
HALTON EARLY YEARS MENTAL HEALTH TOOLKIT



Play is the work of children. Learning happens through play.

Play positively supports children’s social-emotional, fine motor, gross motor, cognitive, language and literacy skills. Play has an essential role in building children’s resilience across adaptive systems; pleasure, emotion regulation, stress response systems, peer and place attachments, learning and creativity. Integrating play into everyday moments fosters critical skills for learning.



Take it Further...

Learn about it... The importance of play (p.23 EYMH Common Message Paper)

Play is universal.

It can take various forms: structured and unstructured, active or exploratory, with peers, adults or independently.

Play creates opportunities for children to develop early literacy, mathematical, thinking, problem solving, and social skills.

Culture impacts how play is viewed and valued.

Children learn about their culture through play as they create worlds that mirror their own.

A growing body of research shows that the skills important to school success are enhanced by play. For example, pretend play is related to children’s abilities to begin to think abstractly and develop empathy.

Take a deeper dive. Watch the following video:

[Brains At Play](#)

Talk about it... Tell caregivers and colleagues about play

Play:

- Supports healthy brain development.
- Builds healthy relationships.
- Develops children’s physical literacy (strength, agility and coordination).
- Nurtures creativity and problem solving skills.
- Promotes essential social-emotional skills such as taking turns, sharing, cooperating, getting along with others, developing empathy and care for others.

- Creates opportunities to master new skills helping children to feel competent and capable.
- Fosters resiliency.

Take a deeper dive. Watch the following video:

[The importance of play](#)

Try it... Moving from knowledge to practise

Create safe environments for children to play. Allow them to explore and learn about themselves and the world around them.

Provide opportunities for both structured and unstructured play, both indoors and outdoors.

Integrate play into everyday activities. For example, counting apples while grocery shopping or by playing 'I spy my little eye!' on the car ride home.

Follow the child's lead and support their exploration.

Use what is found in the child's environment to provide playful experiences. Items such as large cardboard boxes encourage imaginative play, after all...it is just [not a box!](#)

Provide play materials that allow children to see themselves and their culture in the materials i.e. books, dolls, posters, play food etc.

Download free APPs that provide practical ideas that promote learning through play:

- [Zero to Three – Let's Play!](#)
- [Daily Vroom APP.](#)

Refer to '[How does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years](#)' and reflect on how you can strengthen program activities and your interactions with families/children through play.

Direct caregivers to the [Healthy Baby Healthy Brain](#) website to learn how everyday play can build healthy brains.

Take a deeper dive. Watch the following video:

[Healthy Baby Healthy Brain: Playing Builds Brains](#)



For more detailed information go to [Social-Emotional Development in the Early Years: A Common Message Paper \(2nd Ed.\)](#), published by the Halton Early Years Mental Health Committee (EYMHC) to provide professionals with common messages on early social-emotional development.

EYMH Committee members:

Halton Region Health Department
Halton Region Social and Community Services
Reach Out Centre for Kids (ROCK)
Halton Children's Aid Society

ErinoakKids Centre for Treatment and Development
EarlyON Child and Family Centres
Community Living Burlington

Our Kids Network (OKN) and EYMHC work in partnership to manage the [Early Years Mental Health Toolkit](#) on the OKN website.