

Developing Play Skills

‘Do not keep children to their studies by compulsion but by play.

Plato, philosopher

Well over 2000 years ago Plato recognised the importance of play as part of learning. By learning, we also embrace all those social and emotional learning experiences that are necessary for life and well-being.

- **What is play?**

It has five major aspects: meaning, active engagement, iterative, socially interactive, and joyful. We know it when we see it!

- **How can we decide what is play and what is learning?**

All play can be a learning experience and learning can be a playful one.

- **Is play vital to a child’s well-being?**

Both short and long-term plus it can help build their resilience.

To help a child’s play skills to develop you can:

- Copy the child’s play and then see if he can copy your play with a narrative saying what you are doing
- Add something new (and exciting) to the play, e.g., relating objects, pausing to see if the child notices.
- Introduce and model new play for the child – this can widen his play interests and play skills
- Support play alongside a peer – encouraging engagement with a similar activity – this could be using a wooden train track and trains, cars, dolls – play that the child likes.
- Take turns in activities – if the child doesn’t like taking turns introduce it gradually and use a narrative – Child’s name turns, your name turns e.g., Emily’s turn – Sandra’s turn making it quick to start with.
- Have 2 sets of identical objects e.g., a range of identical musical objects placed in 2 bags. When the child takes one out then you take the matching one out of your bag – continue doing this and then try to reverse it by taking one out and see if the copies. You can also use building blocks and copy the child and see if he can copy you
- Break the play activity down into small steps and then build up on this. Remember to allow processing time
- Backward chaining – this is useful to allow the child to complete an activity. The adult starts the activity and leaves the end part for the child to complete. E.g., in jigsaw puzzles, playing in the sand – the adult fills the cup, turns it over and then the child lifts the cup off. ‘Waiting for 1, 2, 3 supports attention and builds anticipation

Useful References and Links

[learningthroughplay_leaflet_june2017.pdf \(legofoundation.com\)](#)

[Go to Exploratorium.edu](#)

[Tinkering Project: Chain Reaction | Exploratorium](#)

[Stress and Resilience: How Toxic Stress Affects Us, and What We Can Do About It \(harvard.edu\)](#)

[Activities Guide: Enhancing & Practicing Executive Function Skills \(harvard.edu\)](#)

[Play to cope with change - The LEGO Foundation](#)

[BOUNCE BACK BETTER: the role of play in building more individual resilience and more resilient communities - Alison Woolf \(coursewedo.com\)](#)

[How to handle stress: teachers & education staff \(educationsupport.org.uk\)](#)

[What makes an effective TA? | Tes](#)

[The Importance of Play for Adolescents - Heather Hayes & Associates](#)

[Microsoft Word - Flexible Tools Seeking Pupils' Views 8th Feb-1 \(bath.ac.uk\)](#) Useful tool if you need to look a little closer at what a pupil is finding difficult in school.

[Facilitating and Supporting Children's Play: Suggestions for Teachers](#)

[\(communityplaythings.com\)](#) Useful for Key Stage 1 Pupils

[A World of Learning Through Play](#)

[When the Chips Are Down with Rick Lavoie - YouTube](#) Brilliant way of looking at a child with low self-esteem and how risk-averse they are. Highly recommend this, it is a bit American in it still is good!

[Zones of Regulation Tips and Activities - WeAreTeachers](#)