

# PSYCHOLUDICS IN PLAY

Children and adults play to develop their physical and spiritual identity, their culture and their understanding of the world around them. [Psycholudics](#), the study of the mind and psyche at play, describes the process of play as it happens. It proposes that play is essentially spiritually and ecologically developmental.

Playworkers and other adults working with children will find many useful concepts here that describe the complex phenomena of play. These concepts add up to an application that can be used when working with children better to facilitate the play experience.

This site offers an introduction to [Psycholudics](#) as well as referencing the important works in the area to date. You will also find useful information on related topics and a link to the discussion page, where you can debate directly with Gordon Sturrock, Perry Else and others, about the psycholudic approach of [Therapeutic Playwork](#).

Key to this new form of practice is the understanding that children will play as it in their nature so to do. Adults can enhance play opportunities by sensitively interacting with children and by establishing stimulating play environments deepening their capacity to offer insight and meaningful response.

## Psycholudics and Play

So, to begin with: what is play? It might be said that play is about building social relationships, but it can also be carried out through individual, solitary meditations. We might define play as about developing physical skills but it is also a passive, reflective, mental activity. In fact for everything we use to describe it, there is an opposite description. So what is it that play is?

We believe that we are driven to play as part of our basic human development. This [play drive](#) is as much part of us as the urge to breathe.

From the earliest days as children, the play drive is what helps us learn the key skills essential for our survival. We cannot see this play drive, though we can see the effects it produces. Below we discuss the process of playing – the full [play cycle](#) as we describe it as the basis for a [psycholudic](#) understanding of the play process.

The need to play can first be seen in a kind of internal contemplation, a reverie, we call the [metalude](#). From this state, the child produces an action, which may be very obvious or very subtle. This action we call the [play cue](#). The play cue comes from the thoughts of the child, their internal world, into the physical world in the expectation of getting a

response. For instance, in very young children, the play cue may be to drop an object from the hand for someone else to pick up and pass back. Still later it may be a spoken request.

The answer to a play cue, we call a **play return**. From the external containing world, a response or return is taken in and incorporated by the child. The child will reply to this response in a number of ways. They may react to it and continue the play. They may react and change the play. Or they may ignore it altogether. The return can come from another person, though as many people know, children can play alone and get a lot of stimulation from their own play. In that situation, we say that the return comes from the environment, though it should be understood that it is the child play drive that is completing the play cycle, not the environment that is playing with the child! Put simply, the child may see something interesting in the environment and think, that looks fun and start playing with it. This playing intention is held by the creation of a **play frame**. The frame is a material or non-material boundary that keeps the play in tact. The child may then effect the frame by including others, moving objects or changing it in some other way to create a varied response that maintains the **play flow**. Once entered into this play flow can absorb the child or children for minutes to days at a time. When the plat meaning of the frame is extinguished, when the flow is terminated, we say that the play is **annihilated**. These elements constitute the full play cycle as we perceive it.

Seeing play as a drive that creates cues and responds to the environment has implications for our work practice with children at play. The drive within the child is what starts the play cycle. We recognise this when we say that play is about choice for the child. Children denied choice, will be inhibited in their play, the cycle will be incomplete. The play drive will try to compensate in was that are more urgent or aberrant perhaps causing conflict with the environment around the child. (We highlight this **display** as we call it in our later articles).

We recognise that play is done for its own sake and not for some external reward. The play drive is seeking to play with the world around the child and those things and people in it. When it gets a meaningful response, when the frame and the content are spent, it is complete and can begin all over again. Play is therefore incremental and developmental; anyone who tries to lead or force it will be denying the play drive purpose and adulterating the child play.

We believe that the play drive, its expression and enjoyment, are closely linked to an ecological well-being and are the basis for our therapeutic way of working with children.

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Perry Else.