



Play and Learning 3

Play for young children: 3 to 5 years

You are your child's first teacher and playmate.

Spend time every day playing, learning and having fun with your child.

- **The first 5 years of life are the most important time for your child's brain to develop.**
- **Play is really important** for children's learning, development, growth and health.
- **Through play, young children learn life skills** like moving, thinking, speaking, socialising, and managing emotions.

When it comes to play, young children:

- need **at least 3 hours of active play every day** spread across the day, including 1 hour of energetic play – running, climbing, hopping, jumping, dancing, kicking and throwing.
- enjoy drawing and painting, holding a pencil well in their preferred hand. Their drawings are easier to recognise – people, faces, houses.
- can tell and listen to long stories, and begin to enjoy jokes. They can join complex ideas, using words like 'because', 'but', 'so', 'when', 'if', and 'then'.
- want to know about everything – asking questions: Why? When? How?
- are getting better at sitting still – enjoying simple card and board games that involve taking turns, memory and thinking skills.
- enjoy more social play with other children – learning to share and play together, especially pretend play.

What you can do

- **Be available.**
Find lots of small amounts of time every day to do fun things together.
Get down to their level, show interest and be positive.
- **Let your child make choices** about how to play.
- **Limit screen time.**
 - Children learn best through doing things. For children 2 to 5 years, limit screen time 1 hour or less each day.
 - Make the most of playtime – turn off all screens including smartphones, TVs and computers.
- **Join:**
 - a playgroup – visit playgroupwa.com.au or phone 1800 171 882.
 - a toy library – visit toylibraries.org.au
 - your local library – visit slaw.wa.gov.au



Some activities to try

- **Play pretend and dress-ups** – children love to make up and act out stories – shopping, doctors, mums and dads, pirates, fairies, and superheroes. You can help by providing things like dolls, toy animals, cars and trucks, DIY and gardening tools, dolls and cooking sets.
- **Be creative** – provide art and recycled materials to experiment with – paper, glue, crayons and paint, tape, boxes, egg cartons, plastic containers, pavement chalk, playdough, sand.
- **Get outdoors and be active** – as your child moves more confidently, they'll enjoy learning to ride trikes and bikes, visiting playgrounds and the bush, playing ball games, trampolines and swimming. Make sure your child is safe, but also encourage them to explore and work things out for themselves.
- **Quiet play** – try some table top games – puzzles that fit together (around 20 pieces), picture lotto or dominoes, sound bingo, matching card games, 'Simon says', and simple board games.

Homemade toys

Homemade toys are fun, easy to make, cheap, and develop your child's creativity. Make toys together – involve your child in recycling boxes and containers.

- **Bat and ball** – make a bat with rolled-up newspaper and tape. Use the bat to play games with balloons and balls.
- **Car/bus/fire-engine** – use a strong box big enough for your child to sit in. Add wheels and a steering wheel, using lids and paper plates. Decorate together. Boxes are also great for building cubbies or setting up a shop.
- **Puppets and masks** – decorate a paper plate, paper bag or old sock to make a mask or puppet.
- **Jigsaws** – use calendar pictures or photos glued onto cardboard and cut into shapes.
- **Dress-ups** – make hats from plastic containers, wigs from wool or long socks plaited together and fixed to a beanie. Keep a box of old clothes – hats, scarves, shirts, dresses, handbags, and shoes.
- **Musical instruments** – make:
 - drums from plastic containers, cardboard tubes, saucepans, or tins
 - guitars from cardboard, using string or wool for the strings
 - shakers from cardboard rolls filled with rice, lentils or beans, and sealed at each end with tape.

Keeping your child safe

- Supervise your child closely at all times especially around water, play equipment, or when using objects such as scissors, pencils, glue or paint. Avoid flammable or toxic materials.
- Babies, toddlers and young children can choke on small toys and objects. Regularly check toys to make sure they are safe and in good condition.
 - Toys should be bigger than a 20 cent coin.
 - Strings on toys should be less than 20 centimetres long.
- Do a safety check and make sure your home is safe for your child to actively explore..

Find out more

For more information on play, learning, and a range of other topics, visit:

- playgroupwa.com.au
- raisingchildren.net.au
- bringingupgreatkids.org
- cahs.health.wa.gov.au/childhealthresources

For more information about the metropolitan **Child Development Service** phone 1300 551 827 or visit cahs.health.wa.gov.au/childdevelopment

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with a disability.

This publication is provided for general education and information purposes.

Contact a qualified healthcare professional for any medical advice needed.

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