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## Topic 1

In this topic you will learn about:

**1A Understanding the value of play**

**1B Supporting identity**

**1C Providing for play**

## Creating an environment for play

Children learn about themselves and the world around them through play. Providing a stimulating, challenging and safe environment allows children to explore, discover and grow in their abilities. An environment that allows children to make choices, and reflects their diversity, interests and abilities will enhance their play and leisure time.

As well as consolidating skills children have mastered, play enables them to use their bodies in many new and challenging ways; for example, climbing, standing, stretching, grasping and hopping.

Physical activities assist children to:

- ▶ develop strength and stamina
- ▶ release excess energy
- ▶ learn hand–eye and feet–eye coordination
- ▶ develop balance.

Watch this video about children’s physical development.



## Social, emotional and moral development

Children also develop many social skills through play. They encounter situations where they learn to collaborate, choose experiences, make decisions, and experience failure and success. Pretend play assists children to explore the world of feelings and relationships. By playing out situations with others, children can come to terms with their world, particularly if they do not understand certain experiences.

Emotionally, children’s growth is also fostered through play as they learn to manage a variety of feelings.

Morally, children learn what is right and wrong through play, how to treat others fairly and what it is like to be treated unfairly. They also learn about their community, conservation and the environment as they share stories with others.

By observing children at play, you can gain a sense of how play impacts a child’s self-esteem, independence and sense of achievement. Play enables children to understand more about others and themselves, including their fears, joys and frustrations, and how they and others express themselves.

### Children might practise social skills through play like:

- |                |                                 |
|----------------|---------------------------------|
| ▶ taking turns | ▶ cooperating and collaborating |
| ▶ sharing      | ▶ setting rules and guidelines. |
| ▶ negotiating  |                                 |

Play is not bound by rules of language or culture – it is open to children’s own interpretations and expressions. Children may encounter situations in play that reflect those they will meet again later in life. Through play, children are able to take on new roles, work through and cope with both positive and negative experiences, and learn what is necessary to establish relationships.

From as early as two years old, children begin to notice physical differences in people, particularly differences relating to gender, colour and physical abilities. This is part of the children’s self-discovery as they ask, ‘Who am I?’

When children start forming relationships with others, they develop attitudes about differences. Children begin to work out who they are from their experiences with others; for example, they find out whether they are male or female; they become aware of the colour of their skin, eyes and hair; and they find out about their bodies and physical capabilities.

## Example

**Development through play**

Cynda, an early childhood educator, has set up play dough. On the table she has provided a range of items:

- ▶ a rolling pin
- ▶ biscuit cutters
- ▶ scissors
- ▶ a collection of coloured pebbles and feathers.

The children working with the play dough each demonstrate different abilities.

Development	Abilities
<b>Physical</b>	▶ Rolling, pounding, cutting, moulding, etc.
<b>Social, emotional and moral</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Talking about their work</li> <li>▶ Sharing play dough and materials with others</li> <li>▶ Creating pretend play scenarios</li> <li>▶ Discussing their work with others</li> <li>▶ Manipulating the dough to match the emotion felt; for example, pounding out anger, squeezing the dough for stress release, etc.</li> </ul>
<b>Cognitive</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Planning what to create</li> <li>▶ Working out how to represent ideas</li> </ul>
<b>Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Telling others about their creations</li> <li>▶ Chatting while working</li> </ul>
<b>Spiritual</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Thinking about the play dough and its origin</li> <li>▶ Connecting with the activity and thinking about how it feels to work with the dough</li> </ul>
<b>Creative</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Imagining how to use the materials</li> <li>▶ Creating an idea</li> <li>▶ Manipulating the dough to the shapes desired</li> </ul>

## Stages of play

Social play refers to the way children play with others. Very young children have not gained the social skills to play effectively with others, so they are in a different stage of social play than children aged four years and over who play happily in groups. People who study children's play have noted these differences and have classified them into different play types.

Theorist Mildred Parten defined types of play that reflect the social dimensions of play.

**Parten's types of play:**

- |                    |                   |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| ▶ Solitary play    | ▶ Play with rules |
| ▶ Parallel play    | ▶ Unoccupied play |
| ▶ Associative play | ▶ Onlooker play   |
| ▶ Cooperative play |                   |



## Play with rules

Older preschool- and early primary school-age children become interested in more structured games; that is, those with clearly defined rules. Children often choose to play these games during their playtime at preschool, school or outside school care.

Games with rules include:

- ▶ tabletop games, such as board games and card games
- ▶ games played in lines or circles
- ▶ games with balls, bats or marbles
- ▶ skipping rope games
- ▶ hopscotch
- ▶ cricket
- ▶ football.



You can support play with rules by ensuring materials and equipment are in good order and are readily available to children. Most play with rules requires space and an understanding of the rules of play. Children also need to collaborate with each other as they share what they know and agree on how the game will operate.

Avoid competitive games where possible, as they reduce children's opportunities to practise skills. In competitive games, the children with the greatest skills get lots of practise, while the children with poor or less-developed skills are left out or are eliminated early. This reduces practice time, provides little chance for developing skills, and can also be damaging to self-esteem. In this situation children might become bored, upset or angry. By ensuring games are non-competitive, you ensure all children participate in some activity most of the time, and that there is not a winning team or winning child, but a group of children developing skills.

## Unoccupied play

Children of all ages can become involved in unoccupied play, which involves a child being occupied watching anything that happens to be of momentary interest, rather than actively playing. When there is nothing exciting taking place, the child may play with their own body, get on and off chairs, stand around, follow an educator or sit in one spot glancing around the room. Unoccupied play may not seem important, but you must respect a child's decision not to participate, and see the value in a child's observation of an environment and the people in it.

## Onlooker play

Children of all ages can also become involved in onlooker play. A child who spends time watching other children at play is undertaking onlooker play. The child may talk to the children they are observing by asking questions or giving suggestions, but does not enter into the play.

This type of play differs from unoccupied play in that the onlooker is definitely observing particular groups of children rather than anything that happens to be of interest at the time. The child stands or sits within speaking distance of the group so they can see and hear everything that takes place. As with unoccupied play, onlooker play may not seem important, but you must respect a child's decision not to participate, and see the value in a child's observation of an environment and the people in it.

2. This photo shows a small group of four- and five-year-old children playing. What value might this play have for their development? Consider their physical, social, emotional, cognitive and communication development.




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3. Why do you think it is important to understand the stages of children's play?

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4. Describe a play space you could set up that would be suited to solitary play.

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5. Describe a play space you could set up that would be suited to cooperative play.

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## Practice task 2

1. Complete the following checklist to assess an outdoor and indoor play environment, then answer the questions that follow.

Yes	No	What to consider
<b>Photos/posters/pictures</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are all the children's families and staff at the centre represented?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are there images of people from a variety of ethnic, racial and cultural backgrounds?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are men and women depicted in less traditional roles; for example, women as carpenters and men as care providers?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are differently abled people depicted at work or at play?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is a variety of family types depicted; for example, single parents, an extended family or a same-sex family?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is artwork from different cultural groups displayed; for example, textiles with Aboriginal designs or Egyptian symbols?
<b>Books</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do children's books reflect people of both modern and traditional cultural styles?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are other cultural/ethnic/racial backgrounds reflected positively?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do books reflect a variety of family lifestyles; for example, single-parent families, extended families and low-income families?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do books reflect a range of languages or stories in Braille?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do books reflect males and females in non-traditional roles?

	Infants to 1 year	1 to 2 years	2 to 3 years	3 to 5 years	5 to 9 years	9 to 12 years
<b>Visual (stimulate sight)</b>	Mobiles (that can be seen while lying down), pram and cot dangling toys, pictures, human faces, posters, activity centres, books, hand puppets	Books with card or cloth covers, magazines for tearing, kaleidoscopes, photographs of familiar people, objects	Greater variety of books	Greater variety of books – gradually increasing the complexity of storylines	Poetry, science and history books, magnifying glasses, aquariums	Science fiction and 'how-to' books
<b>Promote hearing</b>	Bells on elastic (firmly attached to wrist or ankle), rattles, squeaky toys, soft foam block or balls with bells inside, music boxes, wind chimes, saucepans with wooden spoons	Simple musical instruments: maracas, drums, rhythm sticks, bells	Greater variety of musical instruments, CD players with classical, folk and children's music	Xylophones, keyboards, clackers, castanets, a greater variety of CDs	More complex musical instruments such as the piano or trumpet	Musical instruments such as guitar, piano, recorder, etc.
<b>Promote feeling and touching</b>	Teething rings, washable soft toys, various types of balls, texture rugs or mats, texture blocks	Feely boxes or bags, sand trays or troughs, water play, finger paint, play dough, textured fabrics, safe natural materials (pine cones, smooth beach stones, etc.)	Clay, mud, texture cards, a greater variety of safe natural materials, sand and water equipment, simple garden tools	Greater variety of natural materials – more complex sand and water play equipment	Magnetism experiments, hourglasses, collecting own materials and sorting into collections	Fossils, radio kits, test tubes, care of pets
<b>Small muscle development and coordination</b>	Activity centres, blocks, nesting toys, measuring spoons, buckets, baskets, bath toys, sponges, simple posting boxes, dolly pegs in containers, push and pull toys	Interlocking blocks, hammer and peg boards, stacking pegs, interlocking train sets, spoons and cups for sand play, large bead frames, simple puzzles with knobs	Variety of threading materials, more complex puzzles, shape and colour sorting activities, construction sets, activity boards/dolls with zips, buttons, velcro, buckles	Accessories for unit blocks, simple board games, felt boards with figures, a variety of blocks, picture lotto, more complex puzzles of 20+ pieces	Pick-up-sticks, jacks, spinning top games, Chinese checkers, draughts, card games, more complex board games and puzzles with smaller pieces, games with dice and spinners, picture dominoes, complex construction sets	Darts, magic sets, memory games, vocabulary and spelling games



- ▶ relaxing; for example, quiet or alone time, or friendship areas
- ▶ reading and writing; for example, reading or language areas
- ▶ discovering; for example, science, nature, maths or texture areas.

Your service should offer as many resources as possible to help children undertake these activities. This allows them to choose their own activity and provides enough choice to ensure they do not get bored.

## Outdoor activities and equipment

The outdoor space needs to have the same level of consideration as indoors; there should also be opportunities for physically active play and gross motor activities. All age groups need to be given many opportunities for physically active play. Children need to be able to involve themselves in physical activities such as running, jumping, digging, pushing, skipping and climbing.

Outdoor play spaces need to be clearly defined so children can immediately see how the space can be used and so they can move easily between spaces without interfering with others at play. Stepping stones and the use of other natural features can provide children with creative options for their physical play.

There should be a variety of interesting things to do; a quality outdoor environment will offer each child a choice of four or five different play activities and experiences that match their interests.

Opportunities to rearrange equipment, change location, add or remove pieces and engage in simple or complex play are provided by a selection of:

- ▶ wooden planks
- ▶ car tyres
- ▶ small ladders
- ▶ A-frames
- ▶ outdoor blocks
- ▶ cable reels
- ▶ off-cut logs.

In addition to these areas for active, hands-on play, children also need areas where they can experiment and explore. Children need to be challenged; they need to be able to actively manipulate their play space by redesigning and reinventing with movable equipment and props. If you provide appropriate materials and equipment for children, they can then create the type of play experience they want to participate in.

Many services provide children with the opportunity to move indoors and outdoors as they please; this is called an indoor–outdoor program. Your staff ratios and service design will determine whether this is an option for you.

Almost all experiences planned indoors can be offered in an outdoor space.

The following table describes various outdoor areas and how they promote children's learning, experimentation and exploration.

Type of play	Action	Learning concepts
<b>Water play</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Manipulating water</li> <li>▶ Controlling water</li> <li>▶ Pouring</li> <li>▶ Tipping</li> <li>▶ Pumping</li> <li>▶ Siphoning</li> <li>▶ Spraying</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Capacity</li> <li>▶ Volume</li> <li>▶ Floating and sinking</li> <li>▶ Wet and dry</li> <li>▶ Force and pressure</li> <li>▶ Evaporation and condensation</li> </ul>

5. If an area is missing, explain how you could provide this.

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6. What would be the ages of the children using these areas?

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7. Identify one example of a child demonstrating an interest in the materials provided in a service. What would indicate the child was interested?

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8. Read a service philosophy. What does it tell you about any of the identified play environments? Write down a section of the philosophy where a specific environment is mentioned.

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## Summary

- ▶ Educators must provide for different kinds of play in the indoor and outdoor environments.
- ▶ Play influences all areas of children's learning and development – physical, social, cognitive, language, spiritual and creative.
- ▶ Children progress through recognisable stages of play and creative development.
- ▶ You can foster a sense of belonging by providing a safe play environment that is challenging, stimulating and non-threatening.
- ▶ You can enhance play by choosing suitable materials and resources, and considering time, space, people and safety.
- ▶ Resources must reflect a range of people, lifestyles, cultural backgrounds, abilities and children's interests.
- ▶ Experiences should be provided that enable children to explore natural materials and their environment.
- ▶ By creating play spaces for the group and individuals, and for active and quiet play, you can meet most children's needs.



## Topic 2

In this topic you will learn about:

**2A Engaging in play**

**2B Meeting play needs**

**2C Offering play choices**

## Supporting children's play and learning

Educators play a significant role in facilitating children's play, and can use direct or indirect guidance to achieve this. When you provide extensions to play, children remain engaged for longer periods and can also find a broader range of options for their play.

Through observation and discussions with children, you can facilitate experiences and provide a flexible routine that allows children to have control and choice over their environment. Children feel a sense of belonging and ownership when they are involved in decisions relating to activities and experiences.



The following table maps this topic to the National Quality Standard and both national learning frameworks.

National Quality Standard		
✓	Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice	
	Quality Area 2: Children’s health and safety	
✓	Quality Area 3: Physical environment	
	Quality Area 4: Staffing arrangements	
✓	Quality Area 5: Relationships with children	
	Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities	
	Quality Area 7: Governance and leadership	
Early Years Learning Framework		My Time, Our Place
Principles		
	Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships	
	Partnerships	
✓	High expectations and equity	
	Respect for diversity	
✓	Ongoing learning and reflective practice	
Practice		
	Holistic approaches	Holistic approaches
✓	Responsiveness to children	Collaboration with children
✓	Learning through play	Learning through play
✓	Intentional teaching	Intentionality
✓	Learning environments	Environments
	Cultural competence	Cultural competence
	Continuity of learning and transitions	Continuity and transitions
	Assessment for learning	Evaluation for wellbeing and learning
Outcomes		
	Children have a strong sense of identity	
	Children are connected to and contribute to their world	
	Children have a strong sense of wellbeing	
✓	Children are confident and involved learners	
	Children are effective communicators	

Intentional teaching is useful for:

- ▶ learning rules and guidelines
- ▶ following directions
- ▶ focusing on the development of specific skills.

Intentional teaching may disrupt play-based experiences, particularly if it occurs at the wrong moment.

Routine times are excellent for intentional teaching. Children are focusing on an activity and their emerging skills are evident. Intentional teaching may occur spontaneously or as part of a plan. The following table provides some examples of intentional teaching during routines.

Routines	Examples of intentional teaching
<b>Bathroom routines</b>	<p>How to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ wash hands</li> <li>▶ turn a tap on and off</li> <li>▶ brush teeth.</li> </ul> <p>Topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Where does the water go?</li> <li>▶ Why do we use soap?</li> <li>▶ What happens if we never brush our teeth?</li> </ul>
<b>Mealtime routines</b>	<p>How to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ use a spoon</li> <li>▶ use a knife</li> <li>▶ use chopsticks</li> <li>▶ set the table.</li> </ul> <p>Topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Where do different foods come from?</li> <li>▶ What makes a healthy menu?</li> <li>▶ Which foods are grown and which are processed?</li> </ul>

## Example

### Intentional teaching

**Scenario 1:** Two children are building a spaceship out of blocks. Sandra (an educator) comes over to them and says, 'That's a big tower. How many blocks have you used?' The children look at her. 'It's not a tower,' they say. Although Sandra thought that this was a good time to teach the children about numbers, they are busy using other skills. Sandra's inquiry might make the children think she is not interested in their work.

**Scenario 2:** Sandra watches and listens as the children are building. She hears that they are building a spaceship. She does not want to interrupt their work, so she decides she will talk to them about their work later in the day. Sandra has realised that the children are learning skills from the task. If she observes that the children need her help, she may provide some intentional teaching around the situation.



# 2B Meeting play needs

As you watch children play and listen to their ideas, you may find that opportunities arise where you are able to provide support and extension to their play. When you provide extensions to play, you are promoting agency, as children remain engaged for longer periods and can also find a broader range of options for their play. This may be as simple as adding some new props to a play space, suggesting a larger or smaller place for their play or adding a new idea about their topic of play.



## Providing more resources

A group of four-year-olds are playing shops in the home corner. Maria, an educator, notices there are not many props available for this play, so she suggests to the children that they come to the factory (the storeroom) to see if they can gather some more supplies to fit out their shop. The children do so gladly and are then able to create a shop that many children can come and visit.

## Including children's interests

Jane, an educator, observes William (four years) 'shearing' children in the kindergarten room. William has recently watched the sheep being shorn on his family farm and it has obviously caught his interest.

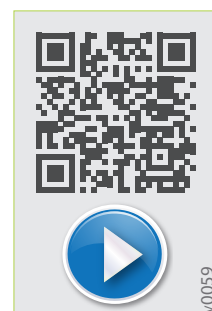
Jane helps the children set up a 'shearing shed' in the block corner using A-frames and cushions. She also helps the children learn songs about shearing and finds posters and books about shearing that she puts up on the walls.

## Providing related activities

Annabelle and Kaya (both five years) are using their fingers to poke and make patterns in the wet sandpit. Sharon, an educator, notices their interest and shows them how to make patterns with their fingers and hands in a traditional Aboriginal way. The girls continue to experiment by using their elbows and knees to make patterns.

Later, Sharon sets up a painting activity to give the children the opportunity to experiment further with hand and foot printing. She also provides a range of natural materials for the children to make prints with.

Watch this video about helping children develop creative problem-solving skills.



# 3A Participating in play

Play is child-directed and occurs naturally. It often lacks structure, meaning that it changes and adapts. The dynamics of play also alter based on the children involved and the ideas and materials that are available.

Children's play should involve the following aspects.

<b>Fun</b>
Children show that they enjoy being involved in play and that they wish to continue playing.
<b>Free choice</b>
Children participate in the experience and are not forced to enter the activity; the desire to play comes from the child.
<b>Active participation</b>
Children are engaged in the activity and are part of the action that the play situation involves; sitting watching television may be enjoyable, but there is no active participation.
<b>Play for the sake of it – a goal is not necessary</b>
Play is the process that children are involved in; they do not consider the activity's purpose.
<b>Control</b>
Children take control of entering and participating in a play experience; an adult does not direct it.

Children's sense of agency will increase if you show that you encourage and value their play. You can encourage children to play by:

- ▶ showing children that you value play as an activity in itself
- ▶ spending time with children during play
- ▶ sharing children's interests and enjoyment.

As play occurs in a social context, there are times when you will become involved.

## Play invitations

Being invited to play makes it obvious that you are welcome. The children you are playing with already have in mind what they want you to do and they will ask you to join in as they feel you can contribute. With this in mind, you need to listen and watch closely, as the children continue to give you clues as to your role.

Some reasons you may be invited into play include the children:

- ▶ asking you to take a dramatic play role
- ▶ needing extra materials or resources
- ▶ needing help to negotiate or resolve an issue
- ▶ enjoying your company.

## Routines and safety

A child's day should comprise a variety of routine practices linked together to meet the needs of all. You need to constantly consider priorities and practicalities regarding when to do particular things so that children can move safely from one situation, activity, experience or space to the next.

Many children become distressed and unsettled if they do not know what will happen next or when to expect changes. Children also feel more stable and secure if routines provide the following:

- ▶ **Belonging:** children need to feel that the environment reflects themselves and their family; this may be done by having a familiar place to keep bags or toys.
- ▶ **Familiar people:** children feel more secure if they are with educators they know who are aware of the environment and each child's individual personality and needs.
- ▶ **Ownership:** children feel ownership if they have choice within an interactive environment, particularly if they are provided with child-focused routines that are appropriate for their ages and developmental stages.
- ▶ **Opportunities for independence:** when children are encouraged and supported to be independent, they feel valued, and develop agency and a positive sense of self. A child who is confident in their ability to care for themselves will feel safer in their environment, as they are less dependent on others.
- ▶ **A routine timetable with a predictable sequence of events:** the flexibility that you provide in the day should still allow you to complete required routine tasks on time.

## Practice task 8

Access a copy of a plan of activities for one day.

1. Write down one experience from the plan that you could adapt to meet the interests of a child. Explain what you would do to adapt it and why you would do this.

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2. Write down one experience from the plan that could or did frustrate a child. Explain how you would alter this experience to be challenging rather than frustrating.

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3. Identify a routine in the plan that enables the children to feel safe.

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## Learning checkpoint 3

# Facilitating children's play, learning and physical activity

Read the case study, and then answer the questions that follow.

### Case study

You have been observing the children's reactions to the play environment and notice that the sandpit is not being used. Currently it has buckets and hand shovels for play, but when the children try to create sandcastles, the sand does not stick together and the castles collapse.

1. The children are feeling frustrated with the sand play. What could you do to make the sand challenging rather than frustrating?

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2. If you were to alter the sand play to make it more interesting, what one idea would you provide for Krystal, a child who enjoys building and constructing, and Ben, who enjoys dramatic play? Explain the reasons for your decision.

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3. If you altered the sandpit to meet the interests of Krystal, how would you initiate play and invite her to participate?

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4. What routines would you implement to ensure children were kept safe when playing in the sand? Explain your answer.

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