



Creating a Beautiful Mess: Ten Essential Play Experiences for a Joyous Childhood

Ann Gadzikowski

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This must-read teaches parents how to embrace self-directed play as a joyous necessity for children.

In *Creating A Beautiful Mess: Ten Essential Play Experiences For A Joyous Childhood*, early-childhood educator Ann Gadzikowski examines the role of play in the lives of children. She takes an up-close-and-personal look at play in all its forms, extolling the virtues of the many ways in which children can happily grow and learn through play.

Through experiences ranging from playing make-believe to cuddling soft toys to making things happen with machines, children are developing their physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and language abilities. Research underpins the author's claim that play in ten distinct categories is, by all rights, essential to the childhood experience. This play should be facilitated by adults, but largely child-directed.

Creating A Beautiful Mess is packed with good information. The exploration of the ideas presented is thorough and relevant. With useful examples, suggested resources, and even a few simple recipes, parents are armed with an arsenal of ideas for how best to engage children in play for maximum enjoyment and development.

The book is cleverly and pleasantly organized, and it subtly embodies the defining point: play. With a splash of color and a small picture of a toy or puzzle on many of the pages, the notion of play is exquisitely communicated. This is the perfect companion to the ideas presented. Real-life scenarios at the beginning of each chapter further illustrate key points. And chapter highlights dispersed throughout the book reiterate important concepts.

The author demonstrates an impressive temperance when it comes to issues of gender. There are multiple instances where special attention is paid to how gender concerns can be mitigated. In a world where these stereotypes still persist, this sensitivity is especially important, and relevant to the world in which we live and the children who live in it.

In *Creating A Beautiful Mess*, Gadzikowski reminds us that self-directed play is important for our children and teaches us how to embrace it as a joyous necessity for them. This is a must-read for parents.

LAURA MAHON (Winter 2016)

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