Let's Play! Activities for Families

SET

Focusing on engagement with others, materials, and the world



Ministry of Education

Overview

This package of resources was developed by the BC Ministry of Education for parents and caregivers who want to support their child's early learning experiences through play.

Each play activity connects with one of the Living Inquiries described within the BC Early Learning Framework, which include:

- Engagement with Others, Materials and the World
- Well-being and Belonging
- Personal Identity, Social Responsibility, and Diversity
- Communication and Literacies

These resources describe simple play activities using this easy to follow format:

- What
- Why
- How
- Where
- When

Acknowledgments

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Discovery Toy Basket



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What

This experience is inspired by the idea of "Heuristic Play," a term coined by Child Psychologist, Elinor Goldschmeid. It simply means to discover the properties of objects. This activity is also called "Heuristic Toy Basket."



Create the Environment

- Place a variety of found objects such as keys, driftwood, and kitchen utensils into a basket, and present it to the child without directing their play.
- If you happen to be away from home, try a themed collection of items from your surroundings (for example, natural materials found at a beach or park). Any container (a bowl or a bag) that can hold your collected items can be used instead of a basket.

2 Play!

This child-led play allows endless opportunities for exploration, creativity, and invention! In addition to developing creativity, children learn the fundamentals of science by using their senses to explore what they find in the basket. By asking open-ended questions you are also able to support the development of children's communication and literacy skills.

Why

Through this experience, children will learn to

- Explore the world using their bodies and all of their senses
- Develop their abstract and critical thinking skills, as well as their creativity and invention skills
- Build independence and confidence as new objects are explored
- Enhance fine motor abilities through manipulating, opening, closing, and pulling items apart

How

Some suggested items are hair rollers, cups, wooden spoons, a metal whisk, shaker, an empty spool, an old CD, old keys, bubble wrap, or small carpet samples and fabric scraps. Include natural items and materials such as driftwood, shells, rocks, leaves, and pinecones for variety.

Add different items such as stacking objects (Russian dolls or measuring cups). You can also try larger marbles, holiday ornaments, sea sponges, a jar of buttons, rubber tubing, acorns, plastic flowers or plants, a wooden brush, an egg carton, or a clothespin.

Ask open-ended questions such as

- "Can you tell me what you have found?"
- "What do you see/feel/hear?"
- "What do you think this is used for?" There are no right or wrong answers. You are asking what is being sensed and how the child is interpreting the object
- "Do you like how it feels (and why)?" or "How does it make you feel?"

Place smaller objects into a fabric bag or sock. With no direction, a child will naturally feel around the sock and reach inside to explore the hidden items. Ask open-ended questions — a guessing game of what is inside may naturally emerge. Remember to focus on the senses to help children feel and guess what is hidden.

Where

This experience can be completed anywhere, preferably in an area with ample room for a child to spread out items and explore them individually.

When

This activity can occur at any time of the day and is best explored individually or in small groups.

Reference

Ranson, Anna (2010, October 28), Heuristic Play-Treasure Basket. Retrieved from https://theimaginationtree.com/heuristic-play-treasure-baskets/





Reuse, Recycle, and Create

What

One way to support creativity and exploration with children is to keep things simple!



Create the Environment

- On a table or flat surface, place a variety of recyclable items such as plastic bottles, paper, and cardboard tubes or boxes.
- Ask your child to help you collect materials like tape, glue sticks, string, and scissors.

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Explore

- Encourage your child to get started!
- Ask, "I wonder what we could do with all of this?"

Why

This activity encourages children to plan and construct new creations and problem solve while making or creating a design or sculpture.

Through this experience, children will learn

- How their actions may affect nature and the planet
- Abstract and critical thinking skills, creativity, and innovation
- Language development and communication

Once completed, children will gain confidence and fulfillment in creating something new.

How

Provide an opportunity for your child to explore the items with their senses. Children will manipulate the different items and begin to explore, evaluate and inquire. Some suggested items could be egg cartons, empty milk bottles, cardboard boxes, tins (omit cans as they can be sharp and unsafe), plastic containers, old CDs, or gift wrapping papers or bows.

Add miscellaneous pieces of toys, plastic caps, plastic straws, plastic or foam mesh, or pieces of Styrofoam. Encourage the child to explain what they are making and how they are making it. If your child asks for help, try to ask open-ended questions to encourage them to find solutions on their own. For example, "I hear you saying you are having trouble keeping the tower up. What other items could you use to hold it up?"



Depending on the interest of the child, you might place images of animals, structures, or objects that they could try to replicate using recycled items. Ask questions about recycling — like what items can be recycled, how items are recycled, and what recyclable items can be reused for. This will enhance a child's knowledge of social responsibility with respect to their own or other communities and the world.

Where

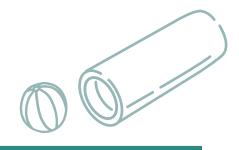
This experience can be completed on a flat surface: ideally at a table, indoors or outdoors.

When

This activity can occur at any time of the day, and best explored individually or in small groups.



Mystery Tube



What

Try this experience if your child is showing interest in manipulating objects, hiding smaller objects in larger objects, or is curious about the different components of toys or objects.

This experience involves experimenting and predicting what might happen when your child rolls balls of different sizes through a tube (poster tube, or piping for construction often works well).



Create the Environment

• You can find poster tubes that people have received in the mail. Often they will give them to you for free. You can use tennis balls or other balls you may already have.

2 Play!

Start with one ball that fits through the tube. Put it in on one side and lift that side so the ball comes out the other way. Talk to your child about what you're doing. "Let's put the ball in here. Is it going to fit? Yes! What will happen if I lift the tube? Wow! It came out the other side!"

Look through the tube at the child on the other end. Let the child try it and comment on what is happening. Try making different faces for your child to copy or label.

Once the child has had an opportunity to explore the tube and ball, you can add other balls of different sizes. Some will fit, some won't. Try reflective talking with your child by speaking about what your child is doing. "You put the ball in the tube!"

Have fun experimenting together and talk about what is happening to enrich the child's understanding and vocabulary. Use words like "big, bigger, biggest, small, smaller, smallest, fits, doesn't fit." Ask the child what they think will happen (making predictions).

Why

Through this experience, children learn to

- Explore two objects and how they interact with each other in a new way
- Predict what might happen (the foundation of many scientific experiments)
- Explore new vocabulary as well as numerical concepts, such as counting the amount of balls you are sending through the tube, and talking about the colours and sizes of the balls

How

You can start to explore the tube and the ball separately. Play peekaboo through the tube, and roll the ball back and forth. Once the child is familiar with both objects, you can combine them.

Roll the ball through the tube, and then, give your child some time to explore and try it. Comment on what's happening. You can ask your child to predict what is going to happen like, "What happens when you put the ball in and you don't lift the tube?" You can also introduce different sized balls. Some will fit, and some won't. Try asking questions like, "What happens when you put in a smaller ball or a larger ball?" Your child can try to predict what will happen.

Try asking your child, "What else can you do with the materials?" They may want to build a structure that includes ramps or different types of tracks. Encourage them to experiment and explore with different types of materials, balls, and objects, and predict what is going to happen.

Where

This activity can be played indoors or outdoors.

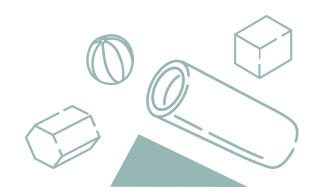
When

As with all activities, it's best to play when your child isn't sleepy or hungry but feels alert and ready to explore.

Reference

Community Action Program for Children (CAPC).

Retrieved from https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion/childhood-adolescence/programs-initiatives/community-action-program-children-capc.html



Let's Go Camping!

What

Real camping or playing pretend camping is a great way to get your child excited for the start of springtime weather, and to get outside more and enjoy nature! Here are some steps to create a fun camping experience with your child:

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Create the Environment:

- Set up play tents (or small real ones)
- Provide sleeping bags and even create a pretend fire made of wooden blocks in brown, red, orange, and yellow (or create from old paper towel rolls and tissue paper)
- Make a forest mural painted with trees, a starry night sky, and some woodland animals with your child
- Tell your child, "Let's think of one kind thing we could do for each other while we're camping."

Camping Activities:

Ask your child what sort of activities they would like to do while camping. Some ideas are

Go fishing!

- Fill a blow-up paddling pool, or other shallow tub with cardboard fish cutouts with paper clips for mouths or pipe cleaner fish
- Make fishing poles out of sticks, string, and magnets tied on the end or use pipe cleaners formed into hook shapes
- Talk to your child about how fish live in our rivers, lakes, and oceans
- Talk to your child about how fish is important in diets for people in B.C., including First Nations communities

Explore nature outside

 A big part of camping is to enjoy nature. Even if you are pretend camping, go outside in your backyard or to a nearby park with your child and look at the trees, flowers, leaves, and animals that are around you. Feel and smell with your child the different types of plants you know are safe. Hear the birds chirping with your child. Ask them questions about what they hear, smell, and feel.

Story time

- Sing camp songs and tell ghost stories (age-appropriate, of course), or tell stories from your cultural background that you learned or heard as a child from your family or community
- Read a book from your local library or a story from your bookshelf that would be fun to read around the "campfire"

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3 Try creating "Camping Food"



Ask your child, "What types of foods would you like to eat while camping?"

Try exploring fun and nutritious camping foods such as

- **Bannock or Fry Bread:** Talk to your child about how bannock can be made on sticks over the fire. Serve with plain yogurt and berries or melt cheese on top or in the middle. A recipe can be found here: https://www.appetitetoplay.com/healthy-eating/recipes/bannock
- **Potato Boats:** Wrap small potatoes in aluminum foil and bake in oven at 400 degrees for around 30 minutes or until easily pierced with a fork. Allow to cool slightly, then give one to your child and encourage them to choose toppings like cheese, Greek yogurt, green onions, steamed/diced broccoli, cooked beans, or chicken
- **Banana Splits:** Have your child help prepare the bananas by laying a whole or half banana on a sheet of greased aluminum foil or parchment paper. Allow your child to practice cutting by using a plastic knife to cut the banana in half lengthwise. Encourage them to choose toppings like shredded coconut, semi-sweet chocolate chips, granola, berries, and nuts, or seed butter (depending on allergies). Bake in a 200 degree oven for 15-20 minutes until bananas are no longer firm when squeezed with tongs. Let cool slightly before serving to your child in the foil for true camp-style eating!

Why

Through this experience, children will learn to

- Explore the world around them using their bodies and their senses
- Build, create, and design using different materials
- Be creative and expressive in a variety of ways (for example, singing, storytelling)
- Develop a sense of wonder for natural environments

How

Together with your child, try the activities based on their interests.

- Create a space for your child to explore the different activities independently, and try watching from the sidelines. Observe their interests and ask questions that encourage exploration.
- Encourage your child to think of new games and ideas that incorporate the camping theme.
- Check out BC parks: http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/bcparks/reserve/

Where

When

This activity can occur either indoors or outdoors. Playing pretend camping in the backyard is always fun and exciting. Try these activities in the morning or the afternoon. Storytime can happen at any time of the day.

Reference

Child Health BC. (2017). Appetite to Play. Retrieved from https://www.appetitetoplay.com/healthy-eating/tips-ideas/lets-go-camping



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