

The Playful Child Modes

When the Playful Child Mode is activated, we have a general sense of contentment in our system because, at our core, emotional needs have been met. This is preferably something that is being done internally, however, meeting these needs externally is something that is helpful and, at times, definitely needed too. In this lighthearted and relaxed state, it feels comfortable for us to be playful, we feel at ease in our system, self-validated, connected, optimistic, competent, and most importantly, safe. Without a sense of safety, both externally and internally, our system is set on high alert, and the protective aspects of our emotional child parts, like anger and impulsivity for example, are not allowed to relax and enjoy the current moment we are in. Access to the many different aspects of the Playful Child mode is extremely necessary for us to engage in spontaneous and enjoyable activities, particularly in social settings. The absence of our ability to access this mode is possibly an indication that we were never allowed, or encouraged to play when we were young. As a result, we miss the early opportunities to explore our own individual likes and dislikes, and a crucial part of our development is skipped by not taking part in this fundamental form of social interaction. When needed, the Playful Child Mode provides an important counterbalance to what is often the emotionally painful experience of the Vulnerable Child, as early exposure to pleasure and joy can develop the skills of internal motivation. This provides the ability to access a sense of optimistic hope that things can and will get better in challenging times later on in adult life. The Playful Child Modes are at the centre of our system when we participate in many of the activities we need for Self-care, without them, many people will simply burn out as they never truly learn how to switch off from the stressors of their day-to-day activities.

“Understanding the role my Playful Child Mode needed to have in my personality system was integral to my success. I truly didn’t know how to play in a healthy way, and ultimately, this was stopping me from practicing Self-care!”

~Steven Morris RP

When I was a child, I was often told that I was only allowed to play with my toys in designated areas of the house. Oh, don’t get me wrong, I pushed the limits of this boundary on a daily basis, the mischievous little boy within me at that time would empty his toys out in many different rooms that were not meant to be used for play. Inevitably, most of the time, I was put back in my room and told not to do it again, as it was important for the house to maintain a certain level of tidiness that my “mess” would obviously compromise.

As a result of the rules I experienced around play, I never learned the skills associated with this most essential of childhood needs. As I grew into my adult life, I found it difficult to express myself in a playful way if I didn't think it was the right time, and definitely if it wasn't the right place. This is something I really had to work on in my own recovery, as spontaneity and play are at the heart of what we call Self-care. Like many people stepping into recovery, I didn't know how to enjoy myself without the use of a substance, and I had to learn these skills if I wanted to build a solid foundation for my own recovery lifestyle, and ultimately start to Live the Life I wanted to Live.

The playful child is an expression of all those things, and as I discovered his presence within my system, I realized he was strongly linked to my Angry Child, my Impulsive Child, my Undisciplined Child, and my Entitled Child. When I am able to release the burden of protection each of these parts is carrying, they are free to express themselves in a spontaneous and playful way. This is the very essence of the re-education process we explore in this work. To teach the child parts of my personality that they are allowed to be free, and they are allowed to express themselves. Obviously, this is within the bounds of a Healthy Adult life, but they no longer need to protect me from my emotions in the way they previously felt they needed to.

Next, let's check in to see how you relate to this Mode in your own behaviours. Answer the questions below based on your personal experiences and the rating scale provided.

Never 0	Sometimes 1	50/50 2	Often 3	Always 4
Description				Score
I feel safe, loved, and accepted by those around me, and I am able to be "myself" in all situations, without feeling judged by others for who I am.				
When I feel safe, I am spontaneous and playful, I am able to relax when I feel stressed with life by participating in activities that are fun with ease.				

Based on the scores you gave for the questions above, and the way you relate to the description provided on the previous pages, how Relevant is the Playful Child Mode to you in your life Add the two scores together to calculate your prevalence score. On a scale of 0 – 8, 0 being not present at all, and 8 being present in my life every day, rate your experience of the Playful Child Mode.

My Playful Child Mode has a prevalence score of ___/8.

On the next page, take the time to explore your experience of the Playful Child Mode, see if you can identify how you feel when this Mode is active, how you are thinking when this Mode is active, what you do when this Mode is active, and what situations you might need to be aware of that can activate this way of thinking in your personality system.

- a. When I am in the Playful Child Mode, I experience the following feelings (List the emotions you experience in the Playful Child Mode, focus on the feelings in your system when you feel like its ok to play, as well as what it feels like when you are actually playing).

- b. When I am in the Playful Child Mode, I am having the following thoughts (List the thoughts you are having when you're in the Playful Child Mode, be specific, focus on thoughts in your system when you are playing, notice the thoughts that revolve around what you're doing, who you're with, and where you are).

- c. When I am in the Playful Child Mode, I behave in the following ways (List the things you do, the way you act, and how you react when you're in the Playful Child Mode).

- d. The following situations are likely to be involved in triggering my Playful Child Mode (List the situations you are aware of that have activated this mode of behaviour in the past).
