

# Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP): A Guide for Parents

**DAP is the approach early care and education professionals use to teach your young child.**

## Developmentally Appropriate Practice:

- Is grounded in research on how young children learn.
- Provides connection to real-world experiences and opportunities to gain knowledge and skills through hands-on learning.
- Prepares children for future learning.
- Acknowledges the role of play in learning and development.

**FACT:** Meaningful play experiences help your child build background knowledge, imagination, and rational thought that enables academic skill development.

### Consider:

- Playing with your child in a water table helps them understand math concepts like shapes and measurements, as well as science concepts like float, sink, and waves.
- Asking your child questions about observed activities, encouraging experimentation, and helping them understand cause and effect relationships during play.
- Including playful elements like using reusable materials to create their own inventions.



**FACT:** Play is the primary way your child uses language and math concepts.

### Consider:

- Allowing your child to construct stories during imaginative play will later become the foundation for creative writing.
- Helping your child recreate elements of familiar books during play, demonstrating the understanding of characters, emotions, and empathy.
- Supporting your child to make choices that interest them as a way to guide their math and literacy skills.
- Asking what strategies your child's teacher uses for reading instruction.
- Asking if worksheet and book activities are made playful.

**FACT:** Dramatic play helps your child develop executive functioning and the ability to self-regulate.

**Consider:**

- During dramatic play, take turns with your child contributing ideas into imagined scenarios.
- Asking if your child's school promotes social and emotional learning.
- Providing your child with opportunities to make choices in their learning.



**FACT:** Physical movement—including the freedom to play—helps your child improve his/her behavior and attention.

**Consider:**

- Giving your child regular opportunities to move their bodies and engage in unstructured physical activities.
- Asking if your school has a recess policy.
- Asking your child's teacher if physical activity is part of the classroom routine.

To view the full white paper visit [tryingtogether.org](https://tryingtogether.org)



**Is Your Child's Environment Developmentally-Appropriate? In DAP environments, your child will:**

Create rather than duplicate.

Move rather than wait.

Attempt to solve their own problems rather than wait for an adult to solve them.

Speak rather than listen passively.

Explore their interests rather than just learning what an adult thinks they should learn.

Make choices rather than just being told what to do.

Make their own lines instead of coloring within pre-made lines.

Write their own books rather than fill in workbooks.

Create art rather than do pre-planned crafts.

Learn through experience rather than mechanical repetition.

Appreciate the process rather than the end product.

Ask questions and figure out the answers themselves.

Learn interesting information and use meaningful skills.

Follow a schedule based on their needs.

(Adapted from "The Butterfly Garden" by Sandra Crosse)