

Play-based learning and your child

Young children are naturally motivated to play. Research shows that in children's early years, play is also the best way for them to learn and grow.

What is play-based learning?

Play-based learning supports children to explore and make sense of themselves and their world. It builds on children's natural curiosity.

Through hands-on exploration of the world around them children learn in many ways. For example, playing with sand helps children learn about mathematical ideas, such as weight and volume, and playing with dolls and dress-ups helps children to learn about families and how to relate to others.

This approach to early childhood education supports children to learn and extend their development through activities and experiences that they find enjoyable and interesting.

Programs that help children to learn through play are supported by educators who will provide children opportunities for:

- **adult-led learning** where the educator plans or introduces a play experience, idea or topic to purposefully direct the child's learning
- **child-directed play and learning** where the child leads their own learning through exploration, imagination and experimentation
- **guided play and learning** where educators involve themselves in children's spontaneous play and extend their learning as opportunities arise.

Why is play-based learning important?

Play-based learning is now widely understood to be one of the most important ways to support children to develop the skills and understanding they need to live well now and into the future.

There is strong evidence that the pathways in children's brains are positively influenced by the exploration that happens during play.

Play supports children in all areas of their development, including their understanding of themselves and relationships with others, their connection to the communities they live in, how they communicate effectively with others and how they think about and solve problems.

Positive attitudes towards learning, such as persistence, curiosity and imagination are all developed during play. These attitudes set children up for a life-long love of learning.

Play-based learning important approaches at home

Children are learning all the time. There are many opportunities for children to learn at home, including in everyday activities such as getting ready in the morning, preparing meals or doing household jobs provide great learning opportunities.

Consider some of the ideas below:

- at bath time, introduce science and maths concepts such as floating, sinking, heavy, full, empty, half, and so on, using a simple container in the water
- when hanging out the washing, ask your child to hand you one, two, three pegs, sort pegs by colour, or talk about bigger, longer, smaller, and so on using clothes
- at mealtimes, describe ingredients, flavours, colours, textures to introduce new words and concepts, such as where the ingredients come from
- when reading books, use the pictures to prompt further conversation or explain the text
- when driving or walking, describe what you are seeing, ask open questions.

