

# Play-Based Learning

## What is play-based learning?

Play-based learning focuses on child-led and open-ended play. Child-led play occurs when an adult follows the child's lead by responding to and extending the ongoing play. Open-ended play has no set outcomes; instead, it provides children with the opportunity to follow their imagination and go in any direction their creativity takes them.



## Why is play-based learning important?

“Play nourishes every aspect of children’s development- physical, social, emotional, intellectual, and creative” (Hewes, 2006).

Play allows children to actively construct, challenge, and expand their own understandings through making connections to prior experiences, thereby opening the door to new learning

- **Physical:** coordination, balance, gross motor, fine motor, etc.
- **Social:** initiating, listening, problem solving, empathy, confidence, etc.
- **Emotional:** identifying, expressing, soothing, etc.
- **Intellectual:** think, understand, respond, remember, etc.
- **Creative:** imagination, experiment, discovery, etc.



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## How do I create a play-based learning environment?

Educators can enhance play experiences by creating responsive environments where children have access to a wide variety of play materials. It is essential that educators co-construct the play environment with children. You might do this by:

- Creating various imaginative play spaces based on children’s interests, such as a block area, dramatic play area, sand and water stations, loose parts, reading nook, etc.
- Providing diverse choices when selecting materials for reading, painting, writing, designing, discovering, etc.
- Nurturing opportunities for “Dizzy Play” (creating order and disorder – spinning, rough and tumble, full body play)
- Getting down at eye-level. Following the child’s lead. Asking open-ended questions



## References

- Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. (2012). CMEC Statement on Play-Based Learning. <https://www.cmec.ca/9/Publication.html?cat=13>
- Hewes, J. (2006). Let the children play: Nature’s answer to early learning. [https://www.child-encyclopedia.com/sites/default/files/docs/suggestions/let-the-children-play\\_jane-hewes.pdf](https://www.child-encyclopedia.com/sites/default/files/docs/suggestions/let-the-children-play_jane-hewes.pdf)
- Makovichuk, L., Hewes, J., Lirette, P., & Thomas, N. (2014). Flight: *Alberta’s early learning and care framework*. <https://www.flightframework.ca/>

## Helpful Resources for Educators:

### Four Essential Characteristics of Play

Dr. Peter Gray discusses the four essential characteristics of play: self-chosen and self-directed; intrinsically motivating; structured by the child(ren); and imaginative: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wJaAegok8L4>

### Galileo Education Network

The Play and Learning section of the website contains useful information and videos about play for young children: <https://galileo.org/earlylearning/play-learning/>

### Providence Child Development Society: Pathways to Success

Play is Work for Kids! This handout-style document contains helpful information on child-led play and tips on how to follow a child’s lead: [https://www.providencechildren.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Pathways\\_Play\\_is\\_Work\\_web.pdf](https://www.providencechildren.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Pathways_Play_is_Work_web.pdf)

### The Hanen Centre

Encouraging Pretend Play in Children with Social Communication Difficulties: provides information and tips on how to help a child develop their pretend play skills: <https://www.hanen.org/information-tips/research-reveals-the-power-of-pretending>