**Play-based learning for preschoolers**

Everyday activities can be fun learning opportunities. Pretending, creating and helping allows your child to discover new things. Play helps children learn about themselves and where they fit in the world. Evidence shows that play can support learning across physical, social, emotional and intellectual areas of development.

Let your child’s imagination run wild. Encourage them to play dress ups or pretend to be a favourite character. Ask them to tell you about it.

Play is often social – that is, it involves other children. Social play gives your child a chance to practise getting along with other children and to learn new skills.

A few suggestions of good play experiences for three to five-year-olds include:

* drawing, painting, finger painting and making potato prints
* emptying and filling containers in the bath or paddling pool – but never leave your child unsupervised
* dressing up in your old clothes, shoes and jewellery
* climbing, digging and running outdoors
* singing
* playing with dolls
* experiencing books.

It’s important for children to engage in both structured and unstructured play. Structured play (organised play) usually includes rules, time limits or special equipment. Examples of structured play include sports games, swimming lessons and dance lessons. Unstructured play (also known as free time) involves games that are made up on the spot or allow children to use the equipment around them as they like. Examples include playing at the park, imaginative play with make-believe stories and dancing to music at home.

There are many activities suitable for indoors and outdoors that you can play with your child. You can get creative with recyclable objects that you have around the house. Milk cartons can be used to mark goals (in sports matches) and toilet rolls can be used to build structures. It’s inexpensive and encourages your child to use their imagination and think creatively.

Ideas for indoor activities include:

* musical chairs and musical statues
* making an obstacle course
* jumping over soft objects or a rope
* acting out stories
* hide and seek
* follow the leader games
* throwing a soft ball or bean bag into a bucket
* involve your child in cooking and other household duties. Cooking teaches about healthy food, numbers and measurement, science, sharing and new words.

Ideas for outdoor activities include:

* running and stopping
* throwing and catching a ball
* hitting soft balls with a tennis racket or soft cricket bat
* follow the leader games
* going to the park and playing on the equipment
* potato sack races
* hop-scotch
* making an obstacle course
* making suggestions about imaginary play, for example asking ‘What would it be like to be small like a mouse?’, or providing props to use for play.

Read with your child every chance you get, words are everywhere! Talk about signs, food labels, and always keep a book handy.