

Consent, Rough and Tumble, and Weapons Play

At Fresh Air Learning, we believe in helping children learn communication skills that will set them up for safe and authentic interactions in life. We talk a lot about consent. For example, if a child pushes or hugs another child, even if it is in the spirit of friendship and fun, we want to make sure that both children feel good about that interaction. We will talk with them about this to ensure that both children have given consent to play in this way. We strive to provide an open environment for children to explore many types of play, including rough and tumble and weapons play.

Our facilitators are there in part to observe the children's play. If the facilitators notice that one or more children are feeling uncomfortable with certain types of interactions, we will talk with the children about those interactions. This discussion may happen in a group or individually. For example, if several children want to play with imaginary weapons and other children do not, the facilitator and the children would work together to determine how to fulfill and respect the needs of each child.

Rough and tumble play and weapons play can feel challenging to parents. There are also many reasons to allow children to play freely. These include:

1. Children can explore challenging social dynamics, such as learning about power and control.
2. Children learn that others have different boundaries and that they need to respect them.
3. Children learn about their own boundaries and how to express or decline to consent.
4. In play, children work through concerns that they have in their everyday lives, such as struggles they are having with a sibling.
5. Children who do not feel restricted in their play feel more comfortable expressing their whole selves at school. Take a look at the book *We Don't Play With Guns Here* for examples.

We welcome discussion from parents about this topic and encourage you to speak with us at any time about the children's play.