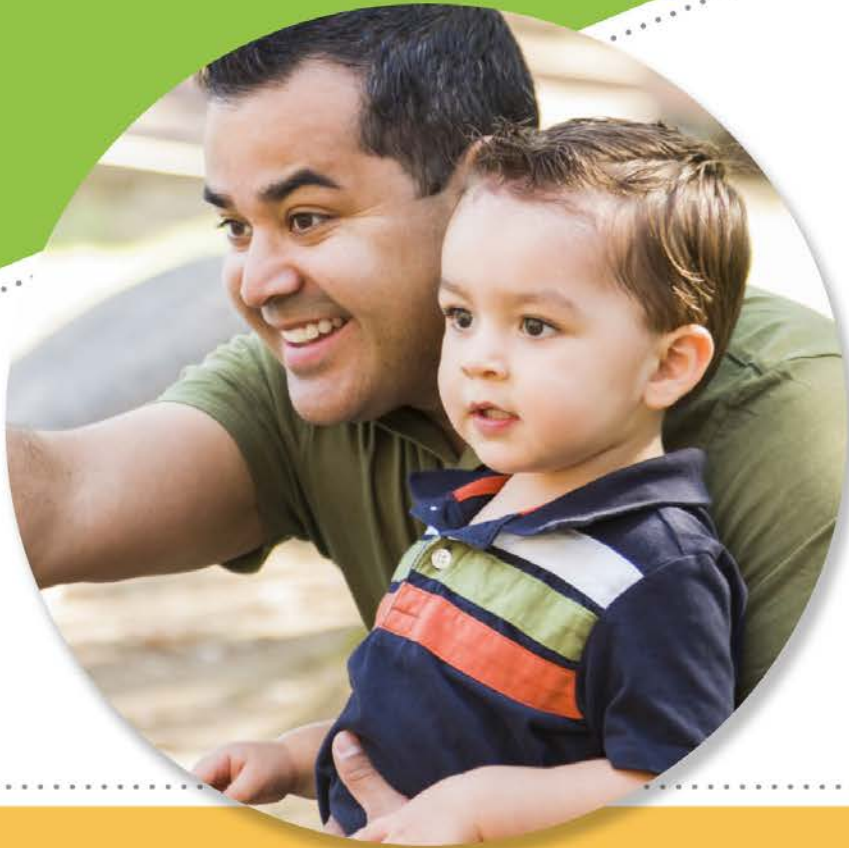


Playing to Learn and Learning to Play, an Interactive Parent Workshop



Corky Klimczak, MSW

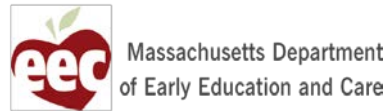


SEL / APL Professional Development Project



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Playing to Learn and Learning to Play

A fun and interactive parent workshop



The greatest gift you can give is the ability and desire to learn as children face new situations and challenges at every age.

Mariah Bruehl, *The Playful Guide to Raising Lifelong Learners*, 2013, www.playfullearning.net

Ground Rules

- **Confidentiality** – what we share stays here; each person's story is their own
- **Respect and non-judgment** – appreciation for everyone and their contributions
- Give others **the benefit of the doubt**
- **Listen well** - everyone deserves an opportunity to speak and be heard
- **Silence cell phones**
- Any other rules the group would like to add?

What We Mean by “Parents” and “Family”

For the purpose of this workshop, “parents” is understood to include all types of primary caregivers:

Birthparents, mothers, fathers, adoptive and foster parents, legal guardians, step-parents, grandparents and other extended family members providing primary care, etc.

“Family” is defined as:

“The closest relationships that a child has, customarily thought of as a mother or father and siblings, but often including foster family, grandparents and others who are significant in the child’s life”

What You Will Learn in “Playing to Learn and Learning to Play” Parent Workshop

1. Why playing with your children - also singing, reading and talking together every day - is so important to their growth and learning
2. Focusing on feelings to help your child learn important skills
3. Ways to build children’s learning through play
4. How to follow your child’s lead in play and expand the play to create a richer learning experience
5. Play activities that will help you connect with your child and help him or her learn

Playing to Learn and Learning to Play

Let's get to know one another!

- Find a partner you do not know well.
- Share:
 - your name,
 - the names and ages of your children,
 - who else lives in your home,
 - one positive thing and one not-so-positive thing about day-to-day life in your family at this point in time. If you finish early, continue chatting to get to know one another.

The positive thing is The Peach!
The not-so-positive thing is The Pit!

Playing to Learn and Learning to Play

- Stay with the same partner.
- This time, share some of your feelings about playing with your child(ren):
 - What comes to mind when you think about playing with your child(ren)? Do you have memories of playing with your parents or grandparents?
 - What kinds of play do you and your child(ren) most enjoy?
 - Are there play activities that your child enjoys, but you usually do not enjoy? Or that you enjoy, but your child does not enjoy?
 - Who usually chooses the activity and makes the rules when you play with your child?
 - Who usually decides when it is time to end the play activity?
 - How do you feel during and after a typical playtime?



Playing to Learn and Learning to Play

Imagine your child 30 years from now....

Part One:

- How do you hope you will be able to describe him or her? Write down a list of up to five words that describe the kind of person you are most hoping he or she will become.
- Share and list some of the characteristics we would like to see in our children when they become adults – or even sooner!

Part Two:

- How do you hope your child will look back and describe you as a parent?

Playing to Learn and Learning to Play

What is social and emotional learning for young children?

Learning to understand and **express feelings** appropriately

Learning to **control anger and impulses** (self-control)

Learning to **calm and soothe** oneself when upset

Feeling good about what they are **learning** and what they can do

Learning to understand and care about the feelings of others (**empathy**)

Learning to **respect differences** and form positive, cooperative relationships with others and to resolve conflicts

Learning how to be **responsible** and **make good decisions**

Learning to **seek and offer help**

MA Standards and Dodge and Bickart, *Preschool for Parents*

Playing to Learn and Learning to Play: What are Approaches to Play and Learning?

The ways children approach or respond to learning situations:

Taking charge of their own learning

With eagerness and curiosity

Trying hard and focusing on the task

With creativity

Cooperating with others

Looking for more than one solution

Being very organized

Remembering what is important



Activity:

Playing to Learn and Learning to Play

- Think of one of your child's favorite play activities. If possible, choose an activity that involves playing with others - adults or children.
- Who would like to share the activity they thought of? I will make a list of your ideas.
- Then, we can think together about some things children might be learning from these favorite play activities, and list those in another column.

Playing to Learn and Learning to Play

Some things children learn by playing:

Taking
turns and
sharing

The
relationship
between
cause and
effect

Understanding
how other
people feel
and act

That there are
lots of different
ways to do
things and
solve problems

That it
takes
practice to
become
skillful

That there are
different ways
to resolve
conflicts and
get their needs
met

Playing to Learn and Learning to Play

Did you know that **playing with you** is your young child's most important learning activity?

- Having fun together regularly will build a strong and positive parent-child relationship. Relationships are the building blocks of the brain and all later learning, including academic learning.
- “Children learn best when they are engaged in playful ways with important people in their everyday lives.”

Mind in the Making website

Playing to Learn and Learning to Play

Why **playing with you** is your young child's most important learning activity

- Research shows that the more animals play, the bigger their brains grow.

Paul Bailey's book, **Think of an Elephant**, 2007

- Parent engagement in child learning at home predicted greater academic achievement in children than any other form of parent involvement

Harris & Goodall, 2008; Downey, 2002; Izzo, Weissberg, Kaspro, & Fendich, 1999 cited in Coppel and Bredekamp, NAEYC, 2009

Playing to Learn and Learning to Play

Build-a-Brain Yarn Activity

Part 1. We are going to make a model of how our brains grow through play. When the ball of yarn comes to you, share an activity you like to do with your child(ren). Then toss the yarn across the circle to someone on the other side until everyone has had a turn.

Part 2. Now we will show how repeating an activity thickens and strengthens the connections in the brain. I will throw the yarn and we'll throw it back and forth representing a fun activity that is repeated many times. Watch what happens to the connection.

Part 3. The connections will get weaker if they are not reinforced by being used, but they can be built up again with more activity.

Raising a Reader website

Playing to Learn and Learning to Play

Brains are made up of billions of neurons, with trillions of connections between them. We just showed how they are bundled together into neural pathways.

A recent discovery is that we learn best when a lot of these brain pathways are all operating at the same time.

A great way to use and grow multiple pathways at the same time is . . .

Drumroll . . .

Play!!!!

www.wellsphere.com/parenting-article/play-it-s-good-for-the-brain/490899

Playing to Learn and Learning to Play

How Does it Feel?

In the next few slides we will explore some ways to play about feelings.

Mirror, Mirror - Part One

Find a partner you have not worked with before.

- Choose who will go first.
- **Using your face only**, act out a feeling and your partner will try to guess which feeling it is.
- Switch.
- Do this 2 times each.



Playing to Learn and Learning to Play

Mirror, Mirror - Part Two

- Same partners
 - This time you can use your face and your body.
 - Act out a feeling neither of you has acted out yet. When your partner guesses the feeling, he or she will try to name other feeling words that might also be used to describe the feeling (or a feeling closely related to it).
 - Do this once per person.

Adapted from Rae Pica, **Great Games for Young Children**, 2006

Playing to Learn and Learning to Play

Other games to play that teach about Feelings

Feeling Freeze Tag 1: Put on music and dance with your family. Stop the music and call out a feeling. Everyone needs to freeze in a pose that acts out the feeling. Notice all the different poses. Take turns calling out feelings.

Feeling Freeze Tag 2: Similar, but instead of calling out a feeling, have the dancers act out a feeling when the music stops, and guess which feeling each dancer is acting out.

Adapted from Rae Pica, **Great Games for Young Children**, 2006

Playing to Learn and Learning to Play

Fun with Feelings – Singing

Do you know the song, **If You're Happy and You Know It, Clap Your Hands?** Sing it with your child and make up new verses for other feelings. Let your child choose the actions for the new words.

For example:

- **If you're angry and you know it, stomp your feet.**
- **If you're excited and you know it, jump up and down.**
- **If you're sad and you know it, cry a tear - Boo Hoo!**

Make up new verses as your child learns new feeling words.

MA CSEFEL Positive Solutions Training, 4.10.12

Playing to Learn and Learning to Play

Did you know?

Researchers at Michigan State University found that when parents helped their toddlers to understand their feelings, it reduced behavioral problems when they were older.

Mind in the Making website - Prescriptions for Learning



Playing to Learn and Learning to Play

More Reasons to Play and Sing About Feelings

Children who know a lot of words for different feelings:

Tolerate
being
frustrated
better

Get into
fewer
fights

Are less
likely to be
destructive

Are less
lonely

Are less
impulsive

Perform
better in
school

Are
healthier

Are
more
focused

MA CSEFEL Positive Solutions Training, 4.10.12

Playing to Learn and Learning to Play

Social skills are key to children's success in Kindergarten.

Young children learn social skills through play and these skills are needed to help them succeed at all other kinds of learning.



Playing to Learn and Learning to Play

- Teaching, playing, and talking about feelings is very important, but it is equally important to listen and express acceptance, understanding, and concern for your child's feelings.
- The more you understand and validate their feelings, the less likely children are to feel the need to act on them.
- Children need to know that all feelings are OK, but not all ways of expressing them are acceptable.
- It is because children experience having their feelings understood and accepted that they can begin to learn about empathy.

Strategies for Raising Caring Kids handout, Collaborative for Educational Services

Playing to Learn and Learning to Play

Examples of Validating Children's Feelings:

"I hear that you really want me to buy that toy and that you will be sad if I don't buy it, but we are not going to buy a toy today. Your birthday is coming up. You could choose to put it on your birthday list."

"Are you getting frustrated with that puzzle? I see that the pieces aren't going in very easily. What else could you try?"

"It's OK to be mad at your sister, but it's not OK to hit or bite her. What else can you think of do with those mad feelings?"

Playing to Learn and Learning to Play

Talk, talk, talk while you're playing

Ask questions to expand the play while following your child's lead.

Open-ended questions:

- Leave room for many possible answers and encourage the kind of creative thinking that children will need as they grow up in this complex and fast-changing world.

Why did you decide to build the barn with red and blue blocks?

instead of

What color is that block? (only one correct answer)



Playing to Learn and Learning to Play

Talk, talk, talk while you're playing

Reflective Questions...

expand the play and lead your child to think more deeply

- Who will live in the house you're building?
- Why do you think the boy decided to follow the giant?
- What do you think the princess is feeling?
- How are you planning to attach the brown triangle to the pink one?
- What do you think will happen if you take that block out of the tower?

Playing to Learn and Learning to Play

Expanding your child's play

When you and your child are playing with blocks, trucks and cars

Ask:

- What kinds of buildings do these trucks need?
- Where are people in the car going?
- What will they do there?
- What do they need to take with them? Food? Clothing? Tools?
- Are they going alone or with others? Who?
- During the day, or at night? Will they go someplace different at different times of day?

.....Stephanie Brown and Raquel Rasmussen PowerPoint, *Increasing Language Development Through Play*

Playing to Learn and Learning to Play

Play Activity
Practice expanding the play

Pretend play scenario choices:

- firefighter is getting ready to go to a fire
- dancer is getting ready to go on stage
- teacher in a classroom
- puppy is lost in the woods

Other play choices: car and truck play, doll or stuffed animal play, playing with a ball

Playing to Learn and Learning to Play

Discussion questions after the practice play activity

- What questions or comments were made that were most successful in expanding the play and creating rich conversations?
- What was the child learning?
- What did you learn as the parent?

Playing to Learn and Learning to Play

The most important part of playing with your children is:

Having Fun !

Laugh, Be silly, Be creative, Be playful

And know that all that fun is adding up to rich learning experiences that will build the skills your children will need for success in school and in life.



Playing to Learn and Learning to Play

A big **thank you** for your participation in this workshop, especially for your willingness to take risks, ask questions, participate in activities, and for being open to learn more about playing with your children.

Please remember to fill out your evaluation form before you leave, then head home to play with your kids.



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