

# Resources on Play

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**W**e have all heard the phrase “play is a child’s work” but how can we convince parents that play should be a meaningful part of their child’s routine?

Play, with its inclusion as one of the critical early literacy practices advocated by the Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR) initiative, may be the hardest sell of the five practices to parents, educators, and even administrators. It may be seen as optional or extra, something to be done after the child has spent time “learning” if there is time.

But, as early literacy experts know, play *is* learning, and there is some excellent science pointing to this fact, particularly coming out of the health and medical fields.

The following resources are excellent places to find more information, both academic and practical, for advocating for the power of play and building meaningful play experiences into your programming.

### **Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development: Play-Based Learning**

[www.child-encyclopedia.com/play-based-learning](http://www.child-encyclopedia.com/play-based-learning)

This Canadian resource is a project of the Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development. Research and practical information on structuring meaningful play experiences for young children can be found here, along with information on a variety of other topics related to child development. Available in English, French, Russian, Spanish, and Portuguese.

### **Boston Children’s Museum: 100 Ways to Play**

[www.bostonchildrensmuseum.org/learning-resources/100-ways-play](http://www.bostonchildrensmuseum.org/learning-resources/100-ways-play)

This site features simple and creative ideas on how to play with children in everyday life.

### **Zero to Three: A Year of Play**

[www.zerotothree.org/resources/1090-a-year-of-play](http://www.zerotothree.org/resources/1090-a-year-of-play)

In this parent-friendly resource, child development experts at Zero to Three present monthly play-based learning activities that adults can explore with their babies and toddlers. It is also an excellent idea generator for librarians working to incorporate more intentional play into their storytimes.

### **Stages of Play**

[www.zerotothree.org/resources/series/the-development-of-play-skills-from-birth-to-3](http://www.zerotothree.org/resources/series/the-development-of-play-skills-from-birth-to-3)

If parents ask you what type of toy or play is best for a twenty-eight-month-old child, what do you say? This quick guide also produced by Zero to Three covers the stages of play for children from birth to age twelve, describing how the play skills develop and connecting that development to age-appropriate toys and activities. Toys to Explore lists can be helpful when restocking toys or early literacy areas. Many of the explanations can be used as developmental tips.

### The National Museum of Play

[www.museumofplay.org/about](http://www.museumofplay.org/about)

Although founded as a history museum to house Margaret Woodbury Strong's vast toy and doll collections, today's Strong National Museum of Play in Rochester, NY, is a nationally known play resource. In addition to interactive children's exhibits and an old-fashioned carousel, the museum also includes children's public library books that can be checked out with a library card. The Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives of Play is a wonderful resource for questions on play-related topics with a huge collection of primary and secondary sources, play materials, and online databases. Librarians at the Strong are also available to field toy-related questions.

The museum also publishes the *American Journal of Play* ([www.journalofplay.org](http://www.journalofplay.org)), which explores play from a scholarly perspective across various disciplines, cultures, and institutions.

### Ted Talks about Play

[www.ted.com/topics/play](http://www.ted.com/topics/play)

This site provides access to many TED talks on play. Topics include how games make children smarter, turning trash into toys for learning, and five dangerous things you should let your kids do. Our favorites are by Kathy Hirsh-Pasek and Dr. Stuart Brown.

### Policy Briefs

<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/142/3/e20182058>  
An updated 2018 policy brief from the American Association of Pediatrics notes that play is not frivolous; rather, it enhances

brain structure and function and promotes executive function. The authors encourage pediatricians to communicate regularly with parents about the role of play in child development, even suggesting they write a "prescription for play" at regular well-visits.<sup>1</sup> What better place to fill that prescription than at the library!

### Play Research

<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.2006328>

A research article in the open-access magazine *PLOS Biology* studies the interconnection of brain activity when babies and their adults play together. When babies try to pay attention to the objects they are playing with on their own, there are bursts of high-frequency brain activity. When babies and their adults play together, the adult brains echoes those same bursts of activity! Joint play has now been shown to influence joint changes in brain activity. Also, "where the parent's brain is more responsive to the child, the child sustains their attention for longer."<sup>2</sup> This information could be used as a developmental tip to encourage parents' active participation in storytime activities.

### Child's Play: Developmental and Applied<sup>3</sup>

This recently reissued 1984 book (published by Psychology Library Editions) provides a scholarly and inclusive look at play. After explaining how play contributes to physical, intellectual, language, social, and emotional development resulting in an "integrated self," other chapters cover bipolarity in play theories as well as play of handicapped children with specific sections on the play of autistic, psychotic, and physically handicapped children. &

## References

1. Michael Yogman et al., "The Power of Play: A Pediatric Role in Enhancing Development in Young Children," *Pediatrics* 142, no. 3 (September 20, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2018-2058>.
2. Sam V. Wass et al., "Parental Neural Responsivity to Infants Visual Attention: How Mature Brains Scaffold Immature Brains during Social Interaction," *PLOS Biology* (December 14, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1101/295790>.
3. Thomas D. Yawkey and Anthony D. Pellegrini, *Child's Play: Developmental and Applied* (New York: Routledge, 2017).