



# EARLY CHILDHOOD AUSTRALIA'S STATEMENT ON *play*

PLAY PRINCIPLES FOR EDUCATORS & LEADERS

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

- 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.

### 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](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au).

### 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 THE STATEMENT ON PLAY

In 2019 ECA convened a multi-disciplinary Advisory Group, with national and international expertise, to advise on ECA's first *Statement on Play* for the early childhood sector. You can learn more about the Statement and evidence on the role of play in young children's lives here: [www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/eca-statement-on-play](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/eca-statement-on-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.

In this document, we highlight the crucial role and expertise of early childhood educators and teachers in supporting young children's play and promoting awareness of its impacts for the whole child. Families, other adults and entities across the community—through their work and in their homes, venues and services—have a role in creating opportunities for play and removing obstacles to play. The Statement and principles have much to offer other settings and services with an interest in promoting the right of every child to play—they contain transferable concepts that can be taken up in ways that honour the children with whom they work and the context in which they operate. All adults have a stake in the protection, preservation and promotion of children's play-based learning.

You can learn more about the pedagogy of play, download the full ECA *Statement on Play*, and find a glossary of terms, resources, references and guides here: [www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/eca-statement-on-play](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/eca-statement-on-play)



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## WHAT STEPS CAN WE TAKE IN LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS?

Whether you are an early childhood educator in an early learning or school setting, or a director, principal, manager or leader, we've gathered just a few ideas from each principle to get you started. You can learn more about the pedagogy of play, download the full *ECA Statement on Play*, and find a glossary of terms, resources, references and guides here: [www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/eca-statement-on-play](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/eca-statement-on-play)

### ● ● ● 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.**

- Develop a philosophy or 'pedagogy of play' as an intentional part of your professional practice, recognising the benefits of play for children every day.
- Look for opportunities to link children's play to home and resource family capacity using documentation, for example, to make children's play visible to their families.
- Ensure that spaces and times for play are sufficiently resourced and protected within the learning program and curriculum. Implement strategies, resources and modifications that respond to differing capacities and needs so each child can participate in play.

### ● ● ● 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.**

- Audit existing skill sets and resources and connect with specialist play pedagogues to strengthen educator skills and resources in new and different play approaches; for example, nature and bush play, indoor/outdoor programs, or resourcing children's dramatic play.
- Use language that supports children to problem-solve through their play and manage risk without adult intervention.
- Ensure that the curriculum and programming offer a balance of diverse play experiences.

#### ENGAGE

Find resources and information to grow your knowledge and develop your practice in upholding children's right to play.

### ● ● ● PRINCIPLE THREE

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

- Weave literacy, vocabulary and mathematical concepts into everyday activities, materials, play provocations and environments, for instance offering a well-stocked 'writing centre' or collaborative story-making for children to develop and enjoy communication skills.
- Support children's expression of complex ideas or difficult experiences in play; identify when referral for specialist support or resources may be needed.
- Foster a wide variety of communication and language sharing in the learning community using home languages, Auslan, diverse scripts, signage and other visual media in the learning environment.
- Ensure a supply of materials—books, audio-recordings, writing and measuring equipment—to foster play with numbers, words and experimentation with different communication techniques.

### ● ● ● PRINCIPLE FOUR

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

- Reflect individually and with your team to deepen your understanding and seek out culturally responsive and developmentally appropriate play resources that encourage children to explore and express their identity, family and community context.
- Work with families and caregivers to incorporate equipment and play materials into the learning environment that reflect the child's context, abilities and interests.
- Actively network with local community groups, inclusion and other services to participate in and learn about children's play contexts.

#### PROMOTE

Become a play ambassador and advocate for young children's play in your setting, community or in government policy.

### ● ● ● PRINCIPLE FIVE

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

- 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.
- Work with families to extend open-ended play opportunities between the early learning setting and the home environment, and to spark children's interest in their local context.
- Incorporate different traditions and practices of play into the programming and curriculum through authentic engagement with local contexts and cultures.

### ● ● ● 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.**

- Help to ensure that children's play is fun, safe, fair and includes everyone who wants to participate.
- Advocate for play that enables safe participation and prioritises children's agency.
- Build children's educational programs around play and lead the understanding of play's role in the whole child's learning, development and wellbeing.
- Create nurturing environments to address limitations—whether social, cultural, gender-based, physical or cognitive—that otherwise inhibit children's capacity to participate in play and reach their potential.

#### MAKE A CHANGE

Put children's right to play first in the decisions you make or where you have influence.