

## The Play Continuum

For library staff supporting Lightly Guided Play and Guided Play in an open setting, such as with toys and manipulatives in the children's area, you may be playing and interacting with the children using the strategies noted, or you may be sharing these strategies with parents and caregivers.

<b>Materials</b>	<b>Free Play</b> Child-directed play No adult involvement	<b>Lightly Guided Play*</b> The adult plays alongside children and follow children's lead. The adult is intentional in scaffolding process thinking, content knowledge, and language.	<b>Guided Play</b> The adult defines learning goals and scaffolds the environment while children maintain control over learning. The adult plays alongside children, taking cues from children's explorations, adding questions, challenges and interactions to enrich play.	<b>Direct Instruction</b> Adult-directed teaching The adult gives instructions to participants.
Playdough of different colors Tools such as spoons, rolling pin	Provide materials in Column 1.	Provide materials in Column 1.  Children explore and experiment with materials. Through prompts and talking, the adult builds on children's explorations to increase learning.	What happens when you use different tools? What happens when you mix colors? Can you make [animal, food, maze]?	Find two colors that when you mush them together make orange (or make a different color) We read about different kinds of dogs. Make one of the dogs you saw in the photographs.
Empty cardboard cereal boxes or other boxes May add other empty containers (jars, for example)	Children explore these materials on their own or with other children.	The adult can: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observe what children are doing.</li> <li>• Nod, smile as children play</li> <li>• Follow the child's lead.</li> <li>• Offer prompts for the child to share what they are thinking.</li> <li>• Offer prompts to increase level of cognitive thinking, vocabulary, and language development.</li> <li>• Add information to support increased vocabulary and background knowledge.</li> </ul>	To explore measurement: Prompts "How tall can you build a tower?" "How can you build a structure that is big enough for you to sit in?" Compare sizes of towers/structures.  For problem-solving: "How can you make one box knock down another?" "How can you make the boxes move?"  How can you make a house? What do you think would happen if . . . ?	Today we talked about different kinds of homes. With these boxes, build a home you would like to live in.
Coffee filters Various colors of liquid watercolor Droppers			Suggest turning those colorful creations into butterflies and offer many bins with a variety of materials to use as antennae and embellishments on the wings (pipe cleaners, streamers, scraps of paper, etc.).	Use droppers with 2 colors, 2 pipe cleaners for antennae, add 2 circles on the wings, and 2 googly eyes to make a butterfly. Use the photographs of butterflies as your guide.
Photocopies of frogs and other pond animals Variety of construction paper, toilet paper tubes, crepe paper, natural materials, etc.			Ask children to make a pond for 5 frogs to live in with the materials provided. Have them count out 5 frogs and color them as they wish; also make the pond as they wish with variety of provided materials.	Provide children with 5 frogs to color, 1 toilet paper tube for log, and blue paper to make a pond. Show an example of the project. Give words to Five Green and Speckled Frogs so they will recite the rhyme using their props.

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<p>Block Play  <u>Stages</u>  <i>Carry, move, touch, hold, feel</i>  <i>Build rows/towers, stack</i>  <i>Build bridges and passageways</i>  <i>Build enclosures</i>  <i>Add patterning &amp; symmetry</i>  <i>Build familiar structures—early representational</i>  <i>Plan and build elaborate structures—later representational</i>  <a href="http://ready2readmontana.org">http://ready2readmontana.org</a>  <a href="https://sclid.org/7-stages-of-block-play-building-and-early-learning/">https://sclid.org/7-stages-of-block-play-building-and-early-learning/</a></p>	<p>Provide materials in Column 1.</p> <p>Children explore these materials on their own or with other children.</p>	<p>Provide materials in Column 1. Children explore and experiment with materials. Through prompts and talking, the adult builds on children's explorations to increase learning, adds new vocabulary and background information.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nod, smile as children play</li> <li>• Tell me about what you are making.</li> <li>• What do you think would happen if . . . ?</li> <li>• What else do you need to . . . ? (following the child's lead of what they want to do)</li> </ul>	<p>How would you make these animals fit?            What might happen if you add these sticks to your structure?            How do you think you could make it (taller, wider, longer, stronger)?            How can you make one block knock down another?            What can you do if you add this (ball, animal, etc.)?            How can you build a (fort, castle, house, skyscraper, etc)?</p>	<p>Let's use our blocks today to build patterns of shapes and colors. What is a pattern?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First, show me a pattern using colors. (blue, red, green, blue, red, green—any shapes)</li> <li>• Now, show me a pattern using shapes. (square, triangle, circle, square, triangle, circle—any colors)</li> <li>• How can you make a pattern using both shapes and colors? (red circle, red square, blue triangle, red circle, red square, blue triangle)</li> </ul>
<p>Dramatic Play            Form of symbolic play. Children pretend to take on roles, acting them out, with or without props. Roles may be fantasy or real-life settings and characters.</p> <p>Materials would include realistic props/toys for younger children who are at the pre-symbolic stage, and more open-ended items for older children who can engage in symbolic play (one thing represents another)            For example, clothing, dolls, stuffed animals, animals, puppets, utensils/tools of any kind, pretend appliances, play money, phone            Paper, blocks, playdoh, writing utensils, boxes</p>		<p>Provide materials in Column 1. Children explore and experiment with materials. Through prompts and talking, the adult builds on children's explorations to increase learning, adds new vocabulary and background information.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nod, smile as children play</li> <li>• Oh my! Tell me what you've got going on here!</li> <li>• What can I do to help? (follow child's lead, provide materials to support the scenario if possible)</li> <li>• How do you think this character feels?            You may want to encourage caregivers to get involved by directing their attention to prompts displayed nearby:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What would you like me to do?</li> <li>• Who should I be?</li> <li>• How do you think this character feels?</li> <li>• Follow the lead of your child.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>What would you do if . . . ?</p> <p>Adds a new character or situation. For example, with repetitive play, adult may guide to a new situation (If the child keeps serving the same food over and over again, the adult may say, "Oh, I am so full of pizza. I think we need to go to the grocery store for ingredients for another kind of food. What shall we make? Let's make a list of what we need.")</p> <p>Adult becomes a character, fitting into the situation the children have created, guiding play for a purpose and adding conversations about feelings, new vocabulary and information.</p>	<p>We read the Three Little Pigs today. Let's see what we can use to act out this story.</p>

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Paper Watercolor paints White crayons		Provide materials in Column 1.  Children explore and experiment with materials. Through prompts and talking, the adult builds on children's explorations to increase learning. The adult can: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observe what children are doing.</li> <li>• Nod, smile as children play</li> <li>• Follow the child's lead.</li> </ul>	Ask children to first color on the paper with the white crayon. Next paint with water color on top of the paper to see "hidden" drawings.	Have children write the letter of their first name, or draw a shape (or whatever) with the white crayon. Then paint watercolor on top in rainbow order.
Playdoh, Googly eyes Pipe cleaners, Random materials Tools		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer prompts for the child to share what they are thinking.</li> <li>• Offer prompts to increase level of cognitive thinking and language development.</li> <li>• Add information to support increased vocabulary and background knowledge.</li> </ul>	Ask children to make monsters and tell a story about their monster.  What do you think would happen next?	Read <i>Go Away, Big Green Monster</i> by Ed Emberley. Provide green playdoh, 2 googly eyes, 2 popsicle sticks, yarn and tools to make a playdoh monster that looks like the one in the book. Retell the story in the book.

**\* Samples of adult conversation starters to enhance thinking and expression in Guided Play**

- I notice . . .
- What do you notice?
- I wonder . . .
- Tell me more
- How could we find out more?
- How did that feel to you? (easy/hard, etc)
- What are you most proud of?
- What would you try differently next time?
- Why do you think? (something happened, character did that)
- How would you feel if ?
- What's the same/different?
- Can you find a way to . . . ?
- How can we work together?
- What is going on here? (or in this picture if with a book)  
What did you see that makes you say that?
- What more can we find?

**Consider this:** the younger the children the more the play is about observation and exploration of the objects in world around them. This is done largely through free play and lightly guided play.  
The older the children, free play and lightly guided play can be supplemented with guided play and direct instruction to enhance discovery and understanding.

## The Play Continuum

### An Example

Dr. Betsy Diamant-Cohen, Mother Goose on the Loose

Materials	Free Play	Lightly Guided Play.	Guided Play	Direct Instruction
Colorful scarves	Children explore these materials on their own or with other children.	<p>Children explore and experiment with materials. Through prompts and talking, the adult builds on children's explorations to increase learning. The adult can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observe what children are doing.</li> <li>• Follow the child's lead.</li> <li>• Offer prompts for the child to share what they are thinking.</li> <li>• Offer prompts to increase level of cognitive thinking and language development.</li> <li>• Add information to support increased vocabulary and background knowledge.</li> </ul> <p>Possibilities: The adult names the ways the child is playing with the scarf—wave, crinkle, wiggle, drop, throw, catch, smush, taste, bounce, watch, feel it Plays peek-a-boo Narrates what the child is doing with the scarves</p>	<p>Nursery Rhyme Play: The adult says nursery rhymes that can be recited and "acted out" with scarves. For example, "Jack in the box, sitting so still. Won't you come out? Yes, I will!" and throwing the scarf up in the air, then watching it come fluttering down. Baby may watch the adult do this and talk about the actions. Older children will imitate the actions.</p> <p>Play color games Play number games Play sorting games Hide and find the scarf Move to music with the scarf</p> <p>Problem-solving: How can you make the scarves reach across the room? How can you make scarves fall faster or slower?</p>	<p>To support sorting: Hand out scarves of different sizes, colors, textures, opaque and transparent.</p> <p>Ask children to sort according to different attributes.</p>