

Eyes on



# Play-based learning

The joy of learning through play



Centre of Excellence  
for Early Childhood  
Development

PARENTS



**“Play-based learning is an effective teaching strategy.”**

## What do we know?

- Play-based learning is:
  - any activity or game that builds children’s development and academic skills
  - an effective teaching strategy
  - simple, fun and collaborative
- Play-based learning can strengthen your child’s cognitive, social and emotional development. It helps make him ready for school by fostering academic learning.
- There are two categories of play-based learning: free play and guided play.
- **Free play** is voluntary, unstructured and initiated by your child. When your child engages in free play (e.g., pretend play), she learns to develop self-regulation. Your child also learns to plan ahead, solve problems, cope with negative emotions, and control her behaviour.
- **Guided play** has specific learning goals. It is led by both your child and an adult: some activities are teacher-directed (e.g., planned games) while others are mutually directed. Guided play is more effective than free play in developing your child’s academic skills.
- When you guide your child during playful activities or games, he is more likely to learn words and mathematic concepts, such as classification, enumeration, dimension and geometric shapes.
- Play-based learning is an important complement to outdoor activities and digital play.
- Free play and guided play are equally important to your child’s development.

Paying attention to...

What can be done?

... how much you are involved in your child's play.

- Let your child lead the play.
- Draw your child's attention to different aspects of the environment for more opportunities to learn.
- Play existing games with specific learning goals (e.g., Bingo, memory games, Tag, Spy).
- Encourage your child's curiosity by asking him open-ended questions (e.g., "What do you think could happen to the little boy in the story?").

... the type of play your child engages in.

- Make sure your child has many opportunities to take part in outdoor activities, games and free play.
- Encourage your child to use her imagination to transform objects (e.g., a banana for a telephone).
- Limit the amount of time your child plays digital games. A good guideline is to limit children aged 2 to 5 years to less than 1 hour per day of "screen time".
- Play digital games that have educational value. For example, games that focus on motor coordination, basic math skills, letter-number recognition and letter sound awareness (for more information, see the "Resources" section under the topic Technology in Early Childhood Education in the Encyclopedia).

... the environment in which your child plays.

- Give your child a variety of toys, such as building blocks, clay, books, costumes, and arts and crafts.
- Set the stage for play. For example, if your child likes to pretend to be a teacher, make sure he has access to the necessary materials.



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**Coordinator:**  
Valérie Bell

**Collaborators:**  
Mélanie Joly  
Angela Pyle

**Copy editor:**  
Lana Crossman

**Graphic design:**  
DesJardins Conception Graphique inc.

## Information

This information sheet is a publication of the Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development (CEECD). CEECD identifies and summarizes the best scientific work on early childhood development. It disseminates this knowledge to a variety of audiences in formats and languages adapted to their needs.

For a more in-depth understanding of Play-based learning, consult our synthesis and experts' articles on this topic in the Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development, available free of charge at [www.child-encyclopedia.com](http://www.child-encyclopedia.com).

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### **Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development**

Université de Montréal  
3050, Édouard-Montpetit Blvd., GRIP  
P.O. Box 6128, succursale Centre-ville  
Montreal, Quebec H3C 3J7

Telephone: 514.343.6111, extension 2541  
Fax: 514.343.6962

E-mail: [cedje-ceecd@umontreal.ca](mailto:cedje-ceecd@umontreal.ca)

Website: [www.excellence-earlychildhood.ca](http://www.excellence-earlychildhood.ca)



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