



CHCECE011

**Provide experiences  
to support  
children's play and  
learning**

Release 2

**Learner guide**

Aspire Version 2.1



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**CHCECE011 Provide experiences to support children's play and learning, Release 2**



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Cover and design  
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**First published** February 2018

**Cover design** Rewind Creative

**Printer** Doculink Australia Pty Ltd, 1d/28 Rogers Street, Port Melbourne VIC 3207

**e-ISBN** 978-1-76075-092-3 (PDF version)

**ISBN** 978-1-76059-948-5

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## Before you begin

This learner guide is based on the unit of competency *CHCECE011 Provide experiences to support children's play and learning*, Release 2. Your trainer or training organisation must give you information about this unit of competency as part of your training program. You can access the unit of competency and assessment requirements at: [www.training.gov.au](http://www.training.gov.au)

## How to work through this learner guide

This learner guide contains a number of features that will assist you in your learning. Your trainer will advise which parts of the learner guide you need to read, and which practice tasks and learning checkpoints you need to complete.

Feature of the learner guide	How you can use each feature
<b>Learning content</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Read each topic in this learner guide. If you come across content that is confusing, make a note and discuss it with your trainer. Your trainer is in the best position to offer assistance. It is very important that you take on some of the responsibility for the learning you will undertake.</li> </ul>
<b>Examples</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ These highlight learning points and provide realistic examples of workplace situations.</li> </ul>
<b>Practice tasks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Practice tasks give you the opportunity to put your skills and knowledge into practice. Your trainer will tell you which practice tasks to complete.</li> </ul>
<b>Video clips</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Where QR codes appear, you can use smartphones and other devices to access video clips relating to the content. For information about how to download a QR reader app or accessing video on your device, please visit our website: <a href="http://www.aspirelr.com.au/help">www.aspirelr.com.au/help</a></li> </ul> 
<b>Summaries</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Key learning points are provided at the end of each topic.</li> </ul>
<b>Learning checkpoints</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ There are learning checkpoints at the end of each topic. Your trainer will tell you which learning checkpoints to complete. These checkpoints give you an opportunity to check your progress and apply the skills and knowledge you have learnt.</li> </ul>



## Topic 1

In this topic you will learn about:

**1A Understanding the value of play**

**1B Supporting identity**

**1C Providing for play**

## Creating an environment for play

Children learn about themselves and the world around them through play. Providing a stimulating, challenging and safe environment allows children to explore, discover and grow in their abilities. An environment that allows children to make choices, and reflects their diversity, interests and abilities will enhance their play and leisure time.

The following table maps this topic to the National Quality Standard and both national learning frameworks.

<b>National Quality Standard</b>	
✓	Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice
	Quality Area 2: Children's health and safety
✓	Quality Area 3: Physical environment
	Quality Area 4: Staffing arrangements
✓	Quality Area 5: Relationships with children
	Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
✓	Quality Area 7: Governance and leadership
<b>Early Years Learning Framework</b>	<b>My Time, Our Place</b>
<b>Principles</b>	
✓	Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
	Partnerships
✓	High expectations and equity
✓	Respect for diversity
✓	Ongoing learning and reflective practice
<b>Practice</b>	
✓	Holistic approaches
✓	Responsiveness to children
✓	Learning through play
✓	Intentional teaching
✓	Learning environments
✓	Cultural competence
	Continuity of learning and transitions
	Assessment for learning
<b>Outcomes</b>	
✓	Children have a strong sense of identity
✓	Children are connected to and contribute to their world
	Children have a strong sense of wellbeing
✓	Children are confident and involved learners
✓	Children are effective communicators

# 1A Understanding the value of play

Play contributes to every area of a child’s development. When you show respect for children’s ideas for play, you provide an environment that allows healthy learning and development.

*Belonging, being and becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia (EYLF), My time, our place: Framework for school age care in Australia (MTO) and the National Quality Standard (NQS) are all based on the belief that play is where children learn and make sense of themselves and their world. This belief is informed by a range of theories about play.*



The EYLF, MTO and NQS and their foundation theories are linked to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that play is a child’s right.

## Theories about play

Some theories and practices that you may hear about as important to the EYLF, MTO and NQS include those in the following table.

Theorist	Key concepts
<b>Malaguzzi (1920–1994)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ The Reggio Emilia approach focuses on the importance of the environment.</li> <li>▶ Children learn through play.</li> <li>▶ Play is essential to a child’s wellbeing.</li> <li>▶ Play is a method that allows both children and educators to learn.</li> </ul>
<b>Montessori (1870–1952)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Play is the child’s work.</li> <li>▶ Play that is linked with sensory activity, and cognitive, social and emotional experiences provides optimum brain development.</li> </ul>
<b>Steiner (1861–1925)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Children need play in order to develop.</li> <li>▶ Children need to use their imagination.</li> <li>▶ Use natural materials where possible to enhance natural play and develop a sense of beauty and care.</li> </ul>
<b>Froebel (1782–1852)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Play is an important route to learning (Froebel designed the first kindergarten to support this belief).</li> </ul>
<b>Piaget (1896–1980)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Children are active learners.</li> <li>▶ At each stage and age, children will use materials and learn differently.</li> <li>▶ Children need to repeat activities over and over to practise skills and learn different things.</li> <li>▶ Learning should be built around children’s interests.</li> </ul>

Theorist	Key concepts
<b>Vygotsky (1896–1934)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Play stimulates thinking.</li> <li>▶ Through play, children take on different roles and try out different ways to communicate.</li> <li>▶ Play allows children to develop language and reasoning skills.</li> </ul>
<b>Parten (1902–1970)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Play has stages that involve:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– solitary play</li> <li>– parallel play</li> <li>– associative play</li> <li>– cooperative play</li> <li>– play with rules</li> <li>– unoccupied play</li> <li>– onlooker play.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## Pedagogical practices

By understanding the frameworks and the individual child, you will be able to develop professional practice, known as pedagogy. This assists children to be involved in all types of play experiences. Pedagogy based on the principles and practices of the EYLF, MTOP and NQS will follow the theories from the previous table to some degree. A service as a whole demonstrates this pedagogy through its philosophy.

When you use these types of guidelines and think about your pedagogy, you are demonstrating reflective practice. This is a form of ongoing learning where you reflect on what is happening in your service setting and how you can change it to improve the environment and outcomes for the children.

## Role of play in learning

The areas, resources and materials you provide for different types of play impact how the child interacts with these areas. How they interact is also determined by their interests and abilities. The learning that occurs through play encourages multiple aspects of their development.

Aspects of development encouraged through play:	
▶ Physical development	▶ Spiritual development
▶ Social, emotional and moral development	▶ Creative development
▶ Cognitive and language development	

## Physical development

During the first few years of life, children’s fine and gross motor skills increase rapidly. Children develop from helpless infants into active toddlers who can crawl, balance, walk, run, climb, swing and jump. At each stage of development, a child first masters a movement, then elaborates on it and practises until satisfied, before moving on to learn something new.

As well as consolidating skills children have mastered, play enables them to use their bodies in many new and challenging ways; for example, climbing, standing, stretching, grasping and hopping.

Physical activities assist children to:

- ▶ develop strength and stamina
- ▶ release excess energy
- ▶ learn hand-eye and feet-eye coordination
- ▶ develop balance.

Watch this video about children’s physical development.



## Social, emotional and moral development

Children also develop many social skills through play. They encounter situations where they learn to collaborate, choose experiences, make decisions, and experience failure and success. Pretend play assists children to explore the world of feelings and relationships. By playing out situations with others, children can come to terms with their world, particularly if they do not understand certain experiences.

Emotionally, children’s growth is also fostered through play as they learn to manage a variety of feelings.

Morally, children learn what is right and wrong through play, how to treat others fairly and what it is like to be treated unfairly. They also learn about their community, conservation and the environment as they share stories with others.

By observing children at play, you can gain a sense of how play impacts a child’s self-esteem, independence and sense of achievement. Play enables children to understand more about others and themselves, including their fears, joys and frustrations, and how they and others express themselves.

### Children might practise social skills through play like:

- |                |                                 |
|----------------|---------------------------------|
| ▶ taking turns | ▶ cooperating and collaborating |
| ▶ sharing      | ▶ setting rules and guidelines. |
| ▶ negotiating  |                                 |

Play is not bound by rules of language or culture – it is open to children’s own interpretations and expressions. Children may encounter situations in play that reflect those they will meet again later in life. Through play, children are able to take on new roles, work through and cope with both positive and negative experiences, and learn what is necessary to establish relationships.

From as early as two years old, children begin to notice physical differences in people, particularly differences relating to gender, colour and physical abilities. This is part of the children’s self-discovery as they ask, ‘Who am I?’

When children start forming relationships with others, they develop attitudes about differences. Children begin to work out who they are from their experiences with others; for example, they find out whether they are male or female; they become aware of the colour of their skin, eyes and hair; and they find out about their bodies and physical capabilities.

Play can assist children to learn to accept and value all people, particularly those who may appear different from themselves. It can also assist children to learn positive attitudes of acceptance and respect for different people.

You can support this learning by:

- ▶ creating a play environment that reflects many different kinds of people and many different ways of living
- ▶ arranging play settings that promote participation of boys and girls, children with and without disabilities, and children from various cultural backgrounds
- ▶ challenging any behaviour that alerts you to negative attitudes that may be developing in children; for example, if a child refuses to include another child in play because of their appearance, physical ability or similar, you should deal with this situation and provide support for both children
- ▶ involving parents in any issues that centre on children's play.

## Cognitive and language development

Communication begins at birth; infants cry to express their needs, coo to the sounds of a human voice and need engagement. Through their play and interactions with others, children begin to learn the essence of communication. They develop words, progress to forming sentences, and learn about tone of voice and many other language skills.

As these language skills increase, children are able to express new concepts. Children can develop new ideas and actions through the use of words and phrases such as 'under', 'in front of', 'bigger' and 'smaller', and questions and comments like: 'Can I fit through that space?', 'How far can I jump?' and 'My hand is bigger than yours!'

New forms of language emerge as children expand their verbal skills and develop an ability to use written language. As their understanding and use of language grows, children express fun and serious ideas, use formal or correct language, and later add informal or slang terms. When children use made-up words and are creative in the way they speak, it demonstrates that they have a strong grasp of how language works.

Play enables children to develop their cognitive skills and begin to grasp ideas or concepts such as:

- ▶ the same and different
- ▶ sorting and classifying (which things belong together)
- ▶ ordering or sequencing (what comes first, second, third, etc.)
- ▶ cause and effect (if I do this, that happens)
- ▶ problem-solving and decision-making
- ▶ negotiating
- ▶ controlling their environment.

School-age children learn cognitive and language skills that include reading and writing, and skills that allow them to openly express themselves and find out about others.

Watch this video to learn about children's cognitive development.



## Spiritual development

Spiritual development involves religious aspects which are usually left for parents to manage (unless your service is affiliated with a religious body).

However, spiritual development also refers to considering things greater than yourself. When you have a sense of awe or wonder, think about your purpose in the world, see all humans as having common needs or reflect on the meaning of life, you are expanding your spiritual development.

The spirituality of children can be supported by:

- ▶ encouraging children to think about and listen to the world around them
- ▶ exploring and discussing nature
- ▶ caring for the environment and other people
- ▶ participating in celebrations and events
- ▶ helping others to feel secure and loved
- ▶ experiencing enjoyment with others.

## Creative development

Play experiences that encourage children to be creative and express themselves include:

- ▶ drawing
- ▶ painting
- ▶ using play dough
- ▶ moulding clay
- ▶ finger painting
- ▶ creating a collage
- ▶ using blocks
- ▶ trying woodwork.

During creative experiences, the focus should be on enjoying the process itself, rather than the outcome or end product.



## Example

**Development through play**

Cynda, an early childhood educator, has set up play dough. On the table she has provided a range of items:

- ▶ a rolling pin
- ▶ biscuit cutters
- ▶ scissors
- ▶ a collection of coloured pebbles and feathers.

The children working with the play dough each demonstrate different abilities.

Development	Abilities
<b>Physical</b>	▶ Rolling, pounding, cutting, moulding, etc.
<b>Social, emotional and moral</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Talking about their work</li> <li>▶ Sharing play dough and materials with others</li> <li>▶ Creating pretend play scenarios</li> <li>▶ Discussing their work with others</li> <li>▶ Manipulating the dough to match the emotion felt; for example, pounding out anger, squeezing the dough for stress release, etc.</li> </ul>
<b>Cognitive</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Planning what to create</li> <li>▶ Working out how to represent ideas</li> </ul>
<b>Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Telling others about their creations</li> <li>▶ Chatting while working</li> </ul>
<b>Spiritual</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Thinking about the play dough and its origin</li> <li>▶ Connecting with the activity and thinking about how it feels to work with the dough</li> </ul>
<b>Creative</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Imagining how to use the materials</li> <li>▶ Creating an idea</li> <li>▶ Manipulating the dough to the shapes desired</li> </ul>

**Stages of play**

Social play refers to the way children play with others. Very young children have not gained the social skills to play effectively with others, so they are in a different stage of social play than children aged four years and over who play happily in groups. People who study children's play have noted these differences and have classified them into different play types.

Theorist Mildred Parten defined types of play that reflect the social dimensions of play.

**Parten's types of play:**

▶ Solitary play	▶ Play with rules
▶ Parallel play	▶ Unoccupied play
▶ Associative play	▶ Onlooker play
▶ Cooperative play	

Familiarise yourself with these stages of play and how play influences development, so you can:

- ▶ develop expectations for children that are realistic; for example, not expecting infants to play together cooperatively
- ▶ offer children suitable play experiences, materials, activities and resources; for example, ensuring that children who can play cooperatively have plenty of opportunities to do so
- ▶ interact with children in ways that foster self-esteem and promote learning to help children achieve their full potential.

## Solitary play

Solitary play is where children are playing individually and do not have any social contact with others. Solitary play is mostly seen in children under two years, but older children may also engage in solitary play, as they enjoy time alone to pursue their individual interests, or to relax and recharge.



Solitary play usually involves the types of play described in the following table, where there is a focus on objects and their exploration.

Stage	Description
<b>Sensory exploration play</b>	Young children use their senses to explore objects with repetitive movements. For example, a child may repetitively bang a cup and spoon together to hear the sound this action makes.
<b>Functional play</b>	The child manipulates objects in a functional manner (for example, pressing keys on a keyboard) and then combines objects (for example, puts balls into and out of containers). Self-directed imitation then begins (for example, holding a cup to their mouth).
<b>Constructive play</b>	The child begins to sort and build with various objects. Materials are used in simple and then more complex ways. Creative expression begins to emerge.

An environment set up for solitary play should have experiences that are for one child only, such as a pop-up toy, a sensory mat or a puzzle. The space provided should be suitable for one child to work at, such as a small table with one chair, a cushion with an individual activity or an easel.

## Parallel play

Children between two and three years old begin to enjoy being near others and participating in the same activities. Although they are still very self-centred and are usually unable to share or talk together effectively, they may imitate and play in the same manner as a child nearby. An example of parallel play would be when two children are at the play dough table and are both squeezing and poking the dough, but not interacting together.

Older children may also choose to play side-by-side in parallel play, even though they have the skills to play together.

To set up for parallel play, provide experiences where small groups of children can participate in the same or similar play activities independently. These experiences should be similar to those for solitary play, such as puzzles, car mats, painting or a book corner.

## Associative play

Associative play usually occurs in children at early preschool age. It is called associative play because children are beginning to associate with each other.

As a child's language skills increase and improve, they also become more aware of other children and better able to communicate. A child may play with others, speak briefly to them, laugh together, and react to experiences and other children. Although these children are playing together, their interactions will be brief and the play episode may not last very long. For example, children may borrow and lend toys, and laugh together without actually cooperating or playing with common ideas in mind.

Early superhero play is often observed at an associative play level, as groups of children 'fly' around and deal with emergencies. However, the play is not organised and the children do not talk together about plots or particular characters.

To encourage associative play, you may provide props for imaginative play or experiences that require children to share materials with others; for example, car mats, block corners and dress-up areas all give children the opportunity to associate with each other.

## Cooperative play

At late preschool age, children become less focused on themselves and more interested in other children. Because their language is becoming more complex, their interactions with other children usually last longer, as they begin to collaborate by sharing ideas and solving problems.

They enjoy taking the roles of leader or follower, and they give roles to each other in their play; for example, 'You be the dad, I'll be the mum. Joey can be the baby!' Plots will be discussed and played out; for example, 'Now you go to the table and I will come in and serve dinner.' Because children are working together and the play is lasting longer, this is called cooperative play.



You can encourage cooperative play by providing for role-plays, imaginative or dramatic play. You may include dress-ups, cubbies, home furniture or other props that children can use. Car mats, block corners and dress-up areas all provide children the opportunity to collaborate and develop ideas for cooperative play.

## Play with rules

Older preschool- and early primary school-age children become interested in more structured games; that is, those with clearly defined rules. Children often choose to play these games during their playtime at preschool, school or outside school care.

Games with rules include:

- ▶ tabletop games, such as board games and card games
- ▶ games played in lines or circles
- ▶ games with balls, bats or marbles
- ▶ skipping rope games
- ▶ hopscotch
- ▶ cricket
- ▶ football.



You can support play with rules by ensuring materials and equipment are in good order and are readily available to children. Most play with rules requires space and an understanding of the rules of play. Children also need to collaborate with each other as they share what they know and agree on how the game will operate.

Avoid competitive games where possible, as they reduce children's opportunities to practise skills. In competitive games, the children with the greatest skills get lots of practise, while the children with poor or less-developed skills are left out or are eliminated early. This reduces practice time, provides little chance for developing skills, and can also be damaging to self-esteem. In this situation children might become bored, upset or angry. By ensuring games are non-competitive, you ensure all children participate in some activity most of the time, and that there is not a winning team or winning child, but a group of children developing skills.

## Unoccupied play

Children of all ages can become involved in unoccupied play, which involves a child being occupied watching anything that happens to be of momentary interest, rather than actively playing. When there is nothing exciting taking place, the child may play with their own body, get on and off chairs, stand around, follow an educator or sit in one spot glancing around the room. Unoccupied play may not seem important, but you must respect a child's decision not to participate, and see the value in a child's observation of an environment and the people in it.

## Onlooker play

Children of all ages can also become involved in onlooker play. A child who spends time watching other children at play is undertaking onlooker play. The child may talk to the children they are observing by asking questions or giving suggestions, but does not enter into the play.

This type of play differs from unoccupied play in that the onlooker is definitely observing particular groups of children rather than anything that happens to be of interest at the time. The child stands or sits within speaking distance of the group so they can see and hear everything that takes place. As with unoccupied play, onlooker play may not seem important, but you must respect a child's decision not to participate, and see the value in a child's observation of an environment and the people in it.

# Practice task 1

1. Consider your pedagogy (professional practice) and answer the following questions.

a. Write down a sentence or comment from the EYLF or MTOP that explains your pedagogy in relation to play. Provide the name of the framework and the page number.

.....

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b. Write down a point in an assessment guide from the NQS that best represents your pedagogy in relation to play. Provide the element number in which this point can be found.

.....

.....

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c. Write down the article of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child that means the most to you in relation to your work with children. Provide the article number.

.....

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2. This photo shows a small group of four- and five-year-old children playing. What value might this play have for their development? Consider their physical, social, emotional, cognitive and communication development.



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3. Why do you think it is important to understand the stages of children’s play?

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4. Describe a play space you could set up that would be suited to solitary play.

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.....

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5. Describe a play space you could set up that would be suited to cooperative play.

.....

.....

.....

# 1B Supporting identity

Play is the child's tool for understanding the world around them. Children can make sense of what they observe, and develop their sense of identity and belonging through their experiences of play.

<b>Active, hands-on experiences with the natural environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Learning about the world</li> <li>▶ Understanding where things come from</li> </ul>
<b>Safe toys (materials and equipment)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Working at challenging experiences</li> <li>▶ Persisting through frustration and difficulty</li> <li>▶ Being stimulated to learn new things and how they work</li> </ul>
<b>Other children and themselves</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Learning about the things they like and dislike</li> <li>▶ Learning about how they are the same and different to other people</li> <li>▶ Developing skills in caring for themselves and understanding their needs</li> </ul>
<b>Educators</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Being supported through challenges</li> <li>▶ Having the ability to try new skills with support</li> </ul>

When you are aware of the individual abilities and interests of children, you can support their play in a much more positive way. If you expect all children to play in the same way, you may not give them equal opportunities to express themselves and interact with the environment.

You can build on children's skills and abilities and adapt your curriculum (programs and interactions) to match the needs of all children so they have positive play and learning experiences. As you develop your knowledge of play, you will begin to understand the benefits that play can bring to children's wellbeing, and healthy growth and development.

## How play supports belonging

Children's social play reflects who they are becoming in terms of their:

- ▶ cultural experiences
- ▶ temperament
- ▶ interests
- ▶ communication style
- ▶ personality
- ▶ abilities
- ▶ level of social skills.

Each child approaches their play experience with a unique set of beliefs and values. These are worked through as they play with their peers and experience the differences and similarities between themselves and others. They might also be affected by how long they have been attending the service. When you provide for the child's needs and help them to understand their similarities and differences, you assist them to feel a sense of belonging. When you allow children to make choices and to influence their environment, you are encouraging their agency.

## Play and inclusion

Because play has such a large social value, the play environment must reflect the many different lifestyles and people who make up society. You need to think about children's individual needs when preparing play environments.

### Children's individual needs might relate to their:

▶ race and culture	▶ communication style
▶ gender	▶ personality
▶ age	▶ length of time attending the service
▶ interests and preferences	▶ abilities.
▶ social context and lifestyle	

To ensure play and physical activities reflect the cultural diversity, gender and abilities of children, you should ensure that:

- ▶ there are no stereotypical or inaccurate materials that project limited ideas of gender roles
- ▶ resources and their content reflect everyday differences and similarities such as dolls that reflect different cultural backgrounds; books and photos that reflect a broad range of people, abilities and lifestyles
- ▶ each child's cultural or other differences are reflected in the environment.



## Cultural and racial differences

You can encourage play among children with cultural differences and from different backgrounds by:

- ▶ allowing children to use play that depicts their culture through role-playing, modelling or by using their first language
- ▶ being aware of children's backgrounds and, if possible, incorporating resources that are relevant to the curriculum; for example, cookware from a particular culture for home corner, cultural dress for dress-ups, dolls with a variety of skin colours, or musical instruments from different cultures for music time
- ▶ including cultural resources as part of the day-to-day environment
- ▶ realistically depicting things that are relevant to children away from the care setting to assist them to feel valued and that they belong
- ▶ respecting all cultures
- ▶ continually educating yourself about aspects of the children's lives outside the service
- ▶ not getting caught up in stereotyping any child or family; everyone is unique and has their own needs and interests
- ▶ including special occasions that some or all children participate in.

## Gender differences

To encourage children to accept gender differences, you should:

- ▶ never label a particular activity as best suited to boys or girls
- ▶ be aware that boys and girls play differently from each other
- ▶ encourage all genders to participate in all areas of play in the environment that you set up – encourage boys to dress up, girls to engage in messy play and initiate spontaneous interactions with all children in the group
- ▶ be sensitive to the values, cultures and attitudes of some families in your service; you may need to make compromises if your attitudes are different.

## Additional needs

To encourage children with additional needs to play and socialise, you should:

- ▶ include them in all types of play for all aspects of development
- ▶ participate in play to show children ways to include others and encourage interactions
- ▶ provide specific equipment or an environment to ensure success
- ▶ follow any individual programs that have been developed by a specialist service
- ▶ ensure that children's individual programs are incorporated into the overall play setting to provide an inclusive experience
- ▶ encourage a range of children to participate in activities, including those specified by specialist services.

Respect and encourage children with cultural differences, gender differences and additional needs to participate. All children will learn from this interaction, which helps them to use appropriate communication.

## Practice task 2

1. Complete the following checklist to assess an outdoor and indoor play environment, then answer the questions that follow.

Yes	No	What to consider
<b>Photos/posters/pictures</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are all the children's families and staff at the centre represented?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are there images of people from a variety of ethnic, racial and cultural backgrounds?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are men and women depicted in less traditional roles; for example, women as carpenters and men as care providers?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are differently abled people depicted at work or at play?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is a variety of family types depicted; for example, single parents, an extended family or a same-sex family?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is artwork from different cultural groups displayed; for example, textiles with Aboriginal designs or Egyptian symbols?
<b>Books</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do children's books reflect people of both modern and traditional cultural styles?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are other cultural/ethnic/racial backgrounds reflected positively?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do books reflect a variety of family lifestyles; for example, single-parent families, extended families and low-income families?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do books reflect a range of languages or stories in Braille?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do books reflect males and females in non-traditional roles?

Yes	No	What to consider
<b>Creative play</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is a variety of skin tones (tan, brown, black) offered in paints, crayons and textas?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are these materials offered each day so children have time to explore them?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are wall and hand mirrors available to study physical features?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do block accessories (human figures) depict a range of racial groups and people of varying abilities?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are natural materials available for play on a daily basis; for example, sand, water, clay, gumnuts, pine cones, shells, sea sponges and natural baskets?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are there dolls that depict a range of cultural groups?
<b>Pretend play</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are both commercial and homemade dolls available?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are at least some dolls anatomically correct with a range of accurate skin tones and facial features?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are there both male and female dolls?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are there dolls with various abilities/disabilities?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do dress-ups, utensils and objects reflect a variety of cultural/ racial/ethnic backgrounds?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is there a diversity of role-play props reflecting all genders?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are pretend play objects easily used by children with disabilities?

- a. For one item that you checked 'yes' to, provide an example of the toy, materials or equipment that represents this.

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- b. For one item that you checked 'no' to, explain how you could change the environment to include this point.

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- 3. What are some ways you can demonstrate respect for differences?

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- 4. What is one common item you could add to the home corner that would demonstrate the inclusion of an Indian family?

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- 5. Choose an activity that is commonly undertaken by boys and identify how you could encourage girls to be involved as well.

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# 1C Providing for play

You can encourage children to use their playtime to participate in play and learning experiences and develop a sense of agency by:

- ▶ providing organised yet flexible routines
- ▶ being gentle and developing security
- ▶ providing a safe play area with time allocated for exploration and experimentation
- ▶ providing suitable materials
- ▶ arranging smooth transition times
- ▶ modelling play and use of equipment
- ▶ providing new situations, materials and/or resources
- ▶ ensuring challenges are offered
- ▶ allowing for individual and group play
- ▶ being clear about limits
- ▶ acknowledging feelings
- ▶ supporting children to participate and succeed
- ▶ providing space for play
- ▶ accepting a certain amount of mess.



## Inviting play environments

There are many universal aspects that facilitate an appropriate and inviting play environment for both group and individual play activities and experiences, including:

- ▶ time
- ▶ space
- ▶ materials and equipment
- ▶ people
- ▶ safety

## Time

When children are rushed through play, they miss opportunities to fully participate in the activity and to develop a sense of agency. This may cause frustration and reduce the learning potential. Play for children must be unhurried and uninterrupted.

### Children need time to:

- |                              |                              |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| ▶ make choices and decisions | ▶ practise and master skills |
| ▶ become involved            | ▶ form relationships         |
| ▶ change direction           | ▶ express themselves.        |

When you allow children enough time for their play to develop, this gives them the opportunity to become involved and engaged, and to feel challenged and stimulated.

Children may become frustrated or disruptive if they are not allowed to see their play through to a logical conclusion. When possible, allow play to be completed before changing activities or moving on. If this is not possible, explain why to the child and then organise a time when they can continue to play. For example, ‘Jackie, you’ve done such a good job building that tower, but it’s lunchtime now. Can you please go and wash your hands for lunch? I’ll make sure your tower is safe and that you can finish it after lunch’.

The length of time any experience will continue for is difficult to judge, as each experience will engage children in different ways, and each child will show interest in their own time. The period of time you provide activities for should be dictated by the children’s participation rather than a set number of days, weeks or planning cycle. In any one play space, experiences should be offered over varying times.

## Space

You have limited control over the amount of space available for children’s play. Regulations set minimum standards for the amount of space that must be provided in a particular service. However, how you arrange the available space is up to you. You may occupy play space that is solely for your use, or you may share a space with other groups and need to pack up and set up each day.

Try to work with children to decide how available space should be used, and remember the points listed in the following table.

<p><b>Children need hands-on experiences.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ They need to explore, touch, smell, move, create and build.</li> <li>▶ Encourage children in these activities by setting out their environment appropriately and in an interesting way.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Children need opportunities to be alone.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Children can become tired and overstimulated if they are in a group all the time. Children need space to spend some time in quiet, individual activities.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Children need choices.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ The space available should prompt children to choose to do something that interests them; therefore, there should be sufficient play spaces available for children to have a choice of two or three activities.</li> <li>▶ Indoor and outdoor choices should be available if possible.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Children need challenges.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ The space you arrange needs to offer a variety of possibilities and should encourage children to think creatively, solve problems and make decisions.</li> <li>▶ The space should be flexible to allow children to play in self-created play or to mix two or more play experiences.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Children need safety and security.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Children need to feel safe without feeling overprotected.</li> <li>▶ Finding a balance between safety and appropriate risk-taking is a challenging part of your job.</li> </ul>

## Materials and equipment

The play environment should be set up and arranged so that children have a clear indication of where and how they can play, and so that materials are well displayed.

When children are involving themselves in any type of play, they must have easy access to the resources – toys and equipment – that facilitate their play. You must also ensure that the resources they use are changed regularly, so children are provided with a variety of activities and the resources offered are in good condition. This may mean changing resources on a weekly or monthly basis, or according to your service's policies and procedures.



Everything that a child could use in their play should be safe, age-appropriate and in good condition. You should look at the play setting from the child's point of view and ensure that everything present is a potential stimulus for the children and sends positive messages about how they should behave.

The materials and equipment made available to children have a huge bearing on the quality and types of play children can engage in. You should ensure that:

- ▶ materials match individual children's interests, needs and abilities
- ▶ there are enough resources for the number of children in the group to make choices
- ▶ good-quality resources are provided
- ▶ materials and equipment are regularly rotated to ensure children are constantly provided a variety of activities.

## People

Staff-child ratios and the qualifications and experience of the adults working with children impact the experiences that are presented to children. Therefore, you need to understand the importance of providing for and supporting children's play and learning. You should understand the need for space and time to be able to interact with playing children, enhance social play, model appropriate behaviour and extend the play where possible.

It is also important to consider how educators are positioned to ensure children's safety and wellbeing.

The educators that make up a team all contribute to the effectiveness of the play environment. They influence:

- ▶ how the area is set up
- ▶ what resources and materials are used
- ▶ how safe and well supervised the areas are
- ▶ whether children are encouraged to take on challenges and use risk-taking skills
- ▶ the level of belonging each child feels
- ▶ how time and learning are prioritised
- ▶ how much time is spent indoors and outdoors
- ▶ each child's sense of agency.

## Safety

Look at the basic environment and identify how it needs to operate and be presented to ensure safety. You need to consider the developmental abilities of the children when creating a safe play space.

### Consider the children's levels of:

- ▶ understanding of safety and danger
- ▶ spontaneous behaviour
- ▶ ability to follow limits and guidelines
- ▶ curiosity
- ▶ interest in adult-modelled behaviour
- ▶ independence and attempts at greater independence
- ▶ understanding of consequences
- ▶ mobility and stability.

A safe environment is non-threatening. Providing a non-threatening play space is about how comfortable and easy it is to share thoughts and ideas, ask questions and make mistakes as part of learning. In a non-threatening environment, children and educators are encouraged to interact without put-downs, punishments or ridicule.

Service policies and procedures, regulations, standards and health and safety legislation are all in place to reduce the incidence of injury and the legal implications that staff may face.

There are day-to-day procedures that are affected by these guidelines, such as:

- ▶ sun safety
- ▶ equipment maintenance
- ▶ providing softfall areas.

When considering the design of equipment, you should look for:

- ▶ Australian Standards Association conformity, which shows the design has been considered for safety
- ▶ the recommendations in relation to the age and developmental stage of the children using the equipment
- ▶ clear assembly instructions to avoid breakage or disassembly
- ▶ instructions for use and supervision.

The older the children are, the more likely it is that they will be able to manage equipment safely – particularly school-age children. Despite your observations of what may be suitable for a particular child or group of children, you must always present equipment that is in good order and provide adequate supervision.

## Choosing activities and equipment

When considering the choices children have for play and leisure, remember to view the environment from their perspective. Children undertake activities both indoors and outdoors, so both these areas should be considered when creating a stimulating, positive and developmentally appropriate environment. You should use materials and equipment from a variety of sources, and supply these according to children's individual interests, needs, ages and stages of development.

The following table describes a range of suitable play and leisure resources that can be used to address individual children's interests and abilities and promote agency, for those aged from birth to 12 years.

	Infants to 1 year	1 to 2 years	2 to 3 years	3 to 5 years	5 to 9 years	9 to 12 years
<b>Visual (stimulate sight)</b>	Mobiles (that can be seen while lying down), pram and cot dangling toys, pictures, human faces, posters, activity centres, books, hand puppets	Books with card or cloth covers, magazines for tearing, kaleidoscopes, photographs of familiar people, objects	Greater variety of books	Greater variety of books – gradually increasing the complexity of storylines	Poetry, science and history books, magnifying glasses, aquariums	Science fiction and 'how-to' books
<b>Promote hearing</b>	Bells on elastic (firmly attached to wrist or ankle), rattles, squeaky toys, soft foam block or balls with bells inside, music boxes, wind chimes, saucepans with wooden spoons	Simple musical instruments: maracas, drums, rhythm sticks, bells	Greater variety of musical instruments, CD players with classical, folk and children's music	Xylophones, keyboards, clackers, castanets, a greater variety of CDs	More complex musical instruments such as the piano or trumpet	Musical instruments such as guitar, piano, recorder, etc.
<b>Promote feeling and touching</b>	Teething rings, washable soft toys, various types of balls, texture rugs or mats, texture blocks	Feely boxes or bags, sand trays or troughs, water play, finger paint, play dough, textured fabrics, safe natural materials (pine cones, smooth beach stones, etc.)	Clay, mud, texture cards, a greater variety of safe natural materials, sand and water equipment, simple garden tools	Greater variety of natural materials – more complex sand and water play equipment	Magnetism experiments, hourglasses, collecting own materials and sorting into collections	Fossils, radio kits, test tubes, care of pets
<b>Small muscle development and coordination</b>	Activity centres, blocks, nesting toys, measuring spoons, buckets, baskets, bath toys, sponges, simple posting boxes, dolly pegs in containers, push and pull toys	Interlocking blocks, hammer and peg boards, stacking pegs, interlocking train sets, spoons and cups for sand play, large bead frames, simple puzzles with knobs	Variety of threading materials, more complex puzzles, shape and colour sorting activities, construction sets, activity boards/dolls with zips, buttons, velcro, buckles	Accessories for unit blocks, simple board games, felt boards with figures, a variety of blocks, picture lotto, more complex puzzles of 20+ pieces	Pick-up-sticks, jacks, spinning top games, Chinese checkers, draughts, card games, more complex board games and puzzles with smaller pieces, games with dice and spinners, picture dominoes, complex construction sets	Darts, magic sets, memory games, vocabulary and spelling games

	Infants to 1 year	1 to 2 years	2 to 3 years	3 to 5 years	5 to 9 years	9 to 12 years
<b>Large muscle development and coordination</b>	Large plastic covered foam mats or cylinders for rolling on, suitable swings, large cushions, boxes and tunnels for crawling through, large blocks for climbing over	Ride-on toys, climbing equipment (steps, crates, outdoor or homemade blocks), stable wooden trolleys, doll prams, low balance beams, tyres	Wheelbarrows, small wooden ladders, mini trampolines, swings and slides, barrels, jouncing boards, large inflated tyres for bouncing, tricycles	Unit blocks, woodworking bench with real tools, ring toss games, bean bags and targets, simple bat and ball games, obstacle courses	Structured games with rules such as four-square, hopscotch, skipping rope, pogo sticks, stilts, simplified football, T-ball, roller skates, seesaw, scooters, bicycles, tents, punching bags, tether ball, simple bat and ball games	Hobbies, team and group games, clubs, interest groups, frisbee, volleyball, badminton, table tennis, tennis
<b>Encourage imaginative and pretend play</b>	Hats, bags, dolls, cars, wheeled toys, soft toys, mirrors	Baskets for carrying, small school cases, telephones, washable dolls, doll blankets, tea sets, simple kitchen utensils, cars, train sets, small brooms	Stove, sink, iron and board, sturdy wooden dolls house with a range of people, zoo and farm animals, cameras, vehicles, boats, planes	Pretend-play prop boxes (fire fighter, ambulance, hospital, hairdresser, dentist, shop, post office, bakery, etc.)	Puppet shows, simple skits and plays of children's own design, complex dress-ups, dolls clothes with small accessories, road systems, real cooking experiences	Spy games, action figures, movie themes
<b>Encourage art and creative expression</b>	Chunky black crayons, repeated actions and games like peekaboo and pat-a-cake	Large thick black crayons or thick black pencils with large sheets of white paper, thick paint (primary colours), stubby handled thick brushes	Coloured torn paper for pasting, easels and brushes, dough with rolling clay	Blunt scissors, staplers, hole puncher, tape, blunt darning needles and wool, felt-tip pens, crayons, print-making, crayon resist painting	Simple sewing projects, weaving looms, wool, coloured pencils, pastels, charcoal, a greater variety of paints, paint-mixing, screen-printing	Embroidery, knitting, potter's wheel for clay modelling, carving, oil paints

## Indoor activities and equipment

When you create play spaces indoors, provide areas for all types of play: quiet, active, play in groups and areas for personal space.

The way in which children are grouped can affect how you set up these areas. For example, your service may group children by age range, such as infants, toddlers and preschoolers, or you may have family groupings where the ages are mixed from infants to five-year-olds. If you work in a school-age care program, the children may be aged five to 12 years.

You will need to know about children's physical development to identify appropriate activities and equipment for the indoor play area.

Infants and toddlers usually use indoor areas for:

- ▶ discovery – exploring interesting items with their senses in a safe way
- ▶ climbing
- ▶ playing with wheeled toys
- ▶ looking in mirrors, where they can see their images
- ▶ manipulative play
- ▶ pretend play
- ▶ block play
- ▶ messy play
- ▶ creative activity
- ▶ quiet time.

When you arrange your indoor space carefully, infants and toddlers are offered opportunities to practise both fine and gross motor skills. Most activity areas for infants will be arranged on the floor for easy access, rather than on tables.

Preschoolers usually use indoor areas for:

- ▶ dramatic play
- ▶ blocks
- ▶ books, language and listening (quiet area)
- ▶ manipulative play with puzzles, threading and construction sets
- ▶ maths games sorting, classifying, matching and ordering games and activities
- ▶ science and nature activities
- ▶ creative arts such as clay, painting, drawing and collage
- ▶ sand and water play
- ▶ woodwork
- ▶ cooking.



School-age children usually use indoor areas for:

- ▶ creating; for example, art, sewing or model building areas
- ▶ constructing; for example, carpentry, construction or block areas
- ▶ pretending and performing; for example, dolls, playing house, or drama or music areas

- ▶ relaxing; for example, quiet or alone time, or friendship areas
- ▶ reading and writing; for example, reading or language areas
- ▶ discovering; for example, science, nature, maths or texture areas.

Your service should offer as many resources as possible to help children undertake these activities. This allows them to choose their own activity and provides enough choice to ensure they do not get bored.

## Outdoor activities and equipment

The outdoor space needs to have the same level of consideration as indoors; there should also be opportunities for physically active play and gross motor activities. All age groups need to be given many opportunities for physically active play. Children need to be able to involve themselves in physical activities such as running, jumping, digging, pushing, skipping and climbing.

Outdoor play spaces need to be clearly defined so children can immediately see how the space can be used and so they can move easily between spaces without interfering with others at play. Stepping stones and the use of other natural features can provide children with creative options for their physical play.

There should be a variety of interesting things to do; a quality outdoor environment will offer each child a choice of four or five different play activities and experiences that match their interests.

Opportunities to rearrange equipment, change location, add or remove pieces and engage in simple or complex play are provided by a selection of:

- ▶ wooden planks
- ▶ car tyres
- ▶ small ladders
- ▶ A-frames
- ▶ outdoor blocks
- ▶ cable reels
- ▶ off-cut logs.

In addition to these areas for active, hands-on play, children also need areas where they can experiment and explore. Children need to be challenged; they need to be able to actively manipulate their play space by redesigning and reinventing with movable equipment and props. If you provide appropriate materials and equipment for children, they can then create the type of play experience they want to participate in.

Many services provide children with the opportunity to move indoors and outdoors as they please; this is called an indoor–outdoor program. Your staff ratios and service design will determine whether this is an option for you.

Almost all experiences planned indoors can be offered in an outdoor space.

The following table describes various outdoor areas and how they promote children’s learning, experimentation and exploration.

Type of play	Action	Learning concepts
<b>Water play</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Manipulating water</li> <li>▶ Controlling water</li> <li>▶ Pouring</li> <li>▶ Tipping</li> <li>▶ Pumping</li> <li>▶ Siphoning</li> <li>▶ Spraying</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Capacity</li> <li>▶ Volume</li> <li>▶ Floating and sinking</li> <li>▶ Wet and dry</li> <li>▶ Force and pressure</li> <li>▶ Evaporation and condensation</li> </ul>

Type of play	Action	Learning concepts
<b>Sand play</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Digging</li> <li>▶ Pouring</li> <li>▶ Moulding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Using imagination: pretend play learning</li> <li>▶ Wet and dry</li> <li>▶ Weight</li> <li>▶ Texture</li> <li>▶ Volume</li> <li>▶ Large and small muscle development</li> </ul>
<b>Wood – blocks and woodwork play</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Hammering</li> <li>▶ Sawing</li> <li>▶ Stacking</li> <li>▶ Fitting together</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Pretend play</li> <li>▶ Maths learning</li> <li>▶ Working together</li> <li>▶ Working alone</li> <li>▶ Problem-solving</li> <li>▶ Comparing</li> <li>▶ Classifying</li> <li>▶ Measurement</li> <li>▶ Parts and whole</li> </ul>
<b>Earth play</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Digging</li> <li>▶ Moulding</li> <li>▶ Cutting</li> <li>▶ Planting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Texture</li> <li>▶ Form</li> <li>▶ Weight</li> <li>▶ Wet and dry</li> </ul>

## The outdoor environment and belonging

The outdoor environment is very important to many children. Respect for the land and maintaining the environment are central to many cultures. Nurturing children's relationship to the land helps them develop a strong sense of identity and belonging. It is helpful to acknowledge this by allowing children to:

- ▶ work and play outside as much as possible
- ▶ use the immediate environment as a source of learning
- ▶ allow children to play in family groupings.

You should also consider that children from non-English-speaking backgrounds may find relief in the outdoor environment away from the close proximity of large groups of children, and the noise and sensory stimulation that can be experienced in the indoor environment. By offering children the opportunity to choose indoor or outdoor experiences, you can allow them to freely play and express themselves in their individual way.

Outdoor spaces can also be used for family gatherings or informal meetings.

## Natural materials

The diversity of natural materials provides children with many experiences of colour, texture, size and shape. There is also a warmth and 'life force' to such materials that children can often connect with in a more real way than with plastic or artificial toys and materials.



Children of all ages can benefit from the use of natural materials in play. These materials enable children to begin to feel a sense of connectedness and responsibility to the world of living things (including plants) as they become more aware of life around them. When you show wonder and care for all life, children will imitate your behaviour.

You can begin to develop a collection of natural materials that children can use.

This may include:

- ▶ cloth and fabric: many fabrics are made from plant or animal fibres such as cotton, linen, silk or wool
- ▶ natural materials: shells, pebbles, rocks, twigs, leaves, feathers, tree bark, gumnuts and seed pods (be sure to check if these are poisonous or pose a choking hazard) and log sections can be used in play and in many craft activities
- ▶ dolls: small knitted dolls, wooden carved dolls, peg dolls, cloth dolls, corn husk dolls and rope dolls make interesting changes from commercially produced dolls
- ▶ animals: you may provide small wooden animals from different countries that children can play with while learning about each animal
- ▶ blocks: wooden off-cuts make a change from commercially produced blocks; carpentry and joinery businesses may be happy to supply these (ensure these have smooth edges and are free from splinters)
- ▶ boxes: shoeboxes, chocolate boxes and grocery boxes are great fun for imaginative play; sometimes you can find sturdy wooden boxes from greengrocers or wine cellars
- ▶ cane baskets: these come in a great variety of shapes and sizes and can be collected at Easter or purchased cheaply from op shops.

## Practice task 3

1. List all the experiences offered during a play session. For each experience, indicate how long it was provided for the children.

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2. What benefits are you providing children if you ensure the environment is safe and non-threatening?

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3. What benefits are you providing children if you ensure the environment is challenging and stimulating?

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4. Draw or access a floor plan showing both indoor and outdoor spaces and the activities set up. Indicate on the plan where the following areas are:

- ▶ Active play
- ▶ Quiet play
- ▶ Challenging play
- ▶ Group play spaces
- ▶ Individual play spaces
- ▶ Where natural materials are used

5. If an area is missing, explain how you could provide this.

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6. What would be the ages of the children using these areas?

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7. Identify one example of a child demonstrating an interest in the materials provided in a service. What would indicate the child was interested?

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8. Read a service philosophy. What does it tell you about any of the identified play environments? Write down a section of the philosophy where a specific environment is mentioned.

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## Summary

- ▶ Educators must provide for different kinds of play in the indoor and outdoor environments.
- ▶ Play influences all areas of children’s learning and development – physical, social, cognitive, language, spiritual and creative.
- ▶ Children progress through recognisable stages of play and creative development.
- ▶ You can foster a sense of belonging by providing a safe play environment that is challenging, stimulating and non-threatening.
- ▶ You can enhance play by choosing suitable materials and resources, and considering time, space, people and safety.
- ▶ Resources must reflect a range of people, lifestyles, cultural backgrounds, abilities and children’s interests.
- ▶ Experiences should be provided that enable children to explore natural materials and their environment.
- ▶ By creating play spaces for the group and individuals, and for active and quiet play, you can meet most children’s needs.

# Learning checkpoint 1

## Creating an environment for play

### Part A

1. Create **two** play environments – one indoors and one outdoors. Each environment should include the following:
  - ▶ An area for an individual child and an area for group play, which provide for unhurried play opportunities
  - ▶ Resources and materials suited to the play
  - ▶ A set-up that is safe, non-threatening, challenging, stimulating and that promotes a sense of belonging.

You can draw and describe the environments in the space below, or provide photographs of the environments you created.

2. Write down a policy or procedure that you would follow relating to safety. Choose a section in the policy and explain how it links to the safety of one of the experiences you have set up in your play environment.

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2. 'Each child's current knowledge, strengths, ideas, culture, abilities and interests are the foundation of the program'. (National Quality Standard Descriptor, Element 1.1.2)

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3. 'Play provides opportunities for children to learn as they discover, create, improvise and imagine' (EYLF, page 15) and 'Play and leisure activities provide opportunities for children to learn as they discover, create, improvise and imagine'. (MTOP, page 14)

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## Topic 2

In this topic you will learn about:

**2A Engaging in play**

**2B Meeting play needs**

**2C Offering play choices**

## Supporting children's play and learning

Educators play a significant role in facilitating children's play, and can use direct or indirect guidance to achieve this. When you provide extensions to play, children remain engaged for longer periods and can also find a broader range of options for their play.

Through observation and discussions with children, you can facilitate experiences and provide a flexible routine that allows children to have control and choice over their environment. Children feel a sense of belonging and ownership when they are involved in decisions relating to activities and experiences.

The following table maps this topic to the National Quality Standard and both national learning frameworks.

<b>National Quality Standard</b>	
✓	Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice
	Quality Area 2: Children's health and safety
✓	Quality Area 3: Physical environment
	Quality Area 4: Staffing arrangements
✓	Quality Area 5: Relationships with children
	Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
	Quality Area 7: Governance and leadership
<b>Early Years Learning Framework</b>	<b>My Time, Our Place</b>
<b>Principles</b>	
	Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
	Partnerships
✓	High expectations and equity
	Respect for diversity
✓	Ongoing learning and reflective practice
<b>Practice</b>	
	Holistic approaches
✓	Responsiveness to children
✓	Learning through play
✓	Intentional teaching
✓	Learning environments
	Cultural competence
	Continuity of learning and transitions
	Assessment for learning
<b>Outcomes</b>	
	Children have a strong sense of identity
	Children are connected to and contribute to their world
	Children have a strong sense of wellbeing
✓	Children are confident and involved learners
	Children are effective communicators

# 2A Engaging in play

When you engage in children's play, your goal should be to maintain or extend the play, or provide a spontaneous learning opportunity. Children should still be able to feel a sense of agency and that they are in control of the play direction.



## Indirect participation

You can engage in children's play without being directly involved. The following table provides some ways you can participate indirectly, while still helping the play to develop and the children to learn.

Method of indirect participation	Details	Example
<b>Commenting</b>	<p>Your comments may relate to a learning opportunity you think is important or an aspect of the play the children may be ignoring or not noticing.</p> <p>This does not involve you in the play, but helps the children focus on what you think is important.</p>	<p>An educator who is watching two children filling and emptying containers of water in a tub outside says, 'All your containers are full to the brim now!'</p>
<b>Questioning</b>	<p>Questioning extends the play and learning, and encourages children to think more about what they are doing.</p> <p>This does not involve you in the play, but helps the children think further about the play they are involved in.</p>	<p>Two children have been pretending to be crocodiles for much of the day; they are slithering over the floor and using their arms as jaws. The educator asks, 'What food have the crocodiles been eating today?'</p>
<b>Giving information</b>	<p>Watch children playing and then later in the day, when appropriate, gather the players together to look at a book, video, picture or other resource that gives them more information about the topic of their play.</p> <p>This new source of information may give children new ideas for their play.</p>	<p>For the children playing with the water, this could be a storybook about the concepts of full and empty.</p> <p>For the children playing crocodiles, it could be a factual book or video about crocodiles.</p>

Method of indirect participation	Details	Example
<p><b>Retelling, replaying and storytelling</b></p>	<p>You can replay, talk about or dramatise what you saw children doing.</p> <p>This helps children reflect on and think about what they were doing.</p> <p>It is also a good way to show children how much you respect their play.</p>	<p>For the children playing with water, you may retell their play at morning tea when they are pouring their drinks. You could say, 'I saw Ben and Tammy playing with the containers in the water this morning. They were filling up the containers until they were full to the brim. The water went to the very top. When the water got to the top it splashed right over the edge'.</p> <p>For the crocodiles, you could retell their play in a story; for example, 'Once upon a time there were two small crocodiles who lived in our room. Their names were Sol and Java. They were friendly crocodiles, but they slithered all over the floor and we all had to be careful not to step on them. I wonder what they will be doing tomorrow'.</p>

Simple discussion can be important for learning and demonstrating interest in children's play. However, you need to know when to interact and when to allow the children to continue playing. Sometimes the child will learn more from having no interaction, as they continue the activity or work something out for themselves.

### Example

#### Commenting during play

Carolina, an educator, watches toddlers playing with play dough. They are pounding and squeezing the dough.

Carolina wants to introduce the words 'pound' and 'squeeze' to the toddlers, so she approaches and says, 'Look, you are pounding the dough'.

The children stop what they are doing. Their concentration is broken. They notice Dustin running through the room and leave the play dough to chase him.

Carolina's intervention has stopped the children's play. She prioritised her interest in teaching new words over the children's interest in concentrating and building their skills and finger strength.

Instead, Carolina could have approached the play dough table and sat quietly for a while to gauge how intently the children were concentrating. This may have helped her make a decision about whether the children were open to interaction or intent in their learning.

## Listening

Children may express views to you spontaneously or during planned discussions in small or large groups.

When listening to children's views, active listening and positioning yourself at the child's level are the most important ways to communicate clearly and provide respectful acknowledgment.

Active listening requires you to acknowledge, encourage, clarify, restate and reflect what you hear to allow the child to identify that their message is being received by you appropriately.

Positioning yourself at the child's level ensures that you are making eye contact (where culturally appropriate) and also enables you to clearly hear and see any messages a child is relating to you. In addition, being at the child's level makes the child more comfortable as you are not standing over them.

When children feel they are being listened to, they are more likely to express themselves and share information. They are also more likely to explore different topics of interest and be open to new ideas.

Discussion with children during their experiences must include time for them to:

- ▶ think about their ideas and views
- ▶ express their ideas and views in ways they feel are most appropriate; for example, verbally, through art and craft, discussion or emotional reactions.

### Example

#### Listening

Harrison (four years) and Sam (four and a half years) are talking with Jenna (an educator) about shopping for groceries. Harrison talks about how his mum goes to the market as the food is fresher there, so they will be healthy. Sam talks about how his family goes to the supermarket, but they take their own shopping bags so they don't have to use plastic ones.

While the children are talking, Jenna sits at the children's level, reflects what they are saying, adds her own experiences of shopping and also asks questions such as, 'What would your mum do if there were no apples at the market?'

## Intentional teaching

Intentional teaching is deliberate and purposeful. It may occur in a planned situation or be part of spontaneous learning. When you provide intentional teaching, you will have considered how you can best support the child to reach a goal or understand a concept. You will be open to the children's willingness to become involved and contribute.

Intentional teaching usually includes a plan of how to move from one understanding to another. This plan is organised and the process is as practical as possible. Intentional teaching may include scaffolding experiences or activities that assist a child to develop an emerging skill, or it may relate to a topic of interest to the child.



Intentional teaching is useful for:

- ▶ learning rules and guidelines
- ▶ following directions
- ▶ focusing on the development of specific skills.

Intentional teaching may disrupt play-based experiences, particularly if it occurs at the wrong moment.

Routine times are excellent for intentional teaching. Children are focusing on an activity and their emerging skills are evident. Intentional teaching may occur spontaneously or as part of a plan. The following table provides some examples of intentional teaching during routines.

Routines	Examples of intentional teaching
<p><b>Bathroom routines</b></p>	<p>How to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ wash hands</li> <li>▶ turn a tap on and off</li> <li>▶ brush teeth.</li> </ul> <p>Topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Where does the water go?</li> <li>▶ Why do we use soap?</li> <li>▶ What happens if we never brush our teeth?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Mealtime routines</b></p>	<p>How to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ use a spoon</li> <li>▶ use a knife</li> <li>▶ use chopsticks</li> <li>▶ set the table.</li> </ul> <p>Topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Where do different foods come from?</li> <li>▶ What makes a healthy menu?</li> <li>▶ Which foods are grown and which are processed?</li> </ul>

**Example**

**Intentional teaching**

**Scenario 1:** Two children are building a spaceship out of blocks. Sandra (an educator) comes over to them and says, 'That's a big tower. How many blocks have you used?' The children look at her. 'It's not a tower,' they say. Although Sandra thought that this was a good time to teach the children about numbers, they are busy using other skills. Sandra's inquiry might make the children think she is not interested in their work.

**Scenario 2:** Sandra watches and listens as the children are building. She hears that they are building a spaceship. She does not want to interrupt their work, so she decides she will talk to them about their work later in the day. Sandra has realised that the children are learning skills from the task. If she observes that the children need her help, she may provide some intentional teaching around the situation.

# Practice task 4

1. Describe a time when you or someone else used indirect participation to support a child's play.

a. What did the person do?

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b. What type of participation did they use; for example, commenting or questioning?

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c. What was the result of the participation?

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2. Describe a time when you or someone else participated in a discussion with children about their play.

a. What was the discussion about?

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b. What was the result of the discussion?

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3. Write down **three** different occasions when you have or could have provided spontaneous intentional teaching. Include:

- ▶ how old the child was
- ▶ what your intentional teaching was about
- ▶ an explanation of what happened.

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**CHCECE011** PROVIDE EXPERIENCES TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S PLAY AND LEARNING

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# 2B Meeting play needs

As you watch children play and listen to their ideas, you may find that opportunities arise where you are able to provide support and extension to their play. When you provide extensions to play, you are promoting agency, as children remain engaged for longer periods and can also find a broader range of options for their play. This may be as simple as adding some new props to a play space, suggesting a larger or smaller place for their play or adding a new idea about their topic of play.



## Providing more resources

A group of four-year-olds are playing shops in the home corner. Maria, an educator, notices there are not many props available for this play, so she suggests to the children that they come to the factory (the storeroom) to see if they can gather some more supplies to fit out their shop. The children do so gladly and are then able to create a shop that many children can come and visit.

## Including children's interests

Jane, an educator, observes William (four years) 'shearing' children in the kindergarten room. William has recently watched the sheep being shorn on his family farm and it has obviously caught his interest.

Jane helps the children set up a 'shearing shed' in the block corner using A-frames and cushions. She also helps the children learn songs about shearing and finds posters and books about shearing that she puts up on the walls.

## Providing related activities

Annabelle and Kaya (both five years) are using their fingers to poke and make patterns in the wet sandpit. Sharon, an educator, notices their interest and shows them how to make patterns with their fingers and hands in a traditional Aboriginal way. The girls continue to experiment by using their elbows and knees to make patterns.

Later, Sharon sets up a painting activity to give the children the opportunity to experiment further with hand and foot printing. She also provides a range of natural materials for the children to make prints with.

Watch this video about helping children develop creative problem-solving skills.



## Educator roles in play

To help extend play and assist children to learn more through their play, there is a range of roles you may take on, as the following outlines.

### Observer

An observer watches, listens and tries to identify what the play is about from what the children are saying, doing and seem to be interested in. Determining the children's perspective in their play makes you less likely to say or do something that disrupts it, and gives you a better idea of what you could say or do to extend it.

You may be an observer initially and then move into another role.

### Provider

A provider thinks about what the children are trying to do and then thinks about what can be provided so that play can proceed smoothly. For example, a provider may arrange:

- ▶ space for play
- ▶ special materials for play
- ▶ more time for play.

Supplying these things is a way to sustain the play. You can also extend the play by giving children more to think about and do in their play.

### Mediator

A mediator helps children solve problems that occur in play when the children can't solve these problems themselves. Watch for times when children get stuck or when an argument or squabble threatens to stop the play; these are cues for you to mediate. You can step in and make a suggestion, offer an alternative, or model a new way to act to solve the problem, allowing the play to continue.

You also extend children's skills in problem-solving when you intervene to mediate, as children often copy your problem-solving solutions in future play.

### Player

A player plays. This might seem like one of the easiest roles, but careful thought is required before you join in. You can be actively involved in play as long as you respect that the play belongs to the child.

Being a player lets you:

- ▶ extend play by modelling new ideas
- ▶ help new players to find a role
- ▶ help children play out a script that they do not know much about.

A player also assists children to keep their play going for a longer period of time. Perhaps even more importantly, it strengthens the child-educator relationship as the interaction allows both parties to learn more about each other.

# Practice task 5

Read the case study, and then answer the questions that follow.

## Case study

Tom, an educator, is supervising Win and Harshini (both aged four) doing a jigsaw puzzle together. Tom knows Win does lots of puzzles at home, and it is clear he is more confident than Harshini. After they've joined a few pieces together, Win snatches the piece Harshini is holding. Harshini scowls at Win and messes up the pieces Win had sorted. Tom decides it might be time to step in.

'Win, how do you think Harshini felt when you grabbed her puzzle piece?' Win acknowledges that this might make Harshini feel angry.

'Harshini, how do you think Win felt when you messed up his pieces?' Harshini agrees that this might have made Win feel sad. The two children go back to playing alongside one another, and Harshini soon asks Tom to help her find where a certain piece could go. Tom joins in with the puzzle.

1. Which educator roles for play does Tom take on? Explain your response.

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2. How could Tom have extended play in this scenario? Provide one possibility for each of the children.

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# 2C Offering play choices

All children need opportunities for quiet play, active play and rest. They need you to attend to their physical needs by providing warmth, comfort and food to sustain them throughout the day. They need an adequate range of experiences so that all children in the group are occupied and have a choice of activities.



Children should be encouraged to gain a sense of agency through making decisions about what they would like to do. Just like adults, children sometimes feel like being part of the group and joining in a conversation, and at other times feel like being alone or sitting back to watch the rest of the group.

Children feel belonging as well as ownership when they are involved in decisions relating to activities and experiences. You may discuss ways to change activities to suit a child's needs or interests, or you may use their opinions to encourage others to participate.

Everything you do or say influences a child's behaviour. You can help involve children in play both directly (by the way you talk to and interact with children) and indirectly (by the way you set up the environment).

Both methods assist you in supporting the child to make decisions about the experiences they choose based on their competency and their confidence.

Watch this video about activities that help develop creativity.



## Direct involvement

The following table provides ways that you can be directly involved in assisting children's play.

Method	Why this works
Get to know children and form positive relationships with them.	Children are more likely to be interested in your involvement if they feel you are a caring, interested person who displays enthusiasm, playfulness and enjoyment in your interactions.  Your knowledge of their abilities will allow you to support them to decide on experiences that match their competence. This assists in building their confidence.
Model what you encourage of children.	Be enthusiastic, listen to the child and participate fully.
Listen to children and accept their feelings.	Some children will not want to participate. This decision must be respected.

When you focus on the individual child's interests and strengths, and make an effort to involve children, provide relevant choices and encourage enthusiasm and curiosity, you will be providing a high-quality responsive program.

Some children will make the decision not to participate. The following table provides some reasons for this.

Reason	Explanation
A momentary decision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ The child may simply wish to have solitary time or to observe others participating.</li> <li>▶ A child may make the decision to observe what will happen before they participate, particularly in a new experience.</li> </ul>
The result of an event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ The child may be experiencing feelings of anxiety due to past failure and a lack of confidence.</li> <li>▶ They may be enthusiastic to watch as they enjoyed doing this previously.</li> </ul>
An ongoing decision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ The child feels positively about not participating or is not interested in the activity or experience.</li> </ul>
An ongoing difficulty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ The child lacks competence or confidence, or feels uncomfortable with particular peers or activities and experiences.</li> </ul>

In a situation where children make the decision not to participate, it is your responsibility to:

- ▶ respect that decision
- ▶ offer simple suggestions and choices without pressuring the child
- ▶ respect the child's final decision
- ▶ identify why the child may not wish to participate
- ▶ consider providing support if the child is having difficulty or has experienced a negative situation
- ▶ respond to a child's reasoning with acceptance if it is part of the child's personality.

When you plan to introduce a new activity or experience, it is common for children to stand back and watch prior to participating. Be ready for this by preparing some things you might say or do to allow the children to understand what the experience is all about and how they can participate.

## Indirect involvement

The way the environment is set up tells children what they can and can't do, how and where they can do it, and how they can work together. Therefore, the environment guides children indirectly.

The following table provides methods for you to be indirectly involved in assisting children's play.

Method	Why this works
Arrange the environment, materials and experiences in a well-organised, attractive and interesting way to gain children's attention and invite participation.	This works best when it matches the needs and interests of the children.
Be alert to children's indications that play experiences need to change and/or be reset.	Changing experiences encourages new use of ideas and materials. Resetting demonstrates that you respect the materials and helps children become involved again.
Ensure that every child has several play experiences to choose from.	Think about the different interests and skills, and build enough options for children to feel you have considered them individually.
Clearly label shelves and storage.	This shows children where materials are and what equipment is available.
Make sure there is enough interesting equipment and a variety of materials available to children both indoors and in the natural outdoor space.	This is particularly relevant to younger children who may have difficulty waiting their turn.

By providing interesting and varied indoor and outdoor spaces you encourage children to be active participants. The equipment, experiences and options should be varied and regularly rotated or altered to ensure children are continually stimulated and that they do not lose interest by having to play with or do the same activity over again. Practising skills is a very different activity to repeating play due to having no choices. A child who has many play options and a stimulating environment will be happy and active, and have their needs met.

## Practice task 6

Read the case study and then answer the questions that follow.

### Case study

Mari (an educator) is preparing to introduce clay. Many of the younger children have not attempted this activity before.

Mari sets up the materials on the table and begins to squish a small piece of clay, dipping her hand into the water to make the clay slippery. Some children come to watch.

Mari tells the children that she is using clay and that, if they wear smocks, they can work with the clay too. One child, Theo, is eager to start, so Mari assists him to begin and then moves to observing the clay table rather than playing with the clay herself. Three children stand beside her. Mari talks to Theo as he works with the clay. Occasionally the children watching ask questions and Mari or Theo answer.

One of the children moves away after a short time. Two of the children watch for a while.

When Theo finishes working with the clay, one of the children watching decides to use the clay. The other child says she will try tomorrow.

1. If you were Mari, what would you say to the children in each of the following situations?

a. You want to encourage them to try working with clay.

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b. You want them to know they have the competence to use the clay.

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c. You want to build their confidence in using clay.

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d. You want the children to know you support their decision to watch.

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## Summary

- ▶ When you engage in children's play, your goal should be to maintain or extend the play, or provide a spontaneous learning opportunity.
- ▶ The skill required in engaging children in discussion about their play is knowing when to interact and when to allow the children to continue playing.
- ▶ When listening to children's views, active listening and positioning yourself at the child's level are the most important aspects of clear communication and respectful acknowledgment.
- ▶ Intentional teaching is deliberate and purposeful. It may include activities that assist a child to develop an emerging skill or it may relate to a topic of interest to the child.
- ▶ When you provide extensions to play, children remain engaged for longer periods and can also find a broader range of options for their play.
- ▶ To assist children to learn more through their play, you take on the role of an observer, provider, mediator or player.
- ▶ Children should have the opportunity to make decisions about what they would like to do.

## Learning checkpoint 2

# Supporting children's play and learning

1. Choose one child in care or one you are familiar with, and observe them undertaking two play activities. Ensure you maintain the confidentiality of the child by not naming them – refer to them as 'Child X'. If you can't observe a child playing, consider two play activities a child could participate in. Answer the following questions in relation to each play activity:

a. What is a discussion you would have with this child during play?

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b. What is some spontaneous intentional teaching you would provide to this child during play?

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c. How would you extend the child's play? What materials and other resources would you use?

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d. How would you assist the child to participate in play?

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e. What would demonstrate that the child is competent and confident in the play activities?

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f. If the child chose not to participate, what would you do?

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## Topic 3

In this topic you will learn about:

**3A** Participating in play

**3B** Responding to children

## Facilitating children's play, learning and physical activity

Educators play a significant role in children's play and should consider children's needs before entering play and when initiating play. Educators should share children's enjoyment and enthusiasm, and facilitate experiences and provide a flexible routine that allows children to have control and choice over their environment.

The following table maps this topic to the National Quality Standard and both national learning frameworks.

<b>National Quality Standard</b>	
✓	Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice
	Quality Area 2: Children's health and safety
✓	Quality Area 3: Physical environment
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✓	Quality Area 5: Relationships with children
	Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
	Quality Area 7: Governance and leadership
<b>Early Years Learning Framework</b>	<b>My Time, Our Place</b>
<b>Principles</b>	
	Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
	Partnerships
✓	High expectations and equity
	Respect for diversity
✓	Ongoing learning and reflective practice
<b>Practice</b>	
	Holistic approaches
✓	Responsiveness to children
✓	Learning through play
✓	Intentional teaching
✓	Learning environments
	Cultural competence
✓	Continuity of learning and transitions
	Assessment for learning
<b>Outcomes</b>	
	Children have a strong sense of identity
	Children are connected to and contribute to their world
✓	Children have a strong sense of wellbeing
✓	Children are confident and involved learners
	Children are effective communicators

# 3A Participating in play

Play is child-directed and occurs naturally. It often lacks structure, meaning that it changes and adapts. The dynamics of play also alter based on the children involved and the ideas and materials that are available.

Children's play should involve the following aspects.

<b>Fun</b>
Children show that they enjoy being involved in play and that they wish to continue playing.
<b>Free choice</b>
Children participate in the experience and are not forced to enter the activity; the desire to play comes from the child.
<b>Active participation</b>
Children are engaged in the activity and are part of the action that the play situation involves; sitting watching television may be enjoyable, but there is no active participation.
<b>Play for the sake of it – a goal is not necessary</b>
Play is the process that children are involved in; they do not consider the activity's purpose.
<b>Control</b>
Children take control of entering and participating in a play experience; an adult does not direct it.

Children's sense of agency will increase if you show that you encourage and value their play. You can encourage children to play by:

- ▶ showing children that you value play as an activity in itself
- ▶ spending time with children during play
- ▶ sharing children's interests and enjoyment.

As play occurs in a social context, there are times when you will become involved.

## Play invitations

Being invited to play makes it obvious that you are welcome. The children you are playing with already have in mind what they want you to do and they will ask you to join in as they feel you can contribute. With this in mind, you need to listen and watch closely, as the children continue to give you clues as to your role.

Some reasons you may be invited into play include the children:

- ▶ asking you to take a dramatic play role
- ▶ needing extra materials or resources
- ▶ needing help to negotiate or resolve an issue
- ▶ enjoying your company.

The following table summarises the types of play invitations that may be encountered with different age groups.

Age grouping	Play invitations
<b>Infant</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Your involvement may be required for them to play at all.</li> <li>▶ You may need to give them access to play materials.</li> <li>▶ You will often be the play focus as the child enjoys rhymes, peek-a-boo or games that involve their bodies.</li> </ul>
<b>Toddler</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ They will be clear about what they want you to do.</li> <li>▶ Your involvement may include simple dramatic play. For example, they will pour you cups of pretend coffee and hand them to you, or provide you with a telephone and say, 'Hello'.</li> <li>▶ They will direct you to their needs, such as needing to reach the materials.</li> </ul>
<b>Preschooler</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ They will be very clear about what they want you to do.</li> <li>▶ They have developed skills in role-playing and can have complex ideas about their dramatic play stories.</li> <li>▶ Their play will not be hindered by explanations of what they want you to do next. 'Yolanda, go to work.' 'Sheldon, it's time to do the washing.' 'You have to go to bed now.' You will notice these directions within the preschoolers' imaginative play, with or without adult involvement.</li> <li>▶ They may also invite you to support their skills and provide them with materials and equipment.</li> <li>▶ They will have lots of questions (what, why and how) that you may be able to solve for them.</li> <li>▶ You may be needed to play board games or explain how something works.</li> </ul>
<b>School-age children</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ They play more complex dramatic games.</li> <li>▶ They may decide on a storyline prior to the play starting. If you are involved at this stage, you may be directed in your expected role, or asked to take your own initiative.</li> <li>▶ Outside of dramatic play, a school-age child will be interested in competitive games and games requiring skill.</li> <li>▶ They may want you to participate in board games.</li> </ul>

When invited into play situations, remember the role you are taking and try to participate in a manner that suits the experience. It is very easy to turn into the 'educator' and want to provide continual learning and extension.

To take on an appropriate role in play, you might be an observer, provider, mediator or player, as explained in Topic 2.

## Initiating play

The times you are most likely to initiate play are when:

- ▶ the experience requires an initial demonstration
- ▶ new experiences are provided and you want to show children their value
- ▶ children are not occupied or interested in the current options for play.

It can be challenging to decide the optimum moment to introduce a change or transition to play. An interruption to children's play can lead to positive ongoing play, but can also result in creativity and ideas fizzling out.

The following table provides some techniques you may attempt when initiating play.

How you can initiate play	Example
Extend the play.	Ask some open-ended questions that may result in a deepening of the experience.
Talk about actions.	When children are playing with play dough or clay, ask them how it feels as they squeeze and pound it. Ask them if they can do some new things; for example, 'Can you roll it and shape it?'
Show them what to do.	Show a toddler how to hit pegs with a mallet by doing it yourself.

You will notice that these strategies are simple, but they also add an aspect of intentional teaching to the play. Watch the children's reactions. You might only need to start the children off with a new activity before stepping back, or the children may demonstrate they want your involvement to continue with questions and other interaction.

If your initiation of play occurs in response to a child finding it difficult to join in, you may:

- ▶ develop a new role for them in the existing play; for example, 'I just met a nurse and she may be able to help with your sick baby'.
- ▶ support them in asking to join in.

Your goal is to encourage inclusion. Consider:

- ▶ how the play will be affected
- ▶ how the additional child will fit in to the play
- ▶ how the additional child may be introduced to the play.

## Enjoying play

It is essential for you to have fun in your job. This will help you to get the most out of your role as an educator and to create an environment and atmosphere that facilitates children's play, learning and physical development. Enjoyment can be demonstrated by showing enthusiasm, playfulness and happiness with the children. It is also shown by you:

- ▶ valuing each child and giving them the warmth and attention they need
- ▶ finding out the things they enjoy and taking pleasure in their enjoyment
- ▶ celebrating their successes and special events
- ▶ helping children to laugh together
- ▶ sharing your leisure pursuits, where appropriate.



Children will appreciate your authentic and positive expressions and interactions, as this helps them enjoy their play more. How you enjoy and value the children depends on the particular needs, interests and ages of the group.

The following table provides examples of the types of activities different age groups enjoy.

<b>Age group</b>	<b>Showing enthusiasm, playfulness and enjoyment</b>
<b>Infants and toddlers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Infants enjoy simple things like eating and being rocked and cuddled. They need simple bright toys to explore with all their senses.</li> <li>▶ You can communicate enjoyment by:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– singing and playing with them</li> <li>– going for walks and showing them everyday things, like watching the rubbish truck come or watering the garden</li> <li>– singing action songs</li> <li>– looking at picture books</li> <li>– labelling objects using single words</li> <li>– using nonverbal communication to show that you enjoy their company.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▶ Allow plenty of time for just looking at everyday sights.</li> </ul>
<b>Preschoolers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Preschoolers enjoy pretend play and dressing up.</li> <li>▶ You can also:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– enjoy music and dance with them</li> <li>– participate in physically active play</li> <li>– use quiet times to look at books</li> <li>– have discussions about things of interest.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▶ When providing them with the opportunity to paint, draw, construct and explore, encourage them with enthusiasm to increase their self-esteem.</li> <li>▶ Preschoolers begin to enjoy jokes, nonsense rhymes, silly songs, poems and longer stories, which are usually easy to deliver in a playful and enthusiastic manner.</li> </ul>
<b>School-age children</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ School-age children develop broader interests and enjoy a huge range of activities. They are busy with:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– friends</li> <li>– humour</li> <li>– sharing experiences</li> <li>– memories of times that were fun.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Enthusiasm, playfulness and enjoyment are contagious – if your interactions reflect these emotions, children will become enthusiastic and playful, and find genuine enjoyment in what they are doing.

## Reflecting on your play

The most effective way to identify if you can improve your skills at entering and participating in play is to reflect on your day or have someone else provide some feedback for you. You can reflect on:

- ▶ whether you play or just supervise
- ▶ how often you play
- ▶ what types of experiences you participate in
- ▶ how you become involved
- ▶ if you assist other children to become involved in play
- ▶ if you demonstrate enjoyment in play with children.

## Practice task 7

1. Ask a supervisor or colleague to give you some feedback. Have them answer the following questions.

Yes	No	Question
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you play with the children?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you play while you supervise children?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you participate in play most of the time?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you initiate play?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you enter play when invited?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	When invited into play, do you participate appropriately?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you show enthusiasm, playfulness and enjoyment when you play with children?

2. For any question with a 'no' response, ask your supervisor or colleague to provide some feedback for improvement. Write down the feedback you receive.

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# 3B Responding to children

Children are creative and imaginative. They have their own ideas about how to play. They need time and space to use their initiative, and routines that are flexible and allow time for play. By watching children's reactions to the play environment, you can find ways to extend and expand on the available experiences. Letting children guide play activities is a good way to help them gain a stronger sense of agency. Your observations can be used to identify children's interests, encourage them to try new things and ensure experiences are challenging without being frustrating.

Watch this video about considering different children.



## Changing the environment

Working with children is not only about planning the play space, but also about changing the space in response to the needs, interests and reactions of the group. Sometimes the experiences or activities you plan for children just don't work.

Changes to any play environment should be made on the basis of children's needs and interests rather than them all being changed weekly or fortnightly. If children are actively engaged in play and sufficiently challenged, then the space can be preserved until they indicate otherwise. If they lack interest, agency, engagement or show frustration, then the space can be altered until the children react positively.

The following are some indicators that children feel a lack of agency and it is time to change the environment:

- ▶ Children appear uninterested in a particular play area or activity; you can discuss with preschoolers or school-age children what they would like to do in this area.
- ▶ When children come to the program with an idea in mind (perhaps prompted by something that happened at home or as a result of an excursion or play activity), you have an opportunity to reflect this interest and share it with the group.
- ▶ Your observations of children's play may highlight interests or ideas that are not currently accommodated in the existing area. For example, you may hear children talking about a summer holiday plan to go camping or to the beach. Ask children if they would like to help set up a camping area or create an interest table with their beach treasures.
- ▶ The children are frustrated; this may be demonstrated by their misuse of equipment or negative behaviour, or it may be a demonstration of defeat shown on their face, through their comments or in experiences being only partly completed.

Be on the lookout for opportunities to work with children as you plan experiences. All children are individuals who have a range of ability levels, interests and needs for recognition, encouragement and attention. Ensure that your responses match these needs.

## Routines and safety

A child's day should comprise a variety of routine practices linked together to meet the needs of all. You need to constantly consider priorities and practicalities regarding when to do particular things so that children can move safely from one situation, activity, experience or space to the next.

Many children become distressed and unsettled if they do not know what will happen next or when to expect changes. Children also feel more stable and secure if routines provide the following:

- ▶ **Belonging:** children need to feel that the environment reflects themselves and their family; this may be done by having a familiar place to keep bags or toys.
- ▶ **Familiar people:** children feel more secure if they are with educators they know who are aware of the environment and each child's individual personality and needs.
- ▶ **Ownership:** children feel ownership if they have choice within an interactive environment, particularly if they are provided with child-focused routines that are appropriate for their ages and developmental stages.
- ▶ **Opportunities for independence:** when children are encouraged and supported to be independent, they feel valued, and develop agency and a positive sense of self. A child who is confident in their ability to care for themselves will feel safer in their environment, as they are less dependent on others.
- ▶ **A routine timetable with a predictable sequence of events:** the flexibility that you provide in the day should still allow you to complete required routine tasks on time.

## Practice task 8

Access a copy of a plan of activities for one day.

1. Write down one experience from the plan that you could adapt to meet the interests of a child. Explain what you would do to adapt it and why you would do this.

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2. Write down one experience from the plan that could or did frustrate a child. Explain how you would alter this experience to be challenging rather than frustrating.

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3. Identify a routine in the plan that enables the children to feel safe.

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## Summary

- ▶ Play occurs naturally, so you should follow a child's lead in play.
- ▶ When invited into play situations, remember the role you are taking and try to participate in a manner that suits the experience.
- ▶ You may initiate play for a variety of reasons, including in response to a child finding it difficult to participate.
- ▶ Intentional teaching may occur during play, but should not take over play unless led by the children.
- ▶ It is essential that you enjoy your job and have fun, and that this is communicated to the children.
- ▶ Working with children is not only about planning the play space, but also about changing the space in response to the needs, interests and reactions of the group.
- ▶ You need to constantly consider priorities and practicalities regarding when to do particular things so that children can move safely from one situation to another, and from one activity, experience or space to the next.

# Learning checkpoint 3

## Facilitating children's play, learning and physical activity

Read the case study, and then answer the questions that follow.

### Case study

You have been observing the children's reactions to the play environment and notice that the sandpit is not being used. Currently it has buckets and hand shovels for play, but when the children try to create sandcastles, the sand does not stick together and the castles collapse.

1. The children are feeling frustrated with the sand play. What could you do to make the sand challenging rather than frustrating?

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2. If you were to alter the sand play to make it more interesting, what one idea would you provide for Krystal, a child who enjoys building and constructing, and Ben, who enjoys dramatic play? Explain the reasons for your decision.

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3. If you altered the sandpit to meet the interests of Krystal, how would you initiate play and invite her to participate?

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4. What routines would you implement to ensure children were kept safe when playing in the sand? Explain your answer.

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### Case study continued

You have altered the sand play to meet Krystal's needs. Now a number of children are working together on a project. Ben asks you to help make a moat around the castle so his dolls are safe. Krystal offers to drive a truck to help dig a hole to go around the sandcastle.

5. What would you do in response to this invitation to participate? What is one thing you might say?

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6. How would you demonstrate enthusiasm, playfulness and enjoyment during your play with the children? Give **two** examples.

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