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## The War Against Play

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Administrators at Willett Elementary School in Attleboro, Massachusetts recently banned tag. That's right folks, no more of that dangerous and frightening game in which one kid runs after another. None of that in Attleboro. They have discovered trouble with a capital "T" and its name is "Tag."

As *TIME* magazine reports,

*Game over for students in Attleboro, Mass., who yelled "You're it!" one final time at Willett Elementary School last week. The school has forbidden tag—as well as touch football and all other "chase" games—during recess, a move that made national headlines. As in schools from South Carolina to Wyoming that have implemented similar bans recently, Attleboro administrators cite fears that children could get hurt and their parents might sue. According to some parents, another factor was concern that such games could hurt self-esteem if, say, one kid were always "it."*

No more "chase" games? Yeah, like that will ever happen. What are these people thinking?

We have transformed childhood into the arena of self-esteem and lawsuits. Dodge ball — my favorite game in middle school — has been banned in many school districts because it celebrates violent behavior. Of course it does. Let a kid throw a ball at a classmate and just maybe a little frustration will dissipate. That energy is going to come out one way or another. And if physical violence is to be absolutely avoided, what about football? Of course, the difference is that dodgeball needs no great apparatus or athletic supervision — no coach. Just give the kids a ball and let them loose. Isolate the bullies and let the other kids play, and play hard.

*The Los Angeles Times* reports:

*The topic is so no-win that school officials, admittedly busy with loftier issues, are reluctant to discuss it. But the reality is that schools across the United States have been quietly discouraging tag for years. Any discussion of it elicits a flinch response because this simple schoolyard game is at the nexus of three competing interests: giving kids freedom to play (what many teachers and kids want), keeping them safe from harm on large, unruly playgrounds (what concerned parents want) and avoiding band-aid-related depositions (what all administrators want).*

This world is getting crazier by the minute. The kids, meanwhile, will find a way to play anyway.

More from *The Los Angeles Times*:

*Tag is a uniquely elemental game that develops naturally — and kids seem to be hard-wired to play it. At age 4 or 5, children are running around chasing each other, and by the first grade, they've created the rules and organized themselves into a game. "It's one of the few games left where the adults have absolutely nothing to do with it," says psychologist Fred Frankel, director of the UCLA Parent Training and Children's Friendship Programs. "Kids transmit it from generation to generation and spontaneously organize it."*

So the kids will find a way to play tag anyway. So there, meddling school board. You're *it*.

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