

Supporting Children to Learn Through Play

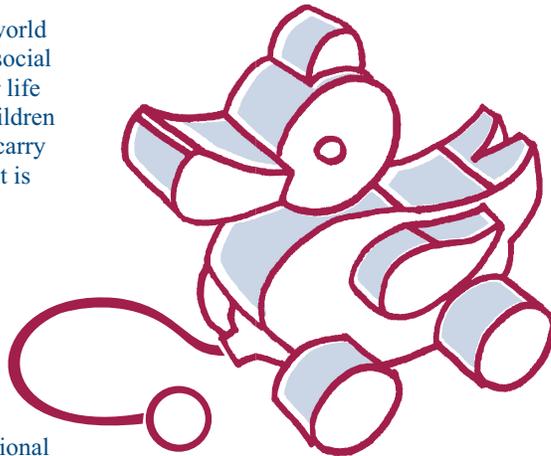
Play is how children experience their world and bring meaning to it. It models the social framework that builds relationships for life and kindles imagination. Play gives children the chance, in a world where so many carry heavy burdens, to simply be children. It is through play that children learn best.

The Link Between Play and Learning

- Play nurtures children's creativity and problem solving capabilities.
- Play is health promoting. It builds children's strength and coordination and is beneficial for children's emotional health.
- Play stimulates the healthy development of children's brains.
- Play allows children to acquire competence and skills that help them feel good about themselves.
- Play provides the context in which caring adults teach children how to behave, how to treat others, and the social conventions of the community.
- Play provides the opportunity to learn essential social skills: to take turns, to share and to cooperate.
- Play helps children develop friendships with their peers good interpersonal skills are essential to children's lifelong success.
- Play environments produce natural opportunities for children to learn self-respect and how to treat others with respect.
- Play promotes a child's development and their development enhances their play - creating an upward spiral.

Learning Through Play Approach in Early Learning and Child Care

Many early learning and child care programs take a "learning through play" approach, which ensures that there are large blocks of time each day when children may choose an activity from a number of activities selected by the educator. By allowing children to select their own learning activities, they become the leader of their own learning.



Child care practitioners organize a play environment in a way that provides a choice of play activities that meet the developmental needs of each child in the group. Often the child care setting is divided into a number learning centres clearly defined areas that have equipment, materials and supplies that fit together and promote children's developmental growth.

During the time devoted to play, children are doing different things. Some might be building structures with blocks while others are playing at a water table and others are looking at picture books. Children move around the centre, selecting the play that interests them. When they are ready, they move on to something else.

Role of the Child Care Practitioner in Learning Through Play Approach

- Child care practitioners assist the children by facilitating their learning through play experience.
- They plan environments to suite the children in their programs using toys, equipment, dress-up clothes, books, are materials and other playthings based on their knowledge of the individual children in their groups their abilities, their interests, their preferences, their unique characteristics, etc.
 - They teach the children how to use the playthings safely. For example, the sand

must not be thrown, because it hurts if we get it in our eyes; helmets must be worn when riding the tricycles, etc. Then they allow the children to use them independently, with safety reminders when necessary.

- They encourage the children to choose the playthings they want to use and to put them back where they belong when they are finished using them.
- They are trained observers. They understand child development and intervene when appropriate to facilitate learning to help children extend their play, and to provide necessary support and guidance.

Why Use a Learning Through Play Approach?

- Children learn more when they are playing.
- Play develops children's creativity and problem solving skills
- Play prepares children better for school learning.
- Play is healthy. It promotes strength, coordination and brain development.
- Play teaches new skills and builds children's self-esteem.
- Play teaches children social skills that help them develop friendships.
- Play is a right of children (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child).

"I Have the Right to Play."

Preserved in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is the simple message that "children have the right to play" (Article 31). On the surface, "the right to play" seems obvious. However, as expectations for achievement increase and as available free time decreases, play time has become a right in need of protection.