

## What should I not do during child-led play?

- Don't give commands about behaviour or what to do with toys, (e.g., "Let's build a house with the blocks.>").
- Don't change the direction of the play.

When teaching your child:

- don't test what your child knows or teach new concepts
- let her play with the toys in any way she likes that is not harmful—there is no one way or right way

Don't ask questions:

- This can be a way of taking control (e.g., "Do you want to build a tower?") or teach (e.g., "What colour is that block?").
- Asking too many questions can be very demanding of the child or set up a power struggle

Child-led play is a very valuable tool for building children's self-esteem and strengthening their relationships.

If you have questions or concerns, please call Access Mental Health at 403-943-1500 or your family doctor.

health information

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## Child-Led Play

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*This material is for information purposes only. It should not be used in place of medical advice, instruction, and/or treatment. If you have questions, speak with your doctor or appropriate healthcare provider.*



Young children's healthy emotional development depends on the quality of their early interactions with important adults.

Child-led play is a special, one-to-one play time between a parent (or other caregiver) and child.

The simple act of daily, child-led play is one way to:

- strengthen the parent-child relationship
- improve the child's sense of security that their parent is there to help them
- promote positive behaviours and to be able to handle different emotions
- build a child's sense of independence and self-confidence
- increases the time a child has for positive attention and close contact

### **What is involved?**

Each day, or every other day, have a special playtime with your child that lasts about 10 minutes.

Clear your schedule of any distractions for these 10 minutes so you can focus just on your child. It is important not to take phone calls or let other activities disrupt the time. Put aside your thoughts and worries so you can try to understand

what your child is *thinking, feeling,* and *doing.*

During this time help your child to direct and lead the play in any way she wants (that is not harmful or destructive).

### **What types of toys should I use?**

Types of toys or activities appropriate for child-lead play:

- familiar, non-competitive toys like blocks, cars, dolls, puzzles, Fisher-Price toys, etc.
- don't use books because then you take the lead rather than your child
- don't do computer/video activities or games

### **What do I do during this playtime?**

#### ***Set the Stage***

- Position yourself at your child's level, face to face.
- Watch your child's play activity closely.
- Wait to see what your child is interested in and what direction she is taking her play.

#### ***Follow your Child's Lead***

- Move to where your child moves (within reason).
- Respond when your child interacts with you.

- Join in the play when your child invites you. Try not to takeover the play.

### ***Describe What Your Child is Doing***

- Once in a while, describe some of your child's specific activities with the play materials (e.g., "There goes the car over the bridge", "You put the blue block on top.>").
- Imitate some of the things that your child does.
- Repeat what she does with the toy materials.
- Repeat what she says, adding to it a little (e.g., if your child says "There's the bus.", you could say "Yes, there goes the yellow bus up the hill.>").
- If she has or uses very little language, repeat the sounds she makes

### ***Praise Your Child***

- The best type of praise focuses on some quality of the child (e.g. "You really know how to build big towers.>").
- Praise behaviour you want a child to repeat (e.g., "You're being really careful with those blocks.>").
- Too much praise can take away from your child leading the play.