



Early Childhood Australia
A voice for young children

EARLY CHILDHOOD AUSTRALIA'S
STATEMENT ON

play

**PLAY PRINCIPLES
FOR PARENTS & CARERS**





ABOUT EARLY CHILDHOOD AUSTRALIA

Early Childhood Australia (ECA) is the peak advocacy organisation for young children (birth to eight years). Our membership includes early childhood professionals, services, schools and organisations that share a commitment to the rights and wellbeing of young children. Our vision is that every young child is thriving and learning. Learn more about our work at www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au.





ECA STATEMENT AT A GLANCE



EVERY CHILD HAS A UNIVERSAL RIGHT TO PLAY—PLAY IS ESSENTIAL & VALUABLE.

THE PRINCIPLES OF PLAY

1. Play is essential and valuable in its own right and for children's learning and development: every child has a right to have play in their life.
2. Every child has a right to a balance of play experiences that develop a healthy mind and body and a sense of wellbeing.
3. Play builds each child's capacity for communication and develops language and thinking skills.
4. Through play, children develop a sense of self and the emotional and social competence to participate in relationships.
5. Play connects children to their world, their cultural identities, to others and to other ways of knowing, doing and being.
6. Children's right to play is our collective responsibility: all adults have a role in understanding, protecting and valuing the importance of play for every child, in every community.



MORE THAN 60,000 YEARS OF PLAY ON COUNTRY

ECA acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land and community. We pay our respect to them and their cultures, and to the Elders both past and present.

ABOUT ECA'S STATEMENT ON PLAY

ECA drew on national and international expertise to develop our first *Statement on Play*. You can learn more about the Statement and the role of play in children's lives and download the full Statement here: www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/eca-year-of-play.

This Statement considers play and young children aged from birth to eight years. The right to play, however, extends to every child of any age, ability or background and is relevant in schools and other learning environments, services, and communities in which children participate.

Did you know that play is sometimes called 'the work of childhood' and that even the youngest child is capable of play? Play is how children learn and grow. It is essential to their wellbeing. Early childhood educators and teachers understand this and know a lot about the meaning of play and ways to ensure that your child has the kind of play experiences that will help them thrive and learn.

In the early years, before children start school and in the early years of school (until Year 3), the best way to support children's development is through play-based learning. A skilled early childhood teacher will craft a program and environment for learning that supports children to learn the basics of language, maths, science, music and creative arts while also learning how to communicate, collaborate and regulate their emotions. These are the building blocks for lifelong learning, setting children up to be confident, curious learners able to problem-solve and innovate.

You are important to your child's play experiences too. Families and caregivers create the first play environments for babies and family members are often baby's first playmates! You don't need to buy expensive toys. Everyday items and playful interactions with your child are great ways to support them. Understanding a bit about how children play and what it means to them can help you in your role as parent or carer.

We want this Statement to encourage deeper understanding and cooperation between families, policymakers, planners and early childhood professionals so that play experiences are available to all children across Australia—everywhere they live, learn and participate in the community.





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WHAT DO THE PLAY PRINCIPLES LOOK LIKE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD?

Whether you are a parent, guardian or caregiver, a friend or family member of a child, or perhaps part of the community and interested in understanding play, we've gathered a few ideas from each principle to get you started. Learn more about the importance of play to children and download the full *ECA Statement on Play* for more ideas and resources, at www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/eca-statement-on-play.

01

Play is essential and valuable in its own right and for children's learning and development: every child has a right to have play in their life.

02

Every child has a right to a balance of play experiences that develop a healthy mind and body and a sense of wellbeing.

03

Play builds each child's capacity for communication and develops language and thinking skills.

04

Through play, children develop a sense of self and the emotional and social competence to participate in relationships.

05

Play connects children to their world, their cultural identities, to others and to other ways of knowing, doing and being.

06

Children's right to play is our collective responsibility: all adults have a role in understanding, protecting and valuing the importance of play for every child, in every community.

The following section looks at what families and caregivers can do to support these principles and create a playful home environment.



PRINCIPLE ONE

Play is essential and valuable in its own right and for children's learning and development: every child has a right to have play in their life.

WHAT STEPS CAN WE TAKE AT HOME?

- Learn more about the different kinds of play and how these support children's developing brains and their physical, cognitive and social capacities.
- Offer a variety of play opportunities and time to play each day—this might include imaginary games, making things from everyday materials or indoor and outdoor play.
- Stand up for children's right to play in learning environments and community spaces.



PRINCIPLE TWO

Every child has a right to a balance of play experiences that develop a healthy mind and body and a sense of wellbeing.

WHAT STEPS CAN WE TAKE AT HOME?

- Provide time and use language that supports children to problem-solve through their play and manage risk with minimal adult intervention.
- Seek out activities, information and everyday resources to support a balanced range of play experiences for different abilities and ages.
- Participate in community groups such as local playgroups, cultural playgroups, music and outdoor programs, library, toy library and mobile library facilities.
- Search out museums and institutions that welcome children and families and offer a mix of age-appropriate play experiences and interactions with content.





PRINCIPLE THREE

Play builds each child's capacity for communication and develops language and thinking skills.

WHAT STEPS CAN WE TAKE AT HOME?

- Share your own play traditions with your child or translate games and songs from their early learning setting using home or first languages.
- Delight in your child's abstract thinking, creative ideas and problem-solving.
- Get involved with your child's curiosity about the immediate environment; use readily available materials—pegs, baskets, plastic cups, cushions—and engage with existing phenomena.



PRINCIPLE FOUR

Through play, children develop a sense of self and the emotional and social competence to participate in relationships.

WHAT STEPS CAN WE TAKE AT HOME?

- Join your child in pretend or imaginative play, find your 'inner child' and use your imagination to build connections with the child.
- Share information on cultural practices, festivities and celebrations with other families and the learning setting.
- During celebrations, milestones and community events, make space for children's participation and playful interactions with peers and other members of the community.





PRINCIPLE FIVE

Play connects children to their world, their cultural identities, to others and to other ways of knowing, doing and being.

WHAT STEPS CAN WE TAKE AT HOME?

- Support children's connection with other ways of knowing, doing and being by exploring local natural or social phenomena. Depending on location this could include learning on Country, following the regeneration of waterways or bushland after natural events, or a trip to a bakery, factory, solar farm, dairy or potter's studio to investigate how things are made.
- Observe and playfully explore together with babies and toddlers—follow their focus, listen for reactions and questions, and share language to help them identify sensations and observations.
- Consider sharing cultural perspectives, games and play traditions with your child's educator and learning setting.



PRINCIPLE SIX

Children's right to play is our collective responsibility: all adults have a role in understanding, protecting and valuing the importance of play for every child, in every community.

WHAT STEPS CAN WE TAKE AT HOME?

- Adults can help to ensure that children's play is fun, safe, fair and includes everyone who wants to participate.
- If you don't understand play or feel confident about ways to encourage play, consider talking with or watching how an educator or another family goes about it.
- Be aware of your own impact on play; focus on the meaning of play for your child and on the child's interests over adult interests.

- Insist on your child’s right to play and encourage other children’s play.
- Encourage governments and decision-makers, businesses, community organisations, professionals, museums, venues and public institutions to offer play-friendly spaces and resources that support your child’s and your family’s participation as equals in the community.









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