

- › Play promotes language, cognitive, and social skills that are critical to academic success (Spiewak Toub et al. 2018).
- › Active (or big body) play, construction play, and functional play strengthen a range of physical, gross and fine motor, and practical life skills (Lillard et al. 2013).

During play, children interact with adults to make meaning (Cutter-Mackenzie & Edwards 2013). They make sense by doing, trying, revising, and discussing their efforts (Hamlin & Wisneski 2012). Children try out ideas and test their hypotheses using processes of scientific inquiry. Play engages children in meaningful learning and is a critical pedagogical tool for teaching (Barblett, Knaus, & Barratt-Pugh 2016).



Supporting Families in Encouraging Playful Learning

There are many ways for teachers to help families enrich home-based play that will be appreciated during summer months, extended times of quarantine, and weekends. Activities may correlate with lesson plans or simply help families understand the thinking skills, content knowledge, and developmental strengths that children gain through play. Families will appreciate receiving tips through text, email, or your program's digital application. Below are some simple suggestions for how families can engage children more meaningfully in play-based learning:

- › Ask questions about children's play plans and play needs (e.g., to be a firefighter, create a store, make a restaurant). "What will you do first? How will you make that happen? What materials and props do you need to carry out your play ideas?"
- › Respond to children's questions with informational materials (e.g., provide a book that shows breeds of dogs and ways of caring for animals to a child who helps feed the family pet at home).
- › Add interesting measuring tools, tubes, and funnels during water play and bath time and ask questions like, "What will happen if . . . ?" and "Which container holds more (less)?"
- › Include children in cooking and baking activities to support measuring, pouring, comparing, planning, and communication skills.
- › Inspire nature play by talking about animals in the yard, feeding birds, and providing informational books. Offer containers for children to collect natural materials (like bark, leaves, pinecones, and seed pods) to then sort, study, and draw.
- › Promote art play by providing full-color magazine pictures (e.g., healthy foods, colors, sports items) for children to use for collages, preparing homemade playdough with salt and flour, offering table space for watercolor painting, and providing empty boxes for painting or decorating.
- › Enjoy simple card and board games, which teach important mathematics, reasoning, and social skills.
- › Use educational technology well. Enjoy online book reading, painting demonstrations, and science shows designed just for children. Respond by helping children gather materials to carry out the play activities they have observed.