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Today's Children Harmed Physically and Emotionally by Decline in Playgrounds and Recess According to *American Journal of Play* Interview

Following is a summary of an interview appearing in the October 2008 issue of the American Journal of Play, the peer-reviewed, scholarly journal of Strong National Museum of Play in Rochester, New York

“What’s Wrong with America’s Playgrounds and How to Fix Them” From an *American Journal of Play* interview with Joe L. Frost

“Playgrounds and recess have fallen out of favor in neighborhoods and schools” with “destructive and profound” consequences for today’s children according to an interview in the *American Journal of Play* with Joe L. Frost, Parker Centennial Professor Emeritus at the University of Texas, Austin. Limiting outdoor play “harms a child’s cognitive, social, and language development; limits their physical fitness; hurts their health; and reduces learning and the ability to cope with trauma.”

Frost discusses the history of playgrounds in America from 1821 to today, and explores the many factors that have led to inadequate, standardized, cookie-cutter playgrounds and a decrease in recess. He especially admires the more challenging late nineteenth-century adventure playgrounds favored in Europe. Overseen by trained play leaders, such playgrounds provided scrap materials for building dens and huts, and opportunities to care for animals, cook over open fires, tend gardens, and play in water, sand, and dirt. Americans are very risk averse, he says, as is apparent in mushrooming litigation and ever-increasingly stringent Consumer Product Safety Commission playground safety guidelines, which have grown from 13 pages in 1981 to 81 pages in 2006. “Thousands of playgrounds throughout Europe. . . are more

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challenging, more fun, and more developmentally beneficial than most in this country, but most Americans see them as messy and hazardous,” asserts Frost. “Europeans place more responsibility on children for their own safety.”

Frost concludes that fear of injury and lawsuits, fear of violence, organized sports, high stakes testing, and indoor technology or cyber play “collectively and independently reduce children’s opportunities for creative, absorbing play in natural contexts and negatively affect their physical and emotional health. . . .History and a century of scholarly research say that play is essential for healthy development. We must save playgrounds, free outdoor play, and recess, because they matter—for children’s health, for their development, and for their future.”

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Joe L. Frost is Parker Centennial Professor Emeritus at the University of Texas, Austin. He has written or edited fifteen university-level textbooks and more than 100 articles and reports, and served as a consultant to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, and the U.S. Department of Justice. Frost helped design the award-winning playground for the Scottish Rite Hospital for Crippled Children and helped to redesign the Beauvoir School of the National Cathedral complex in Washington, D.C. Currently, he is assisting the Children’s Museum of Houston with a major renovation that includes new children’s activities, natural and built, both indoors and outdoors.

About the *American Journal of Play*: Peer-reviewed and written in a clear, straightforward style, the *American Journal of Play* is the first interdisciplinary journal dedicated solely to the study of play. Providing thought-provoking content from some of the most prominent national researchers and writers in the field, each issue is filled with articles, essays, interviews, and book reviews that explore the critical role of play in learning and human development. To view the most current issue’s table of contents visit: www.americanjournalofplay.org

About Strong National Museum of Play: Home to the Brian Sutton-Smith Archives of Play, Strong National Museum of Play houses the world’s most comprehensive collection of dolls, toys, games, and play-related artifacts and is the only collections-based museum anywhere devoted solely to the critical role of play in learning and human development and the ways in which play illuminates American cultural history. The museum is also home to the National Toy Hall of Fame® and dynamic, innovative exhibitions combining artifacts and interactivity. For more information, visit www.museumofplay.org

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