

PLAY-Based Learning

Caregivers

What is Play-Based Learning?



Self-Chosen



Enjoyable



Process Oriented

Children learn through play by engaging in and making sense of their world. Play-based learning is self-chosen, enjoyable and process oriented. These opportunities are experiences that are child directed and facilitated by an adult. In play-based learning, caregivers take an active role as intentional planners, observers and guides. Play-based learning maintains the joy of free play while allowing children to connect authentically with content. When children co-construct their learning with their caregivers and peers, they apply it to their own lives and make meaningful personal discoveries as they progress towards learning goals.

Benefits of Play-Based Learning

- Builds executive function skills, content knowledge and creative thinking.
- Enhances problem solving skills.
- Develops reading, vocabulary and writing skills.
- Builds counting, classifying, measurement and patterning skills.
- Grows prediction and observation skills.
- Offers the opportunity to test ideas and make modifications.
- Helps children learn about themselves and the world around them.
- Allows children to apply what they learn to new situations. Builds confidence, the ability to collaborate and to express their feelings.
- Produces opportunities to expand thinking and try new things.
- Motivates children to take “safe” risks.

Masterson, Marie L., and Holly Bohart. *Serious Fun: How Guided Play Extends Children's Learning*. National Association for the Education of Young Children, 6453.

Shafer, Leah. “Summertime, Playtime.” *Harvard Graduate School of Education*, June 6452,

Play-based Learning: The Role of the Caregiver



Actively play with your child

Follow your child's lead

Be responsive by showing interest

Watch, listen and respond

Comment and ask questions

Offer open-ended materials found
in nature and from around your
home



Frequently Asked Questions about Play-Based Learning

For Families and Guardians

What is the caregiver's role in play-based learning?

In play-based learning, the caregiver's role is to be a facilitator of play. Caregivers set the environment for learning, they ask guiding questions, set up challenges, offer vocabulary and give feedback. Throughout the play, caregivers are making observations and documenting what they are seeing so that they can set the stage for playing and learning the next day and then use these observations for authentic assessment.



How can I support my child's play-based learning at home?



To support your child's learning at home, play with your child! Ask questions, experiment, encourage curiosity by saying what you see them doing. Respond positively to your child's interests and have fun!

"Playing with your child helps to keep them engaged in the type of play where learning occurs. Your interest, questions and comments as you play along side will help your child use materials productively and the two of you will have lots of fun together."

Gronlund, G. (n.d.). How to Support Children's Approaches to Learning?

What is my child learning?

Through play, children's learning is deeper and more meaningful as they make sense of their world and apply their ideas to other areas of learning. Through play, children develop cognitive problem solving, critical thinking skills and perspective taking. Block play allows children to explore measurement and use comparative and mathematical language while experimenting and exploring scientific concepts. Children experience social problem solving, perspective taking, cooperation, and collaboration during play. Dramatic play supports the development of and authentic use of literacy skills such as speaking and listening. Children develop confidence and creative expression as they play.



University of
New Hampshire

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