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On the Field of Play

Life is an exciting opportunity to be on the edge of discovery with a fresh, updated image of who we are waiting behind every obstacle or challenge. To be conscious is to embrace our spirit of adventure and our ability to play, incorporating it into every aspect of our lives so there is no separation between work and play, or each other. As a person who is all about play, and a therapist who employs play as a vehicle for healing, I find play to be a powerful means for transformation.

In general, people tend to gravitate toward the concept that healing, change, sobriety, etc, is difficult work. If it isn't painful, then it isn't real. This way of being and thinking can hold a heaviness and a lack of vitality. Even if there is pain, life's path can be a journey that presents a chance to step beyond that perception and approach healing with enthusiasm, joy and curiosity.

When I stopped drinking sixteen years ago and sobriety hit me square in the face, my sense of humor and ability to have fun was left behind in the bottle. People kept telling me to lighten up, but I didn't have a role model or teacher to support me in discovering that playful part of myself. It took me years to discover and develop my authentic, expressive, humorous self. One important lesson I learned during those years was that the more I could relax and allow myself to be silly and spontaneous, the more flexible and creative my life became. Whatever "obstacle" was in my way, if I approached it with an inquisitive, "I wonder if..." attitude, the easier and more exciting the outcome was. Through my own relationship with play, I have been able to see in others how an openness to play also gives them more ability to break old patterns and heal. Indeed, I discovered play to be a potent vehicle for transformation.

The 'action' of that knowledge is what I bring to my clients both in private sessions and in groups. Change happens right before me, through the action of consciousness, through the vehicle of play, as I facilitate Play Groups. Play enhances the sense of safety in a group. It never ceases to amaze me how quickly play allows people to try on new roles in front of their peers. With hats, costumes, and other props, each is invited to step out of their comfort zone and to be curious while exploring in a playful way parts of their self other than their addiction. Improvisation is a challenging way to be more in the present and learn how to trust. When reassured there is no judgment – just play – the trust is built to take small risks. And because play is great training for meeting the unexpected, it gives "hands on" experience in how to be more adept at handling whatever life brings.

The transformations are thrilling. Clients often surprise themselves in their willingness to be in uncomfortable, scary situations – by volunteering for the unknown. They share how their anxiety level drops as they permit themselves to join in and have fun. In group, rival gang members will leave their hate and anger on the sidelines while they connect and work together through fun activities. Recently one client said to another, “You’ve opened up more and spoke up more in this group than in the whole time since you’ve been here.” Their joy is evident when sharing how they get less upset at changes, can think clearer, more quickly and creatively and they feel more connected to others.

It’s through these experiences and more that I have witnessed healing and greater wholeness, as countless people connected with parts of themselves that had long been suppressed. My work is to hold a space, open a way and guide others as they connect with the deepest parts of their truth. For this we meet on the field of play to engage the actions that lift and heal.

For each of us, stepping into wholeness is a conscious action on our part – a commitment to who we are and how we choose to live. I invite you to connect with this process through play. Life holds an invitation for us to rise each day, see the playfulness it holds, and embrace our capacity to engage it. We can explore, recognize edges, take risks – small and large; we can challenge ourselves, surprise ourselves and invite something new. We can see life as an adventure and we can be excited by its wonder.