

Happy New Year!

Jan 10, 2023



As an educator, I love opportunities for reflection. What I love about New Year's reflection, is not the pressure of total reinvention of self, but rather the idea that there are tiny shifts I can be making mid school year to lean into the educator, parent, and school leader I hope to be. It also presents the opportunity to remember and celebrate my successes and learning opportunities I experienced over the past 12 months.



Whether you are a teacher, a parent, or play another role in the life of a young child, I invite you to consider some of the Stepping Stones areas of reflection in this new calendar year.



Reflecting on Play

Play is a set of behaviors that are freely chosen, personally directed, and intrinsically motivated. Children are in charge of the content and the intent of their play. -Sally Haughey, Fairy Dust Teaching

Play-Based Resolutions

At Stepping Stones we know that play is the most productive way that children learn and develop their bodies and minds. If true play is freely chosen, personally directed, and intrinsically motivated, then we know that our role in

play is to create opportunities and step back. Easier said than done. We like to ask ourselves:

- Where do we see true play happening in our classroom, home, or outdoor play space?
- Are there opportunities to protect more time for open-ended play in our routines?
- What tiny shift could we make to step back from adult directed activities and say yes to free play?

Reflecting on Risk

Risk taking is essential for human development. It promotes self esteem, self regulation, confidence, problem solving, tolerance for failure, gross & fine motor skills, and more! Risk is different from hazard, as it is calculated and intentional. –

Kristen Peterson, Learning Wild

How to Say Yes to Risk in the New Year

I am much better at honoring risk as an educator than I am as a parent. When I see my little one attempting something risky, I literally and audibly gasp. I find small shifts towards risk in my parenting helps a lot, and allows me to feel more comfortable with risky play at home.

- Start small and gradually increase opportunities for risk.
- Instead of saying “be careful,” talk about the specific risk to support the child’s own decision making: “that log is pretty slippery this morning, what’s your plan?”
- Stay close by but don’t interfere.

I’ll add one final suggestion: send your child to a risk-celebrating, play-based, nature-loving school so you don’t have to watch.

Reflecting on our Environment

At Stepping Stones we believe in creating calm and comfortable spaces with a focus on natural materials, warm lighting, and muted color schemes. Images of children & their families, and displays of children's work should take the stage. A well curated environment supports play and learning, and keeps children from being overstimulated by environmental noise.

Creating Calm and Inspiring Play Spaces in the New Year

Reorganizing is always a big theme in New Year's Resolutions, but we try and consider some other ideas related to our play spaces:

- Are there areas of our classroom/playspace where we can swap out single use materials for more open-ended loose parts?
- Do we have habitats for refuge in your spaces? Hiding places, quiet areas, areas with minimal stimulation?
- Do we have a variety of lighting options? Lamps at different heights, flashlights, click lights, & string lights, natural light?
- Do we have systems in place to adapt play spaces to meet children's needs based on developmental stage, temperament, collaboration, interest, and play actions? Are we rotating toys? Offering different opportunities to climb?

Reflecting on Ourselves

The Educator's Journey is full of challenges, growth, and celebration. There are many different strategies out there for reflecting on your personal journey leading into a new year. We took inspiration from play guru Sally Haughey's Create 2023, and asked our staff some questions about themselves looking back and forward into the new year.

Looking Back

- If you could describe 2022 in one word, what word would you choose?
What color?
- What was your most unexpected joy?
- Where did your teaching brilliance show up in your practice this past year?
Claim it!

What will you keep in your pocket from 2022?

Looking Forward

- What passions or interests will you dedicate more time to in 2023?
- How will you nurture yourself in the new year?
- Make a declaration! 2023 will be the year you finally...

May you find joy, inspiration, and growth in the new year!

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