



CMNH Play Based

Learning Tip # 9

Play Develops Social and Emotional Skills

- Play encourages children to collaborate, compromise, and work together to solve problems.
- Children also learn to practice empathy through play because playing together means listening and noticing social skills.
- One of the best ways to develop these skills is through **dramatic play**. Acting out stories or using puppets to express feelings and emotions helps children to recognize and understand those feelings in themselves and others.
- Play also allows children to practice setting and changing rules, and figuring out when to lead and when to follow- all important social skills!



Dramatic Play: Make Your Own Laminated or Card Stock Characters



Laminating printed storybook characters, props, or animals can help add to dramatic play without purchasing new props or toys. You can opt to print onto card stock instead of laminating, or use clear packing tape to laminate them.

The same set of woodland critters were used to do two different projects pictured here:



Project 1: Choose an animal, and build a habitat for it using Magic Noodles- completed by 8 and 9 year olds (left)

Project 2: Choose an animal and create a story about it and a set for the story- completed by 5 year olds (right)

Both of these projects are examples of guided play, where a caregiver prompts an activity, but children can be creative and choose how to complete the activity.





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Learning Tip #10

Encouraging & Understanding Process Art



- **Process based art** projects are projects where children are given materials to work with, but have **complete** control over the outcome of their project



- **Product based art** projects are projects where children are given materials to make something specific using a template or example.



- Children learn fine motor skills, and usually enjoy all types of art projects- product based art is not "bad"



- Process based art is important in allowing children to be creative, and it can help them working on problem solving skills, especially when framed with a STEAM or STEM challenge.



Math Crafting: Make A Stick Tree



Try out this holiday tree project, where children practice measuring and counting! Stash some dry sticks for projects later in the winter- they will come in handy! This project, while play based, is an example of **product** based art. Children can practice measuring and counting during this activity.

Steps:

- 1: Gather sticks outside- be sure they have fallen off of the trees already, or they will be too fresh
- 2: Break the sticks into different lengths while outside to reduce the mess!
- 3: Use a tray or work surface, and have children choose a center stick
- 4: Ask children to line up their sticks from the longest to the shortest (biggest to smallest)
- 5: A grown up can help hot glue the sticks down in a tree shape
- 6: decorate with tissue paper, sequins, gems, or paper using liquid glue.





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Learning Tip #11

Play Fosters Creativity and Imagination

- Imagination and creativity are crucial life skills for finding solutions to problems and thinking outside the box.
- Creative Play encompasses more than art projects. Using materials such as building blocks or cardboard boxes for play time allows children to be creative, and come up with different scenarios using the same materials
- Children need opportunities to express themselves creatively, and the freedom to have control over play, and to be immersed in the experience. Children are most free to be creative when play involves a topic they are interested in.
- "Play helps develop each child's unique perspective and individual style of creative expression" -PBS "Creativity and Play"



Sensory Play: Ice Skating Characters

This ice skating sensory play activity is a fun way to create a new activity using materials you already have at home! You will need small figurines, a sheet pan, and an ice cube tray

Steps:

1: Place figurines standing upright in the empty ice cube tray

2: Fill the ice cube trays with water so that the figurine will be stuck in the block of ice (cover the feet/legs!)

3: Use a sheet pan, plastic tray, or plate to set up a skating rink

4: Invite children to take their figurines ice skating! Bonus fun: add some real snow!

5: Add books under one end of the tray to create a sledding hill, and see how well the skaters can slide down the hill!





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Learning Tip #12

An Introduction to "Loose Parts"



- "Loose parts are materials that can be moved, carried, combined, redesigned, lined up, and taken apart and put back together in multiple ways. Loose parts can be used alone or combined with other materials." Source: extension.psu.edu/programs/betterkidcare
- Loose parts activities are usually child directed-children choose how to use the materials
- Loose parts activities can also be structured using prompts such as "use these materials to make..."
- Children enjoy loose parts activities because they are open ended, and there are endless possibilities
- Children may need some guidance on using loose parts, for example, when using a tray of nature materials indoors, children may need to know how to use the items safely (ex: items stay on the tray, no throwing sticks or rocks, etc.)



Loose Parts: Make a Snowy Owl



Try making a Snowy Owl using puffy paint and loose parts! Prep Ahead: this loose parts activity has some prep work, but could also be done using white paper circles or felt instead of puffy paint. Have a few Snowy Owl facts ready to share with children, and create the puffy paint using equal parts shaving cream and liquid white glue (this gets messy!). Mix well in a cup or bowl.

Steps:

1. Set up a tray or plate with a thick piece of black or colorful paper- card stock works well. Felt or any paper can be used if you do not use puffy paint- the paint needs thick paper!
2. Set up a plate or tray with loose parts: foam or paper circles and triangles, spangles, gems, beads, straw pieces, natural materials, cotton balls, or anything you choose. If you do not use puffy paint, large white paper or felt circles would be a good addition.
3. Place puffy paint in a cup or bowl so children can add it to the paper using a craft stick (we have found craft sticks are easier to use than paint brushes for this activity)
4. Allow children to choose how to make an owl (or whatever they would like) by adding things to the paper. Objects in the puffy paint will stick if allowed to fully dry! If you are not using the paint, children can make their project more than once, take it apart, change it, or try making other creations!

