

The Value of Play A Forum on Risk, Recreation, and Children's Health

Wednesday, May 31, 2006; 9:00 AM to 12:30 PM
American Enterprise Institute, 1150 Seventeenth Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036

Summary

Children in America have lost significant opportunities for active, stimulating, and creative play that used to be commonplace; as a result, childhood obesity has risen and children's social and cognitive development has suffered. Playgrounds have become boring – stripped of seesaws, slides, swings, and jungle gyms. Sledding on snowy hills in public parks is in legal jeopardy. Fear of being sued and fear of even the slightest risk are increasingly leading to a sedentary childhood, even if that leads to the far greater health risks associated with obesity and lack of exercise.

Play is critical to children's cognitive, social, and physical development and to their mental and physical health. What implications do changes in playground design have for our children's long-term mental and physical health? What is the role of active play in combating childhood obesity? What are the secondary effects of our attempt to remove all risk from our children's lives? And how can fear of litigation be replaced with renewed confidence that reasonable actions will not lead to court cases?

On May 31, 2006, the AEI-Brookings Joint Center and Common Good will convene a conference to consider the relationship between America's growing aversion to risk and the development and health of our children. The Value of Play conference will bring together, for the first time, leaders in the fields of playground and landscape design, childhood development and health, and law to explore the relationship between risk, recreation, and children's health.

The conference will consist of three panels. The first panel will be led by Susan G. Solomon, author of *American Playgrounds: Revitalizing Community Space*, and will include representatives from education and government to discuss the role that legal fear and risk aversion have had upon playground design and recreation activities. The second panel will be composed of experts in childhood development and health and will be led by Joe L. Frost, Professor Emeritus at The University of Texas and a leading expert on issues relating to play and playgrounds. This panel will explore the nature of play, its importance to children's cognitive, social, and physical development, and the decline in children's physical activity and health associated with reduced opportunities for play. The third panel will be led by Philip K. Howard, a prominent New York lawyer, author of *The Death of Common Sense* and *The Collapse of the Common Good*, and Chair of Common Good. It will discuss societal attitudes toward risk and the steps that can be taken to restore the pleasures and lessons that playgrounds and recreation can provide our children.

The AEI-Brookings Joint Center (www.aei-brookings.org) was established by the American Enterprise Institute and The Brookings Institution in response to growing concerns about understanding the impact of regulation on consumers, business, and government. The

primary purpose of the Joint Center is to hold lawmakers and regulators accountable for their decisions by providing thoughtful, objective analyses of existing regulatory programs and new regulatory proposals.

Common Good (www.cgood.org) is a bipartisan, nonprofit coalition dedicated to restoring common sense to American law. By conducting polls, hosting forums, and listening to leaders in health care, education, law, business, and public policy from across the country, we are developing practical solutions to minimize the impact of legal fear in American life. Through widespread national and local media coverage, we also work to elevate the public discussion and consideration of these matters.

Draft Agenda

8:15 – 9:00 Breakfast and Registration

9:00 – 9:10 Opening Remarks

- **Robert W. Hahn**, Executive Director of the AEI-Brookings Joint Center
- **Franklin H. Stone**, Executive Director of Common Good

9:10 – 10:20 Panel I. How Risk Aversion and Liability Concerns Have Changed Play

- **Susan G. Solomon**, author of *American Playgrounds: Revitalizing Community Space*
- **Amy L. Freitag**, Deputy Commissioner for Capital Projects for the City of New York Department of Parks and Recreation
- **Darell Hammond**, Co-Founder and CEO of KaBOOM!
- **Roger A. Hart**, Director of the Children’s Environments Research Group and Professor of Environmental Psychology at The City University of New York

10:30 – 11:30 Panel II. Why We Need Play: Improving Children’s Health and Well-Being

- **Joe L. Frost**, Professor Emeritus of Education at The University of Texas
- **Rhonda L. Clements**, Professor of Education at Manhattanville College and former President of the American Association for the Child’s Right to Play
- **Anthony D. Pellegrini**, Professor of Educational Psychology at the University of Minnesota

11:40 – 12:30 Panel III. Making Play Healthy Again: Legislative and Societal Solutions

- **Philip K. Howard**, Chair of Common Good and author of *The Death of Common Sense* and *The Collapse of the Common Good*
- **Hara Estroff Marano**, Editor-at-Large of *Psychology Today* and author of the forthcoming book, *A Nation of Wimps*

12:30 – 1:30 Lunch

To register for this event, please e-mail rsvp@cgood.org with your name, organization, title, and mailing address. Space is limited, so please respond early. If you have any questions, please e-mail Andrew Park at apark@cgood.org.

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