

# RECESS

## ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

### EXAMPLES OF PLAY

*“Play is often talked about as if it were a relief from serious learning but for children, play is serious learning.”*

**- Fred Rogers**

*“Play is the opportunity children have to learn, grow, and explore the world. Children are inherently bent towards play. I want teachers who give ‘homework’ or ‘activities’ to be a kid and play. They get excited for those kinds of breaks.”*

**- Dr. Sharon Taverno Ross**

Parent at PPS Greenfield Elementary and  
Member of the Recess Advocacy Team



Whether it is participating in distance learning, or connecting with friends and family remotely, we are increasingly more plugged in. “Screen time” is a major concern for parents and educators. As schools have navigated the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of play has been brought to the forefront of conversations on physical and mental wellness.

There are many different types of play, but there is no “right” way for children to engage in play. Playful activities can still happen safely with minimal cost to families or schools. By learning the types of play in all settings, advocates can begin to understand and promote the benefits of play on the development of the child.

The following types of play and examples were adapted from [Encourage Play](https://www.encourageplay.com)<sup>1</sup>, founded by Janine Holloran, to provide common examples of ways play may show up in children’s lives. This list is meant to serve as a starting point and is not exhaustive as there are many other ways that children can engage in play.

<sup>1</sup> [www.encourageplay.com](https://www.encourageplay.com)

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## Socio-Dramatic Play

Children pretend to act out real life social situations.

### Examples:

**Outdoor:** Make up and act out scenarios in an open space.

**Home:** Play pretend a grocery store or restaurant scenario and go “shopping” in the kitchen and create “meals”.

**School:** Encourage children to act out a story that was just read.

### Benefit:

Socio-dramatic play encourages children to use more advanced language that is specific to certain play scenarios or social roles.



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## Locomotor Play

Children engage in movement and physical activity.

### Examples:

**Outdoor:** Climb a tree or play hopscotch.

**Home:** Dance or do jumping jacks.

**School:** Play tag, play a group sport, or bounce or throw a ball.

### Benefit:

Movement and physical activity increases children’s attention span and productivity.

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## Exploratory Play

Children use their senses to explore objects and their functions. Things should get messy!

### Examples:

**Outdoor:** Play with water in streams, puddles, or rain.

**Home:** Create sensory bottles or bins using household items.

**School:** Explore the available space and objects by incorporating more hands-on activities such as using the outdoor space or bringing plants into the classroom while reading about nature/life cycles.

### Benefit:

Exploratory play boosts the development of critical thinking and self confidence skills in children.

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## Creative Play

Children use their imagination to play and create new ideas and things.

### Examples:

**Outdoor:** Create a scavenger hunt.

**Home:** Build an obstacle course, make a fort/tent with blankets and pillows, paint, color, sculpt, or draw.

**School:** Promote students using their imagination to transport to a setting from a story read in class.

### Benefit:

Creative play allows children to strengthen their sense of ego and gain a better sense of their identity through self discovery.

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## Symbolic Play

Children learn through play that things can be used for other purposes besides their intended use.

### Examples:

**Outdoor:** Pretend that trees and rocks become living playmates.

**Home:** Build a robot, spaceship, or fort out of cardboard boxes, or reuse cardboard paper towel tubes as a microphone or telescope.

**School:** Use items in the play space to think of new ideas for how to use them. For example, steps could lead to a magical kingdom, and a pebble may be a magic seed.

### Benefit:

Symbolic play can increase the development of abstract thinking skills in children.







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## Social Play

Children interact with others and follow the same set of rules to accomplish a shared goal.

### Examples:

**Outdoor:** Play group games like hide and seek or capture the flag.

**Home:** Invite children to participate in cooking, board games, or card games.

**School:** Encourage group games like tag, catch, kickball, or four square - and even allow children to make up their own games.

### Benefit:

Children learn the importance of social rules, expectations, and conflict resolution while engaging in social play.

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## Communication Play

Children use words, phrases, and gestures to play and interact with each other.

### Examples:

**Outdoor:** Take a nature hike and share about what you see.

**Home:** Create storylines and act out skits.

**School:** Foster time for peer-to-peer communication, both for social and academic purposes.

### Benefit:

While engaging in communication play, children learn the important skills of picking up on body language, decision making, and the flow of conversations with others.

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## Object Play

Children use physical objects to explore their use and purpose.

### Examples:

**Outdoor:** Find items in nature and figure out additional ways they could be used.

**Home:** Build with blocks.

**School:** Bounce, throw, or catch a ball

### Benefit:

Object play is essential to the development of both gross and fine motor skills for children.

*“ Personally, I have witnessed over the years, those students having quality play/recess experiences generally exhibit better self esteems. Also, students who play together learn to negotiate and communicate with one another more reasonably.”*

#### – Kevin McCarty

Early Childhood Coordinator at Jefferson-Morgan Elementary School

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## Imaginative Play

Children role play and act out experiences by experimenting with different scenarios.

### Examples:

**Outdoor:** Pretend to be a wildlife expert and talk about the animals and nature around you.

**Home:** Pretend to go shopping in a closet.

**School:** Pretend to be an animal or drive in an imaginary car.

### Benefit:

Imaginative play allows children a safe space to explore their curiosity with scenarios they do not experience every day or have never been able to experience.

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## Rough and Tumble Play

Vigorous behaviors that are associated with positive feelings and physical activity between individuals.

### Examples:

**Outdoor:** Race or chase with other children.

**Home:** Wrestle with parent supervision.

**School:** Spin and jump.

### Benefit:

Rough and tumble play allows children to learn how to set boundaries with others, and how to assess risk.

# Considerations to Support Play

There is no “right” way to play. Experiencing play should be a joyful opportunity that considers children’s cultures, languages, and abilities, and enables them to express their unique identities.

- Play is the primary way children express and use language.
- Consider how cross-cultural play can bridge language and social norms.
- Consider modifications for environment, routines, and materials to meet children of differing abilities.

Play does not have to involve expensive equipment, materials, or lots of space.

- From NYT Parenting—a mother explains how her child explores and plays in their small apartment: [My 4-Year-Old Is a Destroyer<sup>1</sup>](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/03/parenting/4-year-old-destroy-play.html)
- From Remake Learning—tips for incorporating mindfulness in the school day: Case study: [How IU1’s campus schools kept mental health support in place during pandemic learning<sup>2</sup>](https://remakelearning.org/blog/2021/03/05/case-study-mental-health/).



Play aligns with literacy and language development.

- Think about how you can encourage children to act out a story you just read, or maybe encourage them to create an alternate ending.
- [Learning at Home: Early Literacy Activities<sup>3</sup>](https://www.pbs.org/parents/thrive/learning-at-home-9-early-literacy-activities)—PBS Kids

Math concepts such as counting, addition and subtraction, patterns and shapes can be incorporated into play.

- Anita Mullen, a pre-k teacher at Jefferson-Morgan Elementary School, suggests incorporating simple learning activities such as counting how many times you go down the slide during recess.
- Think about what household activities and chores can be made playful such as sorting laundry and measuring for recipes.

<sup>1</sup> [www.nytimes.com/2021/03/03/parenting/4-year-old-destroy-play.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/03/parenting/4-year-old-destroy-play.html)

<sup>2</sup> [remakelearning.org/blog/2021/03/05/case-study-mental-health/](https://remakelearning.org/blog/2021/03/05/case-study-mental-health/)

<sup>3</sup> [www.pbs.org/parents/thrive/learning-at-home-9-early-literacy-activities](https://www.pbs.org/parents/thrive/learning-at-home-9-early-literacy-activities)



The Approaches to Learning Through Play are foundational to building academic competencies and social and emotional skills.

- The Pennsylvania Early Learning Standard for Early Childhood provides a continuum of [early learning standards](http://www.pakeys.org/pa-early-learning-initiatives/early-learning-standards/)<sup>1</sup> from infant to second grade.

**Standard 1:** Constructing and Gathering Knowledge

- Skills such as: curiosity and initiative

**Standard 2:** Organizing and Understanding Information

- Skills such as: task analysis and memory

**Standard 3:** Applying Knowledge

- Skills such as: creativity and invention

**Standard 4:** Learning through Experience

- Skills such as: making connections and problem solving

Remember adults need play and physical movement for their own health and physical wellness.

- Ask yourself: How am I modeling play for the children in my care?
- Consider ways to nurture your physical, emotional, and social wellbeing so you can serve as an example for your children and/or students.

<sup>1</sup> [www.pakeys.org/pa-early-learning-initiatives/early-learning-standards/](http://www.pakeys.org/pa-early-learning-initiatives/early-learning-standards/)

