play it.

Sarah: Absolutely. Like there's only, and that, so you're automatically taking away some of those The characteristics of play when you have on non open ended toys for your kids.

Kristen: Absolutely. Yeah. In a lot of play based programs, if you're searching out to look for a play based program as a caregiver at home, a parent, a guardian definitely look for loose parts is what they're called.

Kristen: Open ended materials. A lot of times it looks like junk. So you might go in and you might see a lot of recyclables or you might see milk cartons sitting in the art area. You might. see plastic lids from things all over the place. Wood blocks are like the original loose part. Sticks are a loose part.

Kristen: So anything that children can just like make into anything, like if you have a plastic banana, and I'm not saying like having plastic bananas is bad, that's not it at all. In the program I founded, we had lots of pretend food that was plastic, but like a [00:14:00] banana will always be a banana, right? But a wood block can be a banana, or it can be a cheeseburger, or it can be a cell phone, or it can be a purse.

Kristen: You know what I mean? So that's why, that's just an example of why open ended materials are so important for play based, child led learning through play.

Sarah: That's awesome. And just let's go back a little bit to the anxiety that I was talking about because you mentioned you did mention the study of that, you know, took away that love of learning and get increased test anxiety.

Sarah: Those kids in the academic preschools, but give us some give us your best pitch for why parents should feel okay about not pressing the early academics and not looking for a school that has that early academic.

Kristen: Okay. Are you ready for this? I have a few more anecdotes for you. So I'll start off with I will start off with just the whole phrase, I'm getting them ready for kindergarten.

Kristen: So I actually just turned in a book to my [00:15:00] publisher and the title is, I'm not getting them ready for kindergarten because, and there's many, you know, it's a whole book, so I can't like put it all in one little tiny neat package. So I'll just kind of give you a few points here. So our brain is a muscle, right?

Kristen: It's a big, important muscle. And there are no other times in life. besides getting children ready to go to college, that we spend three years, like I'm talking like three, age three, four, and five, like preschool age. There is no other time in life where we spend so much time getting ready for something, right?

Kristen: So if you had, here's an example, if you have a two day old baby, we better get them ready to walk someday, right? So how about I hold the baby up, and I'm going to have you move their legs, because. We're the adults and we have to get them ready. We need to like force them to get ready. We need to force those muscles to be ready.

Kristen: So you move their legs. Like if you did that, [00:16:00] everyone agrees. That's

Sarah: ridiculous. Yeah,

Kristen: it's ridiculous because we know that that baby will automatically. Get those muscles ready to walk someday because they will lay on the floor and they'll kick their legs, right? Their bodies are preparing them for it.

Kristen: They know that's what they need. If you were to look at any like puppies, kitties, goats, they play, right? They're like rambunctious little boogers and you would never be able to tell a puppy or a kitty or a goat, like, sit down, don't play. It is an innate. Like, animalistic, very, very intrinsic trait. very natural trait that we have that we are just able as mammals to figure out how to get ready for something on the correct timeline.

Kristen: But when the adults put our own ideas into the children's days and what they should be doing and worksheets and long circle times and calendar time [00:17:00] and all those things that aren't developmentally appropriate, we are stealing play from them. And play is the best learning. When you are little, just like any mammal, like bears aren't doing worksheets. Somebody once said I think Leah McDermott said, she's your natural learner. She said that having a child, like a preschooler, like telling them not to play would almost be like telling a middle schooler not to do their math homework. Like, is that important in early childhood to let children play?

Kristen: Another example is have you ever heard of the polar bear and the sled dog? Like the, them. Okay. So up in, I don't know how long ago this was, but I read about this in Dr. Stewart Brown's book called play. He said that there was some researchers up in Antarctica and they had a team of sled dogs and they were tied up outside. Out of the corner of their eye, the scientists were standing there, they saw a giant [00:18:00] polar bear racing towards the sled dogs. So you see that and you think, oh my gosh, they're going to have lunch right in front of us. Like this polar bear is going to eat all of these sled dogs. Well, the lead sled dog must not have been able to read polar bear cues because the polar bear was charging towards them and the, the lead sled dog was like, Oh, somebody's coming to play with me.

Kristen: And they got it down into like a playful stance and the polar bear saw that and stopped and slowed down its gait. And when it got to the sled dog, they like embraced and they did rough and tumble play. Wow. Yeah. The need to play and that need for connection like superseded its need to eat. And they played.

Kristen: They played for quite some time and the polar bear actually came back every day for a week to play with the dog. Isn't that wild? Yeah, I love that. It's just such it's just such a trait that's in us that we can prepare ourselves for things. But we don't trust it because there's so much pressure put on us from so many [00:19:00] different places that we need to get our children ready for kindergarten.

Kristen: My son, Knox, who's nine years old now, he spent his whole entire childhood in play. He, I followed his interests. I followed his lead. He was really into numbers. He wanted everything Everything to do with numbers. I would create things for him to put in the preschool environment because he craved numbers.

Kristen: He was adding numbers before he even got to kindergarten. Like he could add two, two digit numbers. He was, he learned to add actually from watching NFL football, like adding the scores. Right. Yeah. So, but he had like zero interest in letters and numbers, like none or letters, not numbers. Letters, he wanted nothing to do with letters.

Kristen: He didn't want to write them. He didn't want to learn them He didn't want to make the sounds that they make he did not want to learn how to read and he Was scheduled to go to kindergarten when covid [00:20:00] was hit, you know hit and everything was online for that full year So I didn't send him to kindergarten because I knew that That's not an okay situation, and I had the capability and the privilege to be able to homeschool him that year, so I did.

Kristen: And, really, homeschooling was play, because I know that that's how the brain is built, and so I let him play. First grade rolled around, we put him in school, my mama heart broke because I took a picture of him on the first day of school, and he was like, Like, I just saw all of the curiosity and the creativity and the wonder just drain out of his body, and he would come home every day and he would cry, and then he got sick, he got like a sniffle, that was the year where if you had like a sniffle, you had to miss 71 days of school, so he was home for a few weeks, and then went back, and was just like, Really hard.

Kristen: He cried every day when he couldn't come home. So I was like, we're pulling you out of school. We're gonna homeschool for the rest of your life. And he still had zero interest in wanting to learn how to read. And I [00:21:00] didn't force it because I was like, we're, we're just gonna be homeschooling forever. So like, we don't need to force you to learn how to read if you're not ready and interested in that.

Kristen: I knew that it would come someday when he was ready. And so second grade rolled around and our family went through a huge change and I ended up having to put him into school and, cause I couldn't homeschool anymore. I had to work full time and travel around and speak and whatnot. And so he started second grade and I was so nervous to send him to second grade cause like you, every second grader learns to read in kindergarten and first grade, right?

Kristen: They know how to read by second grade. He did not know how to read or write. Things at all. So I was so scared to send him to second grade. He didn't know that that was a like a benchmark that he was supposed to have already met. I didn't tell him that. I didn't want him to feel behind in any way. So he, I explained to the teacher.

Kristen: I sent her an email before this whole thing. And I just said, this is who [00:22:00] I am. This is what I believe in. This is what I know about the brain, and I know that he'll catch on when he's ready for it. And she was like, oh, okay, that's fine. We'll, every child's at a different stage. We'll just, you know, give him some extra help if he needs it.

Kristen: And so he did, he got extra help. And in about March of that second grade year so about six months I got an email from the teacher asking if she could nominate him for a student of the year for school because of his progress. He's like almost reading at grade level, she said. And it's It's been phenomenal, like, we've never seen any child learn to read this quickly.

Kristen: And so I was like, absolutely. So she had to stand up in front of the whole, all the teachers and she had to pitch about Knox and his story and tell them like, you know, he came into the year not knowing how to read and he's almost at grade level, like this is phenomenal. And not only that, like, he's just a very kind.

Kristen: Child, like just the sweetest kid and so he got student of the year for the whole entire school because the staff were blown away They had never [00:23:00] seen anything like it and I attribute it to play like he got to play his brain got to build and build those building blocks and he when he was ready to learn to read that was about the time frame because They they usually say like seven or eight years old is when you're kind of All finally, finally clicks in your brain, and it's a lot easier to learn how to read.

Kristen: That's why, like, Finland doesn't have any formal schooling until seven, children are seven years old, seven or eight. They don't start to learn to read until they're that age either in Finland, and they have one of the best education systems in the world. It is the best. So I attribute it to play. He got to play and he got to wait until his brain was ready to learn something, and it took him six months to learn what everybody else took two and a half years to learn.

Kristen: So that's just an example of like, How powerful play is and that we can trust the brain. We can trust [00:24:00] the huge amounts of research that are out there that support play and like give that gift to our children because it really is like if we are taking away play, we are taking away the opportunity to learn in a healthy way.

Kristen: Like in the best way, like play is the best way to learn when you're young. So I don't know, there's so many, there's so many things that point to play out there, but then there's so much fear that's put on us as early childhood

educators and also as parents that your child's not going to be ready for kindergarten.

Kristen: If you don't do these things, if you don't sign up for the next newest ABC app, like your child's not going to be ready for kindergarten. And there's a lot of people. We're making a lot of money giving, feeding into that garden

Sarah: readiness. Absolutely. I read this book that have you, do you know Jenny Yerrick's book till the street lights come on, I think it's called a thousand hours [00:25:00] outside woman.

Sarah: So in her book, she compared a kindergarten readiness list from 30 years ago to a kindergarten readiness list from today. And it was shocking, the difference, like kindergarten readiness from 30 years ago was like, can, you know, jump can jump with two feet, can walk toe to toe at a line. Like it was all sort of like these physical.

Sarah: Markers of maturity and coordination and compared to like, can count to a hundred or I don't know what it is today, but, but that things have changed a lot over time is my point. The expectations. And I think it's like that, the fear based fear of the rat race, right? The fear that, that if our kid's going to fall behind and they're not going to know Mandarin or they're, you know, not going to know how to read by the time they get into kindergarten.

Sarah: And I, I actually would like to take it a little bit further and say like. I think probably the style of learning that you're, that you teach and, and support would actually be better for kids in terms of like the creativity and thinking [00:26:00] skills.

Kristen: Yes. Yes, absolutely. So have you heard of the NASA Creativity Study?

Sarah: I have, but tell our listeners about it. Okay,

Kristen: so I actually did some digging to see if I could actually find the full study, and we were not able to find the full study, but Dr. George Land did a TED Talk, and so I watched his whole TED Talk, and he, in the TED Talk, states that he did a study with his wife, Dr.

Kristen: Beth Jarman, for NASA. They wanted to hire, NASA wanted to hire the most creative astronauts to be able to go up into outer space. So they gave the astronauts. this test of creativity to see how much creativity they had. And

only 2 percent of adults can pass it. And Dr. George Land says that they've given over a million adults this test and only 2 percent of adults can pass this test.

Kristen: So him and his wife decided to do, to give the study, the same study or the same test, sorry, the same test to four and five year old children. They [00:27:00] wanted to see what percent of four and five year old children could pass. The test. Same test. They give it to 1600 four and five year olds. 98 percent could pass.

Kristen: So they made it into a longitudinal study and they tested the same kids five years later when they were 10 years old. Only 30 percent could pass at 10 years old. And then they gave it to him again when they were 15. It went down to 12%. And then they were It was the same 2 percent as adults. So what they found that all of these children had in common is they all went to school.

Kristen: And school is like sucking the creativity right out of our children. And the interesting thing is, is if you look up the World Economic Forum, like the number one skill that employers are looking for in 2024, it's creativity. But nobody has it. So early childhood is really the last golden place that we can allow children to live fully into that play world.

Kristen: We have the capacity to let young children to do that because we don't have so much red tape in early [00:28:00] childhood. So we can let children play. And it's, it's so important that we give. children up to the age of five. And I would, I argue to say like, we should be able to play our whole lives. But it's especially important through the age of five because that's where like 90%, maybe you know this statistic better than I do.

Kristen: I think it's like 90 percent of our brains are built from the age, from age zero to five. So we need to give children play. If we're taking away play, we're taking away valuable learning that could be happening, connections happening in the brain. My friend, Ray Pica, she's an author and a speaker.

Kristen: She, one of the quotes that she has is that We often just think that children exist from the neck up. Like, we're only worried about filling their head with all the academic things, and we forget that there's a whole entire body there that needs to be developed as well. And that's what's so cool about child led and play based programs is that generally, in true play based programs, we're looking at the whole child.

Kristen: We're not just looking [00:29:00] at the academic pieces. We are looking at social and emotional growth, and we spend a lot of time Working with children on social skills. We spent a lot of time doing, developing fine motor and gross motor skills through play. And then language and literacy is one of the domains of early child education, where we want to make sure that their environments are filled with lots of opportunities for early literacy.

Kristen: And early numeracy, the cognitive skills. But a lot of times in academic preschools, those things are overlooked because in academic based preschools, they're doing a watered down version of kindergarten. And oftentimes that looks like very teacher directed, very structured. Like we're going to sit down and we're going to do calendar time.

Kristen: If you see a calendar on a wall that children are doing every single day, That are under the age of five, even six. I would argue up to age seven. It is not developmentally appropriate. Children should not be doing calendar time. There's like a lot of studies that have been done around that, too. It's just too abstract of a [00:30:00] concept for anybody under the age of six.

Kristen: seven to really grasp. So we're just wasting our time. That was my,

Sarah: that was my how I, I saw your reel about calendar time, which is how I found out about you where you, where you were talking about I think you said something like, guess how long it takes for a four year, four and five year old to learn calendar time.

Sarah: And you, you said like, you know, 32 hours. Yeah. Guess how long. For an eight year old to learn about the calendar, like, one hour.

Kristen: Yes! Like, when you're ready for it, you can learn it so much freaking faster than you can if you're, like, being pushed to learn something your brain isn't capable of being ready for yet.

Sarah: Yeah, I love that. That, when I saw that, I was like, I've got to get this person on my podcast.

Kristen: Yes! So We they don't need to be sitting down for long periods of time. Children move to learn. Children need to be up and running around and moving their bodies. One of the things that kindergarten teachers want Children to have is an executive function skills before they get to kindergarten or self and self regulation skills.

Kristen: A lot of times people think self regulation is learned [00:31:00] through sitting still, Well, self regulation means sitting still and like being able to like keep your hands to yourself. So we need to practice sitting still and keeping hands to ourselves. You're doing the exact opposite because the children they're not born to like sit they're born to move just like puppies and kitties and goats, right?

Kristen: So self regulation is actually learned by jumping and by running and by screaming really loud and by spinning and by taking risks. It's not learned by sitting still. And so there's just all of these misconceptions that are in place that we just have always seen it done one way. And so we think that's the way that it should be done, but it really is just having a detrimental effect on Children and there's an there's another study.

Kristen: That and so kudos to any of you grownups at home or parents listening to this because when there's a whole study that came out in 2023 again that talks about how parents [00:32:00] play beliefs can heavily impact their Children's success in school. So like if a parent believes that play is important, and wants to have that for their children and supplies a play based environment for them.

Kristen: They will do better in school with academics than parents who don't believe in play. So it's, it's good. I think,

Sarah: I mean, you mentioned, you mentioned up to the age of five as being the most important years, but I'd also, for parents who are listening with older kids, like, Like I will, I'm sorry, teachers, but I will often encourage parents to say, we're not a homework family so that their kids have time to play after school.

Sarah: You know, I think the research shows not until middle school is homework beneficial to kids. And so any time that they're spent, they spend doing homework or other adult organized activities is time away from play. And they're already in school for eight hours a day. So I, I think everyone, I think play should be priority for all parents [00:33:00] on all ages is to let them have that play time.

Sarah: If you, if you were working with somebody or if you knew, if you say you knew some, a parent who is listening to this and they're, you know, committing to having more play, if their child is more used to adult direction cause I know some of the research shows that kids can lose their creativity and ability to play.

Sarah: It's not regularly, if they're not regularly allowed to play. How could, how, what are some suggestions you might have for parents who are like, okay, I want to make sure my kid has more actual real

Kristen: play? Let them be bored. I think that's the number one. Like, I think boredom is the best creativity builder.

Kristen: Because, and it can be really uncomfortable, though, for adults to watch children be bored. It's uncomfortable for me to watch my kids be bored. And I try to give suggestions and things, and it makes it even harder when screen time is such an issue, right? So it makes it harder for children to find [00:34:00] joy in play.

Kristen: But once they get started, they generally don't want to stop. So I would say, let them be bored. is the number one thing, because boredom is going to drive creativity most of the time. You're home with some loose parts, like open ended materials for your kiddos. Magnetiles are huge. I love magnetiles.

Kristen: What else? I mean, we had wood blocks and just, Toilet paper rolls. My, my, my son would be so embarrassed if he heard me say this, but like, bra pads. I had a whole bunch of them sitting on my dresser one day and he was like, oh, and he was using them as little like clamshells for his little superhero guys.

Kristen: So like, Materials like that, anything that you're just going to like throw away, put a big box of stuff out and let your children just create with it. Have creative art materials around that they can use to create open ended art with. We have that a lot in my house. We actually are doing sticker journaling right now because all of [00:35:00] my kids are nine and up.

Kristen: And so three out of my four kids are doing sticker journaling with me. So we just have like thousands of stickers and like little tiny notebooks, and we just have it out on the table all the time. And the children can go and make sticker collages whenever they want. So just making the materials accessible too, so they're not hidden away.

Kristen: But it doesn't have to be, like, beautiful and set up, like, in these beautiful play provocations that you might see online. Like, just put stuff out and let them do whatever they want with it. It doesn't have to look aesthetic and beautiful. It might look like a junkyard in your house sometimes, and that's okay.

Kristen: Cardboard boxes. Bringing cardboard boxes. Like, that is the best. Like, imaginative, like it helps you just get so creative and so curious when you have empty cardboard boxes. Like, everybody loves empty cardboard boxes, so find some of those and put those in their environment. I still have I have this wooden handled serrated [00:36:00] knife in my kitchen downstairs that, Every time I use it, it was mine and my sister's cardboard box knife when we were growing up.

Sarah: Like I, it was like the, the knife for my whole childhood. I, I guess my dad must've been getting rid of it, but every time I use it, I remember making cardboard box things with my sister and using that knife to cut the holes in the boxes.

Kristen: Oh yeah. I remember one of my best like play memories as a child was I used to take wood blocks cause we had some wood blocks and I would make.

Kristen: on the floor in our house, I would make very detailed, like house plans, like blueprints with the blocks. So it was like kind of looking in on a house from the top and I would make doorways and I would make like the bathroom and the kitchen. And then I would use just random stuff from around the house.

Kristen: Like a deck of cards was the bed. And I would like make all like a big dollhouse basically. And I would leave it out for days. The floor plan. Yeah, people would have to walk around it, but it was just made out of, like, random stuff from around the house, and that is, [00:37:00] like, some of my favorite memories is making those intricate, detailed houses that spanned feet.

Kristen: I mean, they were, like, four or five feet big across the floor. My parents That's cool your

Sarah: parents let you keep them out.

Kristen: Yeah.

Sarah: I've, I've heard that so much from from people with toddlers or, or like older babies, like they don't want to play with any of the toys that we have. They only want to play with like the whisk and the, you know, the things that are, that are the adult things that are around.

Sarah: So just let them. Yeah. What I'm hearing a theme here is is that managing our own anxiety is one of the ways we can let our children play, right.

The managing our anxiety about the kindergarten readiness or managing. They might be bored so it really is, it's managing ourselves to allow play to happen.

Sarah: Absolutely. And that reminds me too of that study that just came out about risky play which I'm sure you're aware of that you know, again, managing our own anxiety is the big part of just like letting kids do the play.

Kristen: [00:38:00] Absolutely. Yeah. And risk is so important in early childhood too. I mean, we could do a whole other podcast episode on that.

Kristen: Risk is like. I've heard, I can't remember if, I can't remember where I heard this, but if you, if you never let a children, if you never let a child take a risk, it's almost like never allowing them to hold a pencil. Isn't that wild?

Sarah: Yeah. I've heard that if you don't let them take risks earlier in life, then they push them off until the teenage years when the risks are a lot more serious than climbing too high an apple tree.

Sarah: Absolutely. Yeah. So, so what would, if you had Say you, say you're, you know, your kid's in like a straight up kindergarten classroom. Is there any, do you find it at all successful for parents to advocate for more play in the classroom?

Kristen: Oh, absolutely. The, the biggest change will come from parents advocating for it.

Kristen: So, I think if you know that play is the best, And you want to see even more play [00:39:00] in kindergarten because play is missing from a lot of kindergarten classrooms not all but a lot advocate for it say hey, like I know that open ended materials are amazing Is there like a time of day where children can engage in those?

Kristen: Can I supply your classroom with a bunch of things? Can I start a drive to get open ended materials? Another Really fun thing that my kids loved to do is hot glue gun or we use low temp glue guns, but low temp glue gun sculptures, like just having low temp glue guns and like building things is huge.

Kristen: And even just to have like some things like that in a kindergarten classroom where they can create freely and have a time, time in the day to do that. Even just having buckets of Legos. Those are open ended. Having wood blocks in a kid art garden classroom. It's huge. So yes, parents need to advocate for play if they know that play is the best.

Kristen: And You know, I don't know, you know, people live in so many [00:40:00] different pockets of the world and have different access to different types of programs. But if you, if you don't have access to any sort of a real true play based program in your community, yes, it's time to advocate for it and stand up because parents are probably the ones who can make the most change the fastest.

Kristen: I think the biggest thing is just to trust your child, trust brain science, trust the research, trust the educators who are there that are giving, hopefully giving your child that play based learning opportunity.

Kristen: And like, that's what we need to do is just like, trust what we and be developmentally appropriate. A lot of times those watered down kindergarten things in early childhood, they're not developmentally appropriate. So we need to look for places that actually provide developmentally appropriate experiences for the aged children that we're working with.

Sarah: I think that's such a great thing to lean in on with your story about Knox and his reading readiness and the story [00:41:00] about like, you know, the calendar time and readiness. And, and I think Probably there are a lot of teachers out there who would like to have their classrooms be more play based, but the pressure from parents on the other hand of like, my kid has to be reading by the time they finish kindergarten or you know, wanting them to have that academic skills.

Sarah: And I think just, we have to remember what we were talking about in the beginning about how early academics actually doesn't set kids up for success in the way that people think it does. In fact, the opposite, I think is what a lot of research shows.

Kristen: It is the opposite. And then you're also, you know, you're giving children lots of, I mean, a negative view of school because they're being forced to do things they're not capable of or ready for yet.

Kristen: And that can stress kids out. And so, yeah, let them play. Let them play. With, with all the research, last question here, with all the research that does show that play is the best for children's learning, why do you think it's so hard, why do you think that research doesn't translate [00:42:00] as much as you think it would into what schools are like?

Kristen: Oh, there's probably a lot of reasons, but I think it, it's fear. I really do feel like it's all based in fear and money. There's a lot of money that can be

gained from creating curriculums and worksheet books and all of those things. So I think money, there's a lot of big companies out there that can Get you to think in ways to, to like further their businesses, maybe but really fear.

Kristen: I think there's just so much messaging out there that makes people scared that their child will be behind or not ready for something. So, yeah. Oh, it's just, I want to get rid of the term ready for kindergarten or like the whole phrase. I just want to get, They are getting ready. They're getting ready for kindergarten by being a three year old and having three year old experiences.

Kristen: And the play, the play is getting

Sarah: them ready.

Kristen: Yes. They're, yeah, they're getting ready by being four. They're getting ready by being five and having [00:43:00] five year old experiences. They don't need to have ten year old experiences when they're five to get ready for something. So.

Sarah: Yeah. And I, and I think that you have to think about what they're missing out on by not having the five year old experiences when they're supposed to be having the five year old experiences.

Sarah: Absolutely. Well, thank you so much. I'm just going to ask my final question, which is a question I ask all my podcast guests, which is if you could go back in time and this can have to do with play or not have to do with play.

Kristen: Yeah.

Sarah: But if you could go back in time to your younger parents self, what advice would you give yourself?

Kristen: Oh, wow. Okay.

Kristen: I would just give myself more permission to just slow down and be present. I think that that's what I would tell my younger self. And I think that that really actually has a lot to do with just my personality and my drive to build new things and, and seek out new ness. Like I love change and like I [00:44:00] started creating the preschool when I was pregnant with my youngest son.

Kristen: So like I've always just been so go go go like driven to like create the next thing and the next best thing that I Forget to like slow down and just enjoy

the moment And I can now make myself slow down and enjoy the moments with my children But nine years ago. No, I didn't it was like a rat race. I think I would also tell myself Your children don't need to be in every single sport and like lesson ever when they're four you know, like they're not going to become a piano prodigy unless they're meant to be a piano prodigy.

Kristen: So like we can just lay off it for a little while and we don't need to like race from one activity to the next, to the next, to the next, just enjoy. Letting them be little and giving them time to play at home with their siblings or with you or by themselves. So yeah, don't, don't [00:45:00] make them be in soccer when they're three.

Kristen: Don't put them in hockey when they're three, like, just let them be kids. Cause that's like, it's more adult directed activities. Like it's not play it's. Like, me telling you what to do all the time. And children don't have very much control. And so, they do get control over their play when they are able to play.

Kristen: So people are just generally happier when they have time to play.

Sarah: I love that. Thank you so much, Kristen. Of course. Where's the best place for folks to go and find out more about you and what you do?

Kristen: Yeah, I hang out on Instagram most of the time. It's Kristen. RB. Peterson. And yeah. And my website is kristinrbpeterson.

Kristen: com, so there's a bunch of free resources over there. I also have a podcast called the Play Based Learning Podcast if you're interested in learning more about play. So yeah, those are all the best places to find me.

Sarah: Awesome. And if anyone who's listening to this got any early childhood educators in your life, make sure to send them this episode and and Kristin's info.

Sarah: Amazing. Thank you for having me. [00:46:00] Thank you.

Thanks for listening to this week's episode. I hope you found this conversation insightful and exactly what you needed in this moment. Be sure to subscribe to the show on your favorite podcast platform and leave us a rating and review on Apple Podcasts. Remember that I'm rooting for you. I see you out there showing up for your kids and doing the best you can.

Sending hugs over the airwaves today. Hang in there. You've got this.