Playing to Learn, and Learning to Play

Parent and Caregiver Guide

Massachusetts Standards for Preschool and Kindergarten

Social and Emotional Learning, and Approaches to Play and Learning
Playing to Learn, and Learning to Play

This booklet is a resource designed to be shared with parents and caregivers participating in a ‘Playing to Learn, and Learning to Play’ workshop. The materials are also available Spanish, Brazilian Portuguese, Haitian Creole, and Chinese.

‘Playing to Learn, and Learning to Play’ is embedded in Part Two of the SEL/APL Family Engagement workshop for family engagement professionals.

The SEL/APL Professional Development Project is a collaboration between the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and the Collaborative for Educational Services. Professional Development opportunities and materials based on the Massachusetts Standards for Preschool and Kindergarten Social and Emotional Learning and Approaches to Play and Learning created through this project are intended to familiarize early educators from public schools and the mixed delivery system with the SEL/APL Standards and to assist educators to integrate them into their practice.

For more information about Professional Development opportunities provided by the Collaborative for Educational Services Early Childhood Department:

collaborative.org/early-childhood
earlychildhood@collaborative.org | 413.588.5568
Helping your child develop caring ideas and behavior

1. Express Your Values
   - Communicate the importance of caring attitudes and behavior.
   - Point out examples of caring behaviors.
   - Share your own caring motives and feelings.
   - Express your admiration for kindhearted people.
   - Keep expectations realistic for your child’s level of development.

2. Model the Behavior You Want to See
   - Children are powerful imitators – our actions speak louder than our words.
   - Show understanding and concern for your child’s feelings. This will help him develop empathy.
   - Talk about your own feelings in conversations with your child.

3. Be a Good Listener
   - Eliminate distractions and pay close attention when listening to your child.
   - Show that you are listening with your body language and encouraging comments.
   - Provide feedback to your child that lets her know you have listened well and helps clarify that you have understood her feelings (“It sounds like you are angry at your friends because they didn’t let you play with them. Is that right?”).
   - Try not to interrupt until your child seems finished expressing her thoughts. Allow some silences to enable her to think about what she wants to say.
   - Respond to what your child says and thank her for sharing her thoughts and feelings.

4. Use Positive Guidance/Discipline
   - Explain how your child’s behavior affects other people. Connect his actions to the well-being of others (“Your card helped Grandma to feel better.”)
   - Help your child learn to recognize and label feelings. (“Look at his face. He’s feeling scared.”)
   - Encourage your child to try to understand how others see things (“How do you think he feels when . . .? How would you feel if that happened to you?”).
   - Help your child make amends when he has hurt others and think about different ways to act the next time.

5. Provide Helpful Feedback
   - Recognize and praise caring behavior.
   - Discuss hurtful or inconsiderate behavior in a way that helps your child understand the feelings of the person who has been hurt.
   - Describe the behavior that you approve or disapprove of, but also help your child to look within herself for approval based on the good feelings that come from caring for other people.
   - Always be clear that it is not your child, but her behavior, that you disapprove of.
   - Help your child understand when she is acting from caring. (“It was kind of you to share your toys.”)
   - Help your child to see herself as capable and resourceful. (“You managed that so well. How did you know to do that?”)
Emotional Vocabulary is the ability to recognize, label, and understand feelings in one's self and other.

To Enhance Emotional Vocabulary:
- Talk about your feelings.
- Say to your child, "Tell me how that makes you feel."
- Teach new emotion words (e.g., frustrated, confused, anxious, excited, worried, disappointed).
- Talk about how characters in a book, video or on a TV show may feel.
- Reflect on specific situations and discuss feelings.
- Accept and support your child's expression of feelings.
- Use books and art activities to talk about emotions.
- Talk aloud about your own feeling in a variety of situations.
- Describe how your child's face looks or pictures of people in magazines and books.
- Pretend play with toy figurines, stuffed animals, or puppets and have them use "feeling words."

Feeling words that 3-5 year olds who are developing language typically understand: (Joseph 2001; Ridge, Walters, & Kuejaz, 1985)

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<td>Curious</td>
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Making Learning Fun Through Play

1. Allow time for uninterrupted play
2. Get down to your child’s level
3. Provide toys and materials that can be played with in many ways.*
4. Use the Follow the Car technique to expand the play:
   - Follow your child’s lead
   - Comment, and wait
   - Ask questions, and wait
   - Respond by adding more, and wait. \( \text{(Source: www.walearning.com)} \)
5. More suggestions for expanding the play:
   - Ask open-ended questions (what, why, who, where, how)
   - Ask questions that make your child think more deeply
   - Accept your child’s answers to questions, even when they’re not reality-based. They make sense in the context of the play.
   - Remember to follow your child’s lead even as you expand the play

*Ideas for materials that can be played with in many ways

- Household items: pots, pans, spoons, bowls, measuring cups
- Dolls and stuffed animals
- Dress-up items: assorted hats, clothing, old costumes, scarves, shoes, purses, etc.
- Old telephone or toy phone
- Vehicles like cars and trucks
- Blocks
- Art materials: paper assortment, crayons, markers, pipe cleaners, stickers, glue, scissors (when age appropriate)
- Objects found in nature (stones, acorns, leaves, etc.)
- Toy people and animals for use with blocks and vehicle
- Clay or playdough
Research has shown that social and emotional learning (SEL) is the foundation for all other kinds of learning and helps young children succeed in school and in life. This guide has been created to give parents and caregivers ideas about how they can support this very important kind of learning through routines and activities at home.

The Guide below is based on a set of early learning standards developed in Massachusetts, called the Massachusetts Standards for Preschool and Kindergarten in the Domains of Social and Emotional Learning, and Approaches to Play and Learning, available online at:


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**Social-Emotional Learning: A Guide for Families**

*Not all children will be ready to master each of these skills right away. Parents will need to be patient and respect that each child learns at his own time and in her own way.*

**SEL 1.** I talk about feelings with my child and help her **express her feelings** in safe and respectful ways by:

- Talking with her often about my own feelings and how she is feeling
- Listening for, accepting, and validating her feelings
- Using new words to describe feelings when we talk
- Reading books with her and asking her about how the characters in the book might be feeling when different things happen
- Encouraging her to notice and respect the feelings of others
- Letting her know when she hurts someone else’s feelings, and help her find a way she can help that person feel better
- Coaching my child on what TO do, instead of what NOT TO do, when she is having trouble showing her feelings in safe and respectful ways

**SEL 2.** I help my child **understand himself better** by talking with him about:

- What is special about him
- Our family and relatives
- Our family’s traditions, culture, and language
- What he likes and doesn’t like
- Ways he is alike and different from other people he knows

**SEL 3.** I help my child **feel proud and confident** about what she has learned and what she can do by:

- Noticing, encouraging and praising her efforts when she tries out or practices new skills
- Encouraging her to feel proud of her efforts and accomplishments
- Reminding her about what she has already learned to do well
- Celebrating her accomplishments and willingness to try something new
- Encouraging her to do things on her own when she is ready
SEL 4. I help my child to **manage strong feelings and learn self-control** by:

- Good modeling – being as patient and calm as I can when I am angry or stressed; showing him the ways I use to calm myself down
- Helping my child practice skills to calm himself down, i.e. taking deep breaths, cuddling a favorite stuffed toy, or going to a quiet place.
- Helping him learn to wait and take turns by practicing (once he is ready to begin learning these skills)
- Teaching my child to stop and think about other ways to solve problems before acting out angry feelings—and trying to do that myself whenever I can
- Making a safe place in our home where my child can go to calm down (such as a bedroom or a cozy pillow corner)

SEL 5. I help my child **understand and respect the feelings of others** by:

- Showing her how I respect the feelings of other people
- Talking with her and asking her how other people might be feeling
- Finding ways she can help or care for others and show kindness
- Pretend play where we act out the feelings of people or animals

SEL 6. I help my child **be comfortable with and respect people who are different** by:

- Talking about and explaining differences in a positive way
- Answering his questions about differences with respect
- Helping my child get to know many different kinds of people, i.e. different ages, cultures, nationalities, and abilities.
- Explaining that there are many ways to be special and that in our family, we respect and care about all people

SEL 7. I help my child **express thoughts and feelings in different ways** by:

- Talking about and listening to her ideas and feelings every day
- Encouraging her to have conversations about the activities she enjoys
- Reading to her and having conversations about the books we share
- Encouraging her to use drawing, painting, playdough, music, pretend play, and other art activities to express herself
- Helping her to understand the ways her body and face tell others how she is feeling

SEL 8. I help my child **have good relationships** with adults and children by:

- Bringing him places where he can meet and play with, i.e. playgrounds, playgroups, family centers, play dates, and libraries.
- Inviting guests into our home and visiting other families
- Talking about the meaning of friendship and how to be a good friend
- Helping him make cards or gifts for friends and family members
- Providing examples of good relationships with my adult friends and family members
- Being consistent, trustworthy, and as positive as possible in my interactions with him, especially when we are working on changing challenging behaviors
SEL 9. I help my child learn to **get along well with others and to resolve disagreements** by:

- Helping her put herself in a friend or family member’s place and imagine what they are feeling and why they might be feeling that way
- Role playing a conflict between her and another person and having her take the part of the other person
- After a conflict is over, helping her to understand the problem from all sides and think of other ways it could have been resolved
- Praising her efforts to share, take turns, and be kind and caring towards others, even when her efforts aren’t 100% successful
- Reading books with her that are about children faced with a conflict or challenging relationship that is successfully and creatively resolved

SEL 10. I help my child **know when and how to ask for help** when he needs it, and encourage him to **be helpful to others** by:

- Reminding him to ask for help after giving him the chance to resolve a problem on his own
- Explaining that everyone needs help sometimes, even grownups
- Talking with him about the adults who can help him i.e. his parents, teachers, bus driver, doctors, police, and firefighters
- Giving him opportunities to be helpful and praising his efforts to help
- After a time when he needed help but didn’t ask for it, encouraging him to think about when he might have asked for help, and who could have helped him
- Reading books with him about people who give help to others and need help from others and talking about the importance of helping

SEL 11. I help my child to understand why it’s important to **keep promises and be responsible and helpful to other people** by:

- Keeping the promises I make to her and not making promises I know I can’t keep
- Apologizing when I am unable to keep a promise because something happened that I couldn’t control
- Helping her understand how others might feel if they are counting on her and she lets them down
- Involving her in community service projects with our family and explaining how and why our family is helping others

SEL 12. I help my child **learn from his successes and failures and understand the ways his actions and decisions affect him and other people** by:

- After either a success or failure, helping him think about what he learned and what he might do differently the next time
- Showing him how I learn from my successes and failures, and trying to use humor and model self-acceptance when I make mistakes
- Reacting calmly when he makes mistakes, and explaining that everyone makes mistakes and that mistakes help us learn and grow
- Helping him think about the ways his decisions affect not only him, but other people as well
- Reading books with him about people who are trying to learn something new or accomplish a goal
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**Approaches to Play and Learning: A Guide for Families**

*Not all children will be ready to master each of these skills right away. Parents will need to be patient and respect that each child learns at his own time and in her own way.*

**APL 1.** I help my child **do more for himself as his abilities grow**, and support and encourage him to **follow his own interests** by:

- Watching for signs that he is interested and ready to learn a new skill
- Giving him time to do things for himself, like zip his own jacket, even though it takes longer
- Being patient as he learns and letting him know that everyone makes mistakes and they are an important part of learning something new
- Encouraging him to choose activities he is most interested in
- Gradually putting him in charge of daily tasks like brushing teeth, choosing clothes, and dressing himself as he is ready for it

**APL 2.** I encourage my child to **be curious and enjoy learning** by:

- Providing interesting activities for her to explore and learn about
- Following her lead when she is interested in an activity and looking for ways I can help her learn more and go where her interests take her
- Sharing what I am interested in, and the activities I enjoy, with her
- Making learning fun by playing with her often and noticing what she is learning when she is playing
- Wondering with her about how things got to be the way they are
- Asking “What do you think?” before explaining something

**APL 3.** I help my child **stay focused and keep trying** when he is working on a task or learning something new by:

- Telling him stories about how he tried and learned to do new things as a baby, like talking, walking, toilet training, trying new foods, etc.
- Showing him how I need to practice when I am learning something new and sharing how good I feel when I succeed
- Praising him for trying, especially when the task is hard for him
- Suggesting that he take a break when he starts to get frustrated and encouraging him to try again later
- Noticing and pointing out his small successes on his way to mastering a new skill
- Celebrating with him when he finally succeeds!
APL 4. I encourage my child to **use her imagination and be creative** in her play by:

- Providing materials at home for pretend play, i.e. costumes, dress-up clothes, kitchen items, tools, puppets, and stuffed animals
- When pretending together, encouraging my child to “direct” me by telling me the role I’m playing and what I should say and do next
- Collecting unusual materials found in nature or around the house and encouraging my child to experiment and find new ways to make art or “inventions”
- Helping my child choose books for us to read together that spark her imagination and creativity

APL 5. I help my child **learn to cooperate** with other adults and children by:

- Practicing taking turns and sharing at home (when he is ready)
- Noticing and praising my child’s efforts to cooperate with friends and in our family, even when they’re not 100% successful
- Encouraging my child to think about what other people want and need when they’re doing an activity together
- When playing with siblings or other children, encouraging the children to try to solve any problems that come up on their own before asking adults to get involved

APL 6. I help my child **try to solve problems in different ways** and try new ways of doing things by:

- When my child asks me to get involved in a conflict with another child, trying to get the children to suggest possible solutions as a first step
- When my child suggests a solution to a problem, saying, “That’s one good idea. Can you think of other ways to solve the problem?”
- Providing toys and activities that build problem-solving skills, like blocks, puzzles, and games where children get to make choices

APL 7. I help my child **become an organized person** who is able to plan ahead and follow a schedule by:

- Gradually involving my child in picking up and organizing her toys by making it fun and challenging (Try using a timer and see if the child can “beat the clock;” or challenging your child to sort toys by size or color, etc.)
- Talking to my child about the next day’s schedule at bedtime, then reminding her again in the morning about what will first, next, and so on
- Putting up pictures in sequence to help my child learn the steps of daily routines like dressing, hand-washing, tooth brushing, and other activities
- Involving my child in household activities, like feeding pets, helping to measure and count when I’m cooking, and counting the right number of napkins, cups, or utensils for setting the table
- Playing games or singing songs where the players need to think ahead, follow directions or do things in a certain order, i.e., Simon Says, or songs like “Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes,” and “Bingo”

APL 8. I help my child **remember what he has learned** by:

- Playing board and card games that build memory skills
- Having conversations about what happened yesterday or last week
- Helping my child remember relatives who live far away by showing pictures and telling stories
- Reading a book together and asking questions about what happened in the book when we’re finished
Websites for Parents and Caregivers

CDC Essentials for Parenting  
www.cdc.gov/parents/essentials

Head Start  
https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/for-families

Mind in the Making  
www.mindinthemaking.org

NAEYC for Families  
families.naeyc.org

NBC Parent Toolkit  
www.parenttoolkit.com

PBS.org  
www.pbs.org/parents

Raising a Reader  
www.raisingareader.org

Resources for Early Learning  
www.resourcesforearlylearning.org

Vroom  
www.joinvroom.org

Zero to Three  
www.zerotothree.org

The Vroom App

A free app from Vroom provides daily learning tips to parents of young children on their mobile device. The activities build on everyday routines and activities, recognizing that busy parents with limited time need to build on existing routines rather than adding something new to their day. Vroom helps parents make the most of their time by integrating brain building activities into mealtime, bath time, and even clean-out-the-closets-time.

After downloading the app parents will receive a daily email message with a reminder to check for a daily learning tip, tailored to the age of their child. Here’s an example of an activity for four-year-old Travis:

“When you are getting Travis dressed in the morning, pick out his pants and then ask him to find a shirt that matches the color of his pants.”

A number of excellent resources are available on the Vroom website. Users can browse learning tips in categories like mealtime, bath time, laundry, or on-the-go. The science behind each Vroom activity is also available. Files can be downloaded and printed. The website also has a compelling video aimed at parents that shows how learning activities can be built into a busy day.

For more information on Vroom, visit their website: www.joinvroom.org
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SEL/APL
Professional Development Project

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