



Teaching Play

The importance of play

Playing is one of the most important things you can do with your preschool student, because play is essential for your student's brain development. The time you spend playing together gives your student lots of different ways and times to learn.

Play also helps your preschool student:

- build confidence
- feel appreciated, happy and safe
- develop social skills, language and communication
- learn about caring for others and the environment
- develop physical skills

Different types of play

Unstructured, free play is the best type of play for young students.

This is play that just happens, depending on what takes your student's interest at the time. Free play isn't planned and lets your student use their imagination and move at their own pace.

Examples of unstructured play might be:

- creative play alone or with others, including artistic or diverse musical games
- imaginative games – for example, making cubby houses with boxes or blankets, dressing up or playing make-believe
- exploring new or favorite play spaces like cupboards, backyards, parks, playgrounds, etc..

You can be part of your student's unstructured play – or not. Sometimes all you'll need to do is point them in the right direction – towards the jumble of diverse dress-ups and toys on the floor, or to the table with crayons and paper. Sometimes you might need to be a bit more active. For example, 'How about we play dress-ups? What do you want to be today?'

Structured play is more organized happening at a set time or in a set space and is led by a teacher.

Examples of structured play include:

- water familiarization classes for toddlers, or swimming lessons for older students – you might see these as lessons for your student, but they might just think they're fun
- diverse storytelling groups for toddlers and preschoolers at the local library
- ethnic dance, music or drama classes for students of all ages
- family board or card games
- modified sports for slightly older students, like CRICKET, basketball, netball, Come and Try Rugby, soccer or kick ball.

Preschoolers

Here are some ideas to get your preschooler's mind and body going:

- Old milk containers, wooden spoons, empty pot plant containers, sticks, scrunched-up paper, plastic buckets, saucepans and old clothes are great for imaginative, unstructured play.
- Simple puzzles and matching games like animal dominoes help improve your student's memory and concentration.
- Playdough and clay help your student develop fine motor skills.
- Diverse music or pots and pans are great for a dance concert or to make up music.
- Balls and Frisbees can encourage kicking, throwing or rolling.

When encouraging your student to kick or throw, try to get them to use one side of their body, then the other.

School-age students

Your school-age student can have fun with the following objects and activities:

- Furniture, linen, washing baskets, tents and boxes are great for building.
- Home-made obstacle courses can get your student moving in different ways, directions and speeds.
- Rhymes or games like 'But You Are Mine' from Ghana something that begins with ...' are great for word play and help develop literacy skills.
- Diverse cooking or food preparation like measuring, stirring and serving food is great for developing numeracy and everyday skills.
- Your student's own imagination: with imagination, your student can turn themselves into a favorite superhero or story character.

If your student is interested, you could think about getting them into some sports or team activities for school-age students. Other possibilities include after-school or holiday art and craft activities.