



Early Childhood Australia
Professional Learning

Spend a minute ...

... on the rights of the child to play

A few weeks ago, ECA shared [Spend a Minute on the rights of the child](#). For this issue, we're examining the rights of the child specifically to play—what that looks like, the different facets of play, the role of learning environments and how to encourage deep engagement in immersive play. As always, we'll be providing a mix of free and for-purchase resources to help you extend your thinking.

All children learn through play and especially in early childhood, play is the foundation of curriculum. This week, spend a minute on the rights of the child to play.

1. Children's right to play

Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children have a right to 'engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts'. All children have a right to play in safe and enriching environments where they can explore. But sometimes, this right is breached by:

- a focus on 'push down' curriculums or curriculums that don't value play
- a focus on preparing children for tests or the future
- commercial toys and products that may not provide open-ended play opportunities
- less time to play and explore outdoors because educators and parents may be worried about risks and safety.

Understanding the value of play is important for all early learning professionals and those advocating for children's rights. Luke Touhill provides an overview in his ECA Learning Hub module, [The Value of Play](#), and Anne Kennedy breaks down Article 31 in relation to modern pedagogy in [this article](#). ECA continues work on a National Statement on Play; you can [read more about it here](#).

2. Opportunities to promote play

Have you ever been so engrossed in what you're doing, you're completely switched off from the outside world? Some researchers refer to this as [flow](#). Perhaps you feel this when you read a good book or have a riveting conversation with a friend. Children may experience a sense of flow when they engage deeply in play.

When children are given the opportunity for unstructured and unhurried play, they're free to develop complex narratives and scenes, and these moments are bursting with creativity and critical thinking. Ursula Kolbe explores this in her book, [Children's Imagination: Creativity Under Our Noses](#), now available on the ECA Shop.

Children play in a range of ways from birth. For infants and toddlers, sensory play may allow extended and deep engagement. Sensory play engages their fine motor skills as they interact with different textures, colours and shapes. While the child may be stationary (such as a baby on their back) or crawling, children play by touch, sight, hearing and, occasionally, tasting. Learn more in the *Everyday Learning* Series title [Sensory Play and Learning](#).

3. The right place for play

You may have heard the phrase '[the environment is the third teacher](#)'—this is a principle of the Reggio Emilia approach. Creating environments for play may help to inspire, extend and challenge play. [Design Build Play](#) by Robin Christie has been written specifically to empower learning communities to create change in their learning spaces—get your copy on the ECA Shop.

In early learning services, the environment plays an important part in children's learning and development. That's not to say it has to be immaculately designed and modern. In [this article](#), Luke Touhill asks educators to consider: 'What does your space look and feel like: how would you describe its "personality" or "feel"? What does your early learning environment communicate to those who enter it?' And this piece on The Spoke provides [tips for creating a learning environment](#) outside of the early learning space.

4. Time to play

In a regular week, you may provide children with a range of structured and unstructured play opportunities, however, disruptions to routine, Stay at Home measures and other factors can encroach on play. Consider [this video from the ABC](#) in which a group of older children engage in loose parts play in their local park. For families staying at

home, [routines and everyday tasks have the opportunity to become great rituals](#) and learning experiences.

Explore further with the following resources:

[The Lego Foundation Research Centre website](#)

[Play in the Early Years](#) by Marilyn Fleer

[Play as Therapy](#), edited by Karen Stognitti and Rodney Cooper

Combine STEAM and play and join in the latest online Connect Event: 'Connect with curriculum, pedagogy and play: Maths, literacy and creative arts' on Friday 18 September 2020—[register here](#).



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ABN: 44 950 767 752

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marketing@earlychildhood.org.au

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