

PLAY AND LEARN AT HOME



March 2021

CHILD-DIRECTED LEARNING

When children explore topics they enjoy and choose, the experience is motivating. When reading, this might translate to choosing their own reading materials. In play, it translates to free and guided play, risk-taking and loose parts play. Child-directed learning can also help children have confidence in their personal decisions and know that it is better to try and fail than not to try at all.

LITTLE EXPLORERS: SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING, ART AND MATH

Loose parts play supports children making their own choices, healthy risk-taking, and STEAM skills. Loose parts are materials that can be moved, combined, redesigned, taken apart, and put back together. Children might use their engineering skills to build towers or structures outside, and then climb or walk along them.

Here are some suggestions for loose play:

Babies – Explore baskets in an outdoor setting that have reflective objects (shiny spoons, mirrors, bowls, metal dishes); wooden items (wooden spoons, blocks, egg cups); and soft objects (tissue, gloves, scarves).

Children Ages 1-2 – Play using a range of everyday objects, small and large. Go outside and bring kitchen items to scoop and explore sand or dirt like colanders, ladles, whisks and measuring cups.

Children Ages 2-5 – Ready for more complex loose parts play experiences. Sticks might be wands, lightsabers, or walking sticks. Make music with different items (buckets, stones, wooden bins); use art materials (buttons, straws, jewels, beads).

CHOKING CAUTIONS

Always supervise your child's play. Young children can choke on small objects and toy parts.

READY, SET, KINDERGARTEN!: SOCIALLY AND EMOTIONALLY READY FOR SCHOOL

Learning to fail is another part of child-directed learning. It's important for children to learn that failure is okay, even expected, and is finding out one way that didn't work. To keep them motivated to try and try again, build up their confidence.

- Allow them to make their own (adult-acceptable) decisions. Give them 2 weather-appropriate outfits or two healthy snacks and ask them to choose 1. This gives them a sense of ownership of their decisions and lets them feel as if they have some control in their lives.
- Ask for their help with solving a problem. You'll show them that their ideas are worthy and you value their opinion.
- Acknowledge your failures. Did you drive the wrong way, break a dish or spill your coffee? Children need to see how you handle your mistakes. When you make a misstep, say, "Oops, I need to clean that up!"
- Give them room to figure out a problem before stepping in to help. You'll demonstrate to them that you trust their abilities to solve their own issues.

FAMILY PLACE PLAY AND LEARN: LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

Gentle guided play can help build a child's language, background knowledge, math and social skills, but the learning will happen in a natural, fun and motivating way. Adults can help "guide" their child toward more intentional learning with props and questions. Here are a few simple ideas:

- **SET THE STAGE.** Provide props for a dramatic play scene (clothing and equipment for a kitchen, restaurant or doctor's office), science experiments (sticks, pinecones, measuring tools, buckets of soil or water) or construction site (blocks and vehicles).
- **MODEL.** Especially with a new activity, a little adult modeling helps a lot. Put together a storytelling basket of random objects. Tell a story based on the items in the basket and invite your child to do the same.
- **TEACH.** With modeling clay, talk about the different tools you could use to flatten or imprint designs in the clay, then let your child think of more ideas to try.
- **ENGAGE AND QUESTION.** Put yourself in the game, but don't take over. Ask questions or offer bits of information that can help your child think and learn about something new. "Why do you think that happens when the tower gets very tall?" "What kind of food should we serve in our restaurant?"

LEARNING ON THE GO: BUILDING EARLY LITERACY SKILLS

Reading to children is one of the best ways to help them get excited about reading and motivated to learn to read on their own. Allowing children to choose which books to read and play with also helps.

- Children who have access to books at home are scientifically more likely to become readers. Have books available for kids to pick up and explore everywhere!
- Board books are great for babies to explore with their hands and mouths and are made to help young readers learn how to turn pages: if you hold one open, the stiff pages fan out and almost "turn" themselves!
- When you visit the library, you and your child can BOTH choose books to take home. Children are especially motivated to read books they've chosen themselves. Choose books you can read TO your child, WITH your child (either reading the words or telling the story together) and BY your child on their own.
- Reading the same book REPEATEDLY is not much fun for grownups, but it's great for children. They love to know what's going to happen, and learn about story structure, grow their memories and simply have fun.

FIND OUT MORE!

If you'd like to know more about phonological awareness or any early literacy topic, we're happy to help! Visit arapahoelibraries.org, click on **Services** and select **Educator and Parent Support**. Tell us what you'd like to know and we'll help you find the answers!