

# Play Your Way to Literacy



## The Work of Play

Presented by Dr. Betsy Diamant-Cohen

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## Agenda

1. Value of play – supported by research
2. Ages and Stages
3. Play and Storytime
4. Types of play
5. Improving the quality of children’s play
6. Practical tips for adding more play

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## A is for Apple...

Write down as many words, experiences, activities and concepts that can relate to a real apple.

Describe how it looks, smells, feels, tastes...

Describe what you can do with it...

Describe what you can know about apples...

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## Direct Experience Leads to Understanding

- RIGHT ON, PIAGET!!!
- “Hands on, minds on, feelings on” experiences are the foundation for the development of symbolic understanding




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## Direct, Hands-On Experience

- Stimulates language
- Leads to understanding
- Allows the formation of symbolic thought
- Involves multiple pathways in the brain
- Holds the power of DISCOVERY learning




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## play

/plā/ 🔊

*verb*

Engage in an activity for enjoyment and recreation rather than a serious or practical purpose.

*noun*

Activity engaged in for enjoyment or recreation, especially by children.

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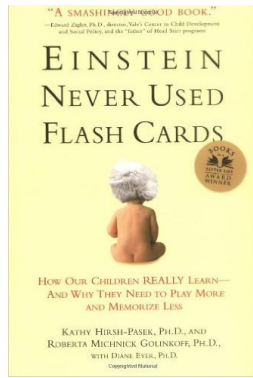
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“Drill & Kill”

vs

Learning  
Through  
Experimentation  
and Play



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### Dr. Stuart Brown

- Founder, National Institute of Play
- Trained in general and internal medicine, psychiatry and clinical research
- Instigator and Executive Producer of the three-part PBS series, “The Promise of Play.”

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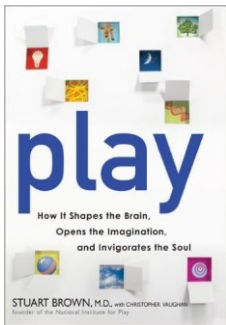
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“The opposite of play is not work – the opposite of play is depression.”

*Dr. Stuart Brown*

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### Dr. Brown's 7 Properties of Play

1. Apparently purposeless (done for its own sake)
2. Voluntary
3. Inherent attraction
4. Freedom from time
5. Diminished consciousness of self
6. Improvisational potential
7. Continuation desire



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### Play affects mental and physical health

- Emotional control
- Social competency
- Personal resiliency
- Continuing curiosity



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### Play is an essential part of a child's life.



- Enables perspective-taking
- Builds social and linguistic competence
- Builds relationships

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Play builds social, emotional, and cognitive skills



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Research supports the value of play; It builds skills in many domains



- Relieves stress, confronts fear
- Fine & gross motor skills
- Language & communication skills
- Math skills
- Science skills
- Social skills

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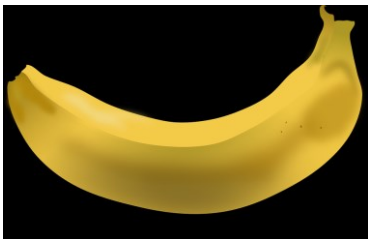
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Go Bananas!



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**From birth to 12 months, children use ALL of their senses.**

Babies enjoy:

- Exploring the world
- Having pleasurable play interactions with parents and other people
  - Builds babies sense of self-worth
- Being entertained with songs, books and conversations
  - Is the beginning of reading readiness



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**Books can be played with or read aloud**



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**From 12 months to 24 months, children build relationships and discover what their bodies can do.**

They enjoy:

- Playing peek-a-boo,
- Handing an item to someone and taking it back,
- Waving and blowing kiss,
- Following one-step directions and getting appreciation.
- Hearing stories, looking at pictures and what they are.



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**Strengthening Parent/Child Bonding while building social, emotional, and literacy skills**



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**From 24 months to 36 months, children learn problem solving.**



They enjoy:

- Showing that they have minds of their own,
- Experimenting with independence,
- Puzzles
- Moving- crawling, leaping, running and walking
- Often wanting to do things "by myself."



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**At age three, children participate in pretend play.**



They enjoy:

- Playing dress-up and make-believe games,
- Sharing toys with others,
- Listening to stories (while seated!),
- Playing games with playmates.

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### From ages three to five, the world of play expands!



Preschoolers enjoy:

- Storytelling with others during imaginary play,
- Conversations,
- Somersaults and tumbling,
- Painting,
- Counting,
- Word play.

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### Storytime/ Circle Time Builds Early Literacy Skills

- ◊ Exposes children to books
- ◊ Build vocabulary
- ◊ Introduces other people's point of view through stories
- ◊ Expands general knowledge
- ◊ Models book reading behavior



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### The Six Skills That Help Children Become Ready to Learn to Read

- Print awareness**
- Letter knowledge**
- Phonological awareness**
- Vocabulary**
- Narrative skills**
- Print motivation**



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### ECRR2: Five Practices that Help Children Become Ready to Learn

- Talk
- Sing
- Read
- Write
- Play



EVERY CHILD READY TO READ @ your library

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### Storytime/Circle Time Can Also....

- ❖ Awaken imagination
- ❖ Give opportunities to practice teamwork
- ❖ Help children practice their self-regulation skills
- ❖ Strengthen parent/child bonds
- ❖ Incorporate play experiences
- ❖ Build 21<sup>st</sup> century skills




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### 21<sup>st</sup> century skills



Creative thinking, being able to go outside of the box, is developed through play experiences.

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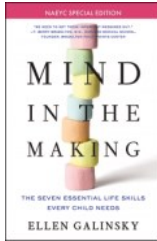
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### Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs

1. Focus and self-control
2. Perspective taking
3. Communicating
4. Making connections
5. Critical thinking
6. Taking on challenges
7. Self-directed, engaged learning



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### Storytime is not a performance



Welcoming Comments remind parents that it is participatory and explains why it is valuable.

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### Infusing Play into Your Storytimes!



It's time to get serious about play!

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**Different types of play can strengthen a variety of skills and lead to literacy.**



1. Physical play
2. Competitive play
3. Puppet play
4. Arts and crafts play
5. Music play
6. Constructive play
7. STEM play
8. Book play
9. Role-playing, storytelling, and fantasy play
10. Digital media play

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### 1. Physical Play

- Movement fires up the brain
- Builds fine and gross motor skills
- Entices children to exercise
- Promotes health
- Gets out excess energy
- Helps children practice behavior regulation
- Increases focus and retention
- Enhances learning by physically acting out words and concepts


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### Ages and Stages of Physical Play

- ✓ Infants kicking and waving,
- ✓ Babies rolling and crawling,
- ✓ Toddlers pushing and walking,
- ✓ Children climbing, running, hugging, tagging, jumping, leaping, hopping, turning, and dancing. (Preschoolers have more finely developed motor skills)


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### Recommendation: Add Movement to Storytime!

Allows children to connect concepts to actions.

Develops self-awareness and self-regulation.

Helps retain learning.



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### Creative Movement Leaping Lizards



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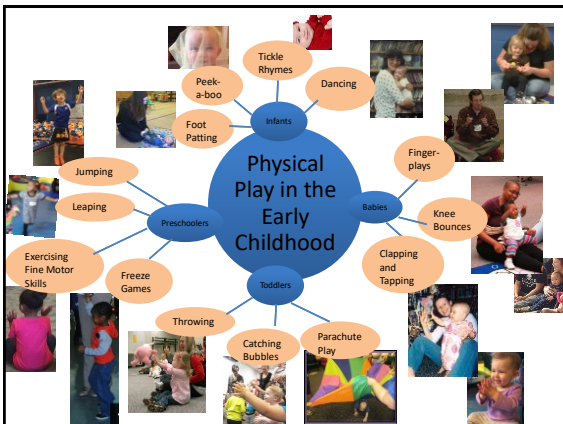
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## 2. Competitive Play

- Teaches rule-following and turn-taking
- Builds self-confidence when a child wins
- Teaches how to accept losing with grace (hopefully!)
- Involves functioning as part of a team.



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## Examples of Competitive Play



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## 3. Puppet Play Benefits

- Gives children practice communicating
- Prompts children to use words and sentences
- Builds narrative skills
- Is a natural platform for using the imagination



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### Children love puppets.

Puppets can put shy children at ease.  
They easily capture children's attention.



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### Acting out the story of "The Three Little Pigs"



(with construction  
paper puppets)



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### 4. Arts and Crafts Play

- Helps to build fine motor skills which are later used for writing
- Encourages creativity
- Exposes children to a variety of materials
- Enhances visual literacy



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### 5. Music Play - Singing

Singing is great way to teach vocabulary words and to recognize emotions.



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### Row, Row, Row Your Boat

Row, row, row your boat,  
Gently down the stream.  
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily,  
Life is but a dream.



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A collage of circular images showing children engaged in musical activities. One child is playing a xylophone, another is playing a drum, and others are playing various instruments. A large light blue circle in the foreground contains the text "Your Storytime with Musical Instruments". Two smaller blue circles contain the text "Cause and Effect" and "Listening Skills".

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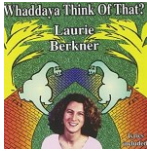
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## Using Musical Instruments Strengthens Listening Skills



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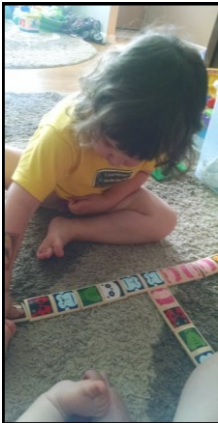
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## 6. Constructive Play

- Learning through action and observation
- Practices engineering skills: manipulation, building, and fitting things together.
- Applies cognitive and motor skills



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**T**ake five minutes or an hour,  
Build a car, or build a tower.  
Make up a story, tell that, too.  
I want to hear the tale from you.  
I might then ask a thing or two,  
And listen for your point of view.

Help children build these STEM skills:  
Constructing  
Creative Thinking  
Making Hypotheses

## Using Block Play In Your Spaces

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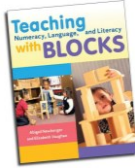
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## Playing with blocks encourages imagination



It also builds math and language skills

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## Block play can build self-esteem



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## Block play strengthens early literacy skills

I just built the biggest castle in the world!

This is a castle.  
Girls only!



Block play builds problem solving skills.

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The **IMPORTANCE** OF **PLAY**.  
 Particularly **CONSTRUCTIVE** Play,  
 IN **PUBLIC LIBRARY PROGRAMMING**



**ALSA**  
Written for the Association for Library Service to Children by Sue McCool Nispeaco  
 Adopted by ALA's Board of Directors, September 10, 2012

**Let's Build!**

1. Divide into groups.
2. Group A builds while Group B observes and takes notes.
3. Group B observes while Group A observes and takes notes.

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**7. STEM Play**

- Involves experimentation
- Introduces children to science, technology, and math in fun ways
- Encourages children to recognize science in the world around them
- Models enjoyable learning activities for parents




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**Soakers go well with Arts & Crafts Activities**

- Pop-up programming
- "Soak up" time
- Works with all ages





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### Diffusion Butterflies

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### Floam!

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### Simple Steps for Soakers

- 1. Portable.
- 2. Simple (not too many “props” involved; easy to set up and disassemble).
- 3. Safe (only use non-toxic materials and never leave the table unattended).
- 4. Age appropriate.
- 5. Unusual (not something that a child is likely to do at home or at school).

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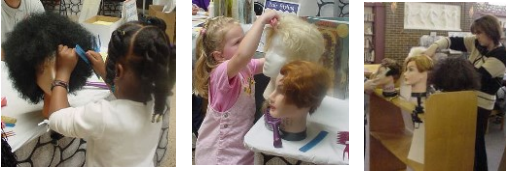
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Soakers can involve science experiments, arts and crafts, and even hairdressing!



Rapunzel's Hair Styling Salon

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What's Inside?  
*Using the clues to form a hypothesis*



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Making snow  
*(sodium polyacrylate )*



<http://www.thinkgeek.com/product/79ea/?cpg=cj&ref=&CJURL=&CJID=1215086>

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### Soakers can go along with books



Write your own story



Make woolly sheep



Try origami



Pet a Rabbit




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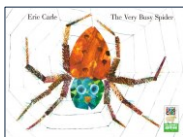
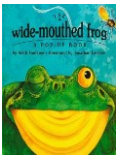
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### 8. Book Play

- Builds motivation for learning how to read
- It's fun!!!
- Legitimizes using a book without reading it




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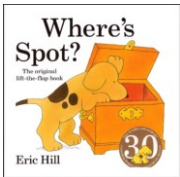
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### Where's Spot?




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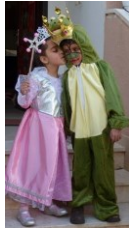
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### Other forms of Imaginative Play: *Role-playing, Storytelling, and Fantasy Play*

- Encourages a natural mode of learning
- Allows children to construct meaning in their worlds
- Strengthens psychological, intellectual and social development



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### 10. Digital Media Play - Benefits

- Build's upon children's aptitude for technology
- Familiarizes children with technology.
- Gives opportunities for collaboration
- Encourages social interactions
- Enables some children to communicate better
- Allows non-writing children to express themselves in print



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Technology itself is not good or bad,  
it is what is done with it that matters.



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What's happening to creativity?



"The more our time 'digital native' kids spend on entertainment media, the more we lose the tactile intelligence critical to design and manufacture physical products. So let's encourage children to start physically building and tinkering again."

(Leonard & Bridges 2013)

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### The Conversation Duet

#### Research Tidbits

Passive viewing does not stimulate the brain  
Cell-phone interruptions reduce learning

**BUT**

Back-and-forth interaction matters  
Video chats between people are the same as personal conversations



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Most computer games are not open-ended

Electronic games often:

- follow a script
- involve repetitive actions to reach a goal without stimulating the imagination
- electronic games played individually often replace group or team games.



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 Felt-Board Mother Goose on the Loose



**Felt Board – Mother Goose on the Loose**

Felt Board - Mother Goose on the Loose is a nursery rhyme based board app designed for young children to use together with parents and caregivers. Children can move felt pieces, sing, and tap along with popular nursery rhymes and songs.



<http://www.softwaresmoothie.com/app/felt-board-mother-geese-loose/>

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Let's use technology to build self-regulation skills!




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**Tips about Using Digital Media**

Using apps in storytime




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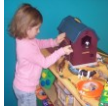
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## 5. Suggestions for Improving Children's Play Experiences

1. Nurturing environment
2. Scaffolding / guided play
3. Engage parents via developmental tips and written prompts
4. Take inventory of your space for play opportunities and make the most of it
5. Keep it inclusive!



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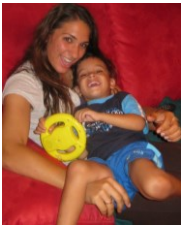
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## A. Create a Nurturing Environment

**It's all about Connections!**



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“Learning” according to Mr. Rogers

- Self-esteem
- Sense of trust
- Capacity to look & listen carefully
- Curiosity
- Capacity to play
- Times of solitude



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## B. Scaffolding / Guided Play

"Zone of Proximal Development"



New knowledge builds on previous learning.

Ideal learning takes place when adults look at where children are and then **scaffold** them!

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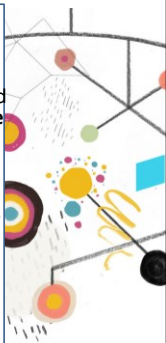
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### "What Babies Know About Physics and Foreign Language"

The new information economy, as opposed to the older industrial one, **demand more innovation and less imitation, more creativity and less conformity.**

New studies show that explicit instruction, the sort of teaching that goes with school and "parenting," can be limiting. When children think they are being taught, they are much more likely to simply reproduce what the adult does, instead of creating something new.

- Alison Gopnik, NY Times, July 30, 2016



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This is NOT an example of scaffolding!

Take that block and put it over here.



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This is NOT scaffolding either.

What letter is on that beanbag?



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Labeling is not scaffolding.

~~What a nice letter you are building.~~

What a nice structure you're building.

What structure do you have here?



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### C. Use Developmental Tips to Engage Parents

**THE EARLY LITERACY KIT**  
A Handbook and Tip Cards

**Tip**  
When parents feel confident and comfortable by themselves, they will be able to help their child learn to read. Encourage parents to ask questions and share their own experiences. Encourage them to share their own experiences with reading and writing. Encourage them to share their own experiences with reading and writing.

**Parents Should Know**  
Parents should know that their child's learning to read is a process that takes time. Encourage them to be patient and supportive. Encourage them to be patient and supportive.



**Tip**  
All children need to have time to play what they're doing. Play is the best way for children to learn. Encourage parents to play with their child. Encourage parents to play with their child.

**INSTRUCTIONS**  
Do the game in a quiet place. Sit down with your child. Read the instructions to your child. Encourage them to follow the instructions. Encourage them to follow the instructions.

**WARNING**  
Do not use this game if your child is under 3 years old. Do not use this game if your child is under 3 years old.

**Making us all go**  
A-making us all go.  
We'll walk and walk and then we'll STOP!  
A-making us all go.

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It's great that he's playing with blocks; he's problem solving.

Look! She's figuring out how tall she can get them and which shapes fit together.

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Let parents know the vital role they play in ensuring their child has a healthy play "diet"




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**Fill in the blanks for Positive Play Experiences**

- "Thank you for \_\_\_\_\_."
- "What a good problem solver you are, you were able to \_\_\_\_\_."
- "It's so much fun to play with you; you are so good at \_\_\_\_\_." (sharing, taking turns)
- "You were being so kind when you \_\_\_\_\_."

The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning

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**Other examples**

- “Thank you for \_\_\_\_\_.”
- “Wow, we \_\_\_\_\_.”
- “It’s so good to \_\_\_\_\_ turns \_\_\_\_\_.”
- “\_\_\_\_\_ were being \_\_\_\_\_, you \_\_\_\_\_.”

Thank you for \_\_\_\_\_

*The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning*

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What a good problem solver you are, you were able to \_\_\_\_\_.

*The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning*

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It’s so much fun to play with you; you are so good at \_\_\_\_\_ (sharing, taking turns).

*The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning*

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You were being so kind when you \_\_\_\_\_.

- "You were being so kind when you \_\_\_\_\_."

*The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning*

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**Inventory Your Physical Spaces for Play Opportunities**



Where can you add stimulation for more play in your physical environment?

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Provide toys and games

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## Use Early Literacy Activity Centers

- Promote early literacy skills;
- Inspire children to explore and learn through self-discovery;
- Demonstrate the purpose of reading and writing and inspire children to explore;
- Demonstrate the purpose and power of print;
- Encourage social interactions and oral language development;
- Invite children to gradually understand print concepts;
- Provide practice with real life experiences that require reading; and
- Add an element of fun to the library – kids learn when they are having fun.



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## Keep it Inclusive: Play for Children of All Abilities

- Multisensory
- Easy to use and/or easy to activate
- Kept in a convenient location that is easily accessible for children who are using wheelchairs or other devices
- Allows for experiencing success.
- Popular with children.



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## Infuse Play Into Other Areas



Add new opportunities for play in your physical environment.

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### Consider extending play outside



<http://librarymakers.blogspot.com/2016/06/let-wild-rumpus-start.html>

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### Summing UP



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The most rewarding play experiences are child initiated and directed.



- Self-directed
- No time limit
- Children create their own rules
- Everyone is engaged

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**++ It All Adds Up ++**

Research tell us that play is essential in the lives of children.

Playful learning can be in free and guided play.

Scaffolding is directed by the child, but initiated or guided by an adult.

Digital media, as well as books and toys, have a role to play in children's development.

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Early childhood teachers, librarians, and parents can create a wide variety of play opportunities for children.



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**++ It All Adds Up ++**

**YOU HAVE AN IMPORTANT ROLE TO PLAY!!!!**



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### Checklist

- Value of play – supported by research
- Ages and Stages
- Play and Storytime
- Types of play
- Improving the quality of children’s play
- Practical tips for adding more play

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If we want to encourage learning, innovation and creativity we should love our young children, take care of them, talk to them, let them play and let them watch what we do as we go about our everyday lives.

We don’t have to make children learn, we just have to let them learn.

*-Alison Gopnik*




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Thank you for joining in today!



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