



Rosi Sexton: Play and Breathing



Rosi Sexton is Cambridge educated and has a PhD in Theoretical Computer Science. She is a musician, a writer and a physical therapist. Discover how Rosie uses play to help build a bridge between our comfort zone and new learnings in the context of teaching combat sports and self defense; and explains how breathing can help soothe our brains when feeling stress or anxiety.

TOP EMBODIMENT TIP: Use play and breathing to engage with your nervous system.

Play Has Adaptive Value: Play Has a Major Role in Growth and Development

- Not unique to humans, but to all mammals, rough play is a way to rehearse potentially traumatic experiences in a safe environment.
- Play trains our nervous system and teaches boundaries. It is through this type of engagement that mammals learn to shift from fight/flight states to calm and relaxed ones.
- Children, especially girls, are being discouraged from rough play, which is detrimental to their development.

Why Use Play in Teaching Combat Sports and Self Defense? Learning Happens in the Context of Safety

- The teaching of combat disciplines has the potential to trigger trauma and anxiety.
- Taking cues from play (like smiling, a relaxed voice, warm facial expressions, familiarity and consent) allows us to **build bridges between the comfort zone and the new learning.**
- Early play experiences should not be taken for granted however, as play varies across cultures.

Breathing and The Brain: How We Can Consciously Use Our Breathing to Soothe the Brain

- In situations of anxiety or stress, breathing becomes shallow and the neck and shoulder muscles tense.
- In a fight/flight situation this maximises use of the rib cage and allows us to run fast. This is an unconscious function of our sympathetic nervous system and it is a reflex response to stress.
- However, sustained shallow breathing leads to neck pain and muscle tension.
- We can soothe the brain by taking deliberate deep breaths, allowing the diaphragm to fall and the belly to fill up. The neck and shoulders, as well as the mind, relax in this form of breathing.

Resources

- ❖ **Website:** combatsportsclinic.net
- ❖ **References:** [Stephen Porges: Play as a Neural Basis](#)



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Rafe's work has been featured in TEDx, the Journal of Ancestral Health, Paleo Fx, the Ancestral Health Symposium, The Embodiment Conference, multiple health and well-being podcasts, and he even organized the first international parkour events in the United States.



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