

Learning through play

Play is a fun and engaging way to support your child's learning and development. Below you'll find some information about the benefits of learning through play to your child's development and their readiness for school. We've also included examples of learning through play activities you can engage in with your child at home.

What is learning through play?

Children are naturally curious about the world around them. They experience and come to understand the world and their place in it through play. Creating opportunities for children to explore, experiment, question and discover new concepts about the world in playful ways is central to their learning, development and wellbeing.

Through play, children engage with the people, places and objects around them to form their understanding of the world and how they fit into it. Play helps to develop a child's knowledge and skills, and prepares them for a lifetime of learning both in school and beyond.

How does play help my child grow?

Play has a powerful impact on children's early cognitive, physical, social and emotional development. Encouraging your child to make up a game, and joining in, will help the child to:

- become autonomous learners
- develop a lifelong passion for learning
- develop numeracy and literacy skills

- develop fine and gross motor skills
- develop language skills and vocabulary
- develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills
- build confidence and social skills
- foster creativity and imagination
- develop emotional maturity.

Learning through play doesn't need to happen in formal settings like pre-school for children to get the benefits. When children are young they play and learn in the home, making parents and caregivers their first teachers. Families can support children's learning and development by creating opportunities for play in the home.

Play can happen both inside and outdoors. You don't need expensive toys or equipment. Learning through play can build on everyday activities in the home and make use of common household items. Cardboard rolls and boxes, plastic cups and buckets, wooden spoons, food packaging, old clothes and pots and pans are just some of the items you can use. Feel free to get creative!

Ideas for learning through play in the home

Playing with Babies

- Reading, talking, telling stories and singing to your baby will help them learn about language, words, and sounds.
- Have fun making funny noises, squealing and babbling together (an early form of talk).
- Tummy time strengthens your baby's head, neck and upper body muscles. This will help them develop movement control. Try to do supervised tummy time every day.
- Toys and objects in different shapes, textures, colours and sizes can help your baby reach and grasp. Soft blocks, balls, stuffed toys and plastic rings are good options.
- Listening to music can help your baby's hearing development. Try listening to nursery rhymes together or make your own music with items around the home. Plastic bottles filled with rice make fun shakers and you can use wooden spoons and pots and pans to make drums.
- Sitting your baby near sturdy furniture can encourage them to pull themselves up and stand. You can encourage crawling by making tunnels out of cardboard boxes or chairs.

Playing with Toddlers

- Making collages with paper, scissors, and glue can help your toddler develop fine motor skills and use their creativity. You can use scraps of paper or fabric, dried pasta or cereal, tin foil, pipe-cleaners, ice-cream sticks, buttons or even natural items like feathers, sand and leaves.
- Building blanket forts or cubby houses in the home will encourage your toddler to use their imagination and solve problems. You can make a blanket fort by hanging a blanket over a table. Large cardboard boxes can be used for cubbyhouses, with holes cut out for windows and doors. You can paint and decorate the cubbyhouse together as a fun activity.
- Sports equipment like balls, rope and hoops encourage throwing, catching, jumping, running and stretching. This develops your toddler's gross motor skills.
- Listening to family-friendly music and radio is a fun way of increasing language and communication skills. Music and rhyme can increase pattern recognition and dancing is a creative way to help your child express feelings and ideas. This can help foster their social and emotional development.

- Camp in the back yard, sit around a fire pit and tell stories or do shadow plays. Children love to get wet, dirty and tired, and learn new things.

Playing with Preschoolers

- Playing games like dress-up, make-believe, hide and seek or I Spy engages your child's imagination and creativity.
- Playing with sensory materials like playdough can develop your child's fine motor skills. You can buy playdough, or make it at home. Consider using shape, alphabet and number cookie cutters to build literacy and numeracy skills. You can also add textured materials like beads, buttons and pasta shells to playdough to encourage sensory exploration.
- Playing board games and sorting puzzles will help children learn to think critically and solve problems.
- Ask your child to 'read' you a story.
- Doing simple household tasks together like cooking, gardening, hanging up washing, feeding your pet and tidying up messes can teach children about teamwork and build their confidence.
- Building obstacle courses in the house or yard supports both fine and gross motor skills. Make obstacles using empty cardboard boxes, jump rope or cord, small ladders, hoops, cones and more to encourage movements like running, jumping, stepping, climbing, and hopping. This helps overall physical fitness and coordination.
- Reaching out to family and friends by video or phone call can foster social, communication and language skills. This sort of playful interaction can teach children how to get along with adults and other children.
- Look up and engage in activities you can do away from the home such as playgroups, libraries, or what your local council has to offer.

These are just some of the activities you and your child can do together. The most important thing is for you and your child to spend quality time together, talking, exploring, laughing and having fun.

Remember that children aged 1–5 need **three to four hours** of play every day. Play activities should be spread throughout the day.

For more information contact your child's service or the Early Childhood Education Directorate on 1800 619 113 or ececd@det.nsw.edu.au

Learning through play schedule

This is an example of different things you can do with your child during the week, to encourage play and learning.

Activities are suggestions and can be moved around flexibly in the day, depending on your time availability and what works for you in the home.



| Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |
|--|---|--|--|--|
| <p>Play outside, try hide and seek</p> <p>Google: raising children outdoor play</p> | <p>Play with words</p> <p>Borrow a book from the library, or join in reading time</p> | <p>Do a virtual museum or zoo tour together</p> <p>Google: world zoos that offer virtual tours</p> | <p>Listen to Kinderling radio</p> <p>Visit: kinderling.com.au</p> | <p>Get active</p> <p>Play with stretching, balls and toys</p> |
| Break time | | | | |
| <p>Listen to a podcast</p> <p>Google: ABC Kids Listen</p> | <p>Make lunch together</p> <p>Visit: healthyliving.nsw.gov.au</p> | <p>Play outside</p> <p>Google: raising children outdoor play</p> | <p>Play with hands using shapes, Lego, playdough</p> <p>Visit: allplaylearn.org.au/</p> | <p>Screen time, try Little J and Big Cuz</p> <p>Google: Little J and Big Cuz</p> |
| Lunch time | | | | |
| Rest time or sleep time | | | | |
| <p>Read a book together</p> <p>Visit: letsread.com.au</p> <p>Download: The Deadly Tots app</p> | <p>Arts and crafts try ABC Make & Do</p> <p>Download: The Deadly Tots App</p> | <p>Play with numbers</p> <p>Google: helping your child with literacy and numeracy at home</p> | <p>Play with words</p> <p>Google: Twinkl EAL</p> | <p>Make an afternoon tea treat together</p> <p>Visit: healthyliving.nsw.gov.au</p> |
| Snack time | | | | |
| <p>Play with numbers</p> <p>Google: helping your child with literacy and numeracy at home</p> | <p>Get active</p> <p>Try dancing, stretching, have a bbq or picnic, kick a ball around or fly a kite</p> | <p>Read a book together</p> <p>Download: LOVE Talk SING Read PLAY app</p> <p>Download: The Deadly Tots app</p> | <p>Imaginative play, play dress ups, make a blanket fort</p> <p>Google: raising children play learning</p> | <p>Do a virtual museum or zoo tour together</p> <p>Visit: govalleykids.com/virtual-field-trips</p> |