

Learning through Play

Children love to play. Play provides many opportunities for children to learn by actively using materials and working with others.

Children learn best when:

- another person interacts with them, helping them to improve skills or add new ideas
- they interact with a variety of materials
- they have choices and can decide what to do and how to do it
- they take time to talk about what they have found out
- they can develop/extend new ideas and skills
- they can try a variety of indoor and outdoor play activities
- their play is not interrupted and is viewed as important/valuable.

What can my child learn through play?

Through play, children become ready for later learning as they:

- talk clearly and listen to others
- explore early reading and writing
- use their imagination and think of new possibilities
- create and construct in different ways
- count and explore early mathematical ideas
- learn to experiment and test ideas
- solve problems
- plan and organise themselves, materials and space for learning
- learn to be independent and responsible
- use technology (computers and everyday tools)
- learn about the natural and man-made world
- find out about themselves and others
- move with control and strength
- control tools and equipment (e.g. pencils and scissors)
- learn to stay healthy and safe
- find out about their community and other people
- learn ways to work with others positively and manage conflicts
- learn to appreciate differences in people.



How can I help my child to learn through play?

You can:

- provide interesting everyday and play materials
- talk about new ways to use materials
- talk with your child about what they are doing and why
- encourage your child to manage challenges and new situations
- show your child a new skill or explain an idea

- encourage your child to try out alternative/new ways to do things
- encourage your child to try different types of play
- join in play, even for a short time, with your child
- encourage another child/adult to sometimes join in your child's play
- look for and value the learning that is part of your child's play.

Pretend play **does not have to be elaborate**. Allow children to be imaginative and 'pretend' they have objects/spaces or **adapt/use basic props** rather than using/making something realistic, for example:

- an egg carton can be a radio or control panel
- a cardboard tube can be a petrol pump
- a table can be a shop/counter/checkout.

Getting organized

Organise dress-up clothes, accessories and props so the children can find and pack them away.

- Place **larger props** (e.g. old telephone, computer keyboard, calculator,) on a **shelf** or in a separate **box**.
- A **space for pretend play** can be made under a table, using chairs, a large box, sheets, a play tent, a carpet piece/quilt, smaller boxes (cots, oven, table).
- Keep **pens and paper** handy and encourage the children to pretend to write/help them to write and use numbers or letters, e.g. to make menus, signs or money.
- Encourage children to include **toys/dolls** as characters in the game, when other children cannot join in. Encourage them to talk and interact as if there was another person in the game. This will allow them to develop language skills.
- **Expect the children** to **sort** the props and clothes and **hang** them up/put them away when they are finished a game.
- **Store pretend play materials** for a particular game **in a box/corner** for a **few days**, so the children can set up the game independently when they have time, e.g. keep the shop play items in a box for three days before they sort and pack them away. This will help children to **extend ideas and language**.

Pretend play games

- Home — cooking, caring for a baby, washing
- Holidays/trips — camping/bushwalk, beach, city, country
- Work — office, property, factory
- Shop — general store, baker, butcher, fruit shop, clothing store
- Hairdresser, library, restaurant, petrol station
- Transport — boat/train/plane/spaceship, submarine, railway, road
- School, playground, party
- Services — doctors, hospital, ambulance, firefighters, police
- Plants — gardening, farming, plant nursery, national park
- Animals — vet, pet shop, pet show, horse riding/show, zoo, circus, aquarium

