



# LEARNING OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL



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## WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

This booklet is a resource for teachers and facilitators as they support families to engage in Parent Time and Parent and Child Together (PACT) Time® at home. Inside you will find descriptions of Parent Time and PACT Time offered to strengthen both practitioners' and families' understanding of these engagement practices. Ten practical examples of Parent Time and PACT Time activities that can be copied and shared with families are also included.

We hope you find this resource useful as you work toward supporting families in their role as their child's first and most influential teacher.



# PARENT TIME AND PACT TIME<sup>®</sup> FOR PRACTITIONERS

## Using the Parent Time and PACT Time Activities

The activities in this resource are designed to support families as they take part in engagement activities outside the classroom setting.

These Parent Time and PACT Time activities are meant for use together. The Parent Time activity provides information to adult family members about the skill or strategy they will focus on during PACT Time with their child, and the corresponding PACT Time activity provides families with an opportunity to apply the skill or strategy explored during Parent Time.



Here is one suggested way to use the activities:

- Begin with Parent Time. Share the activity page and provide space/time for families to ask questions or clarify their understanding of the topic.
- Next, share the PACT Time activity with families and provide space/time for families to ask questions, develop strategies, or clarify their role during the activity.
- Families engage in the PACT Time activity.
- Finally, provide space/time for families to debrief and share their experiences during PACT Time and receive feedback from a teacher or learn from each other.

Presenting both the Parent Time and PACT Time pair of activities, and including opportunities for reflection and sharing experiences, provides families with a comprehensive family engagement experience.

A template for creating connected Parent Time and PACT Time activities is included in the Resources section of this booklet. Practitioners can use the template to create additional engagement activities designed with families' needs and interests in mind.

## Participation and Documentation

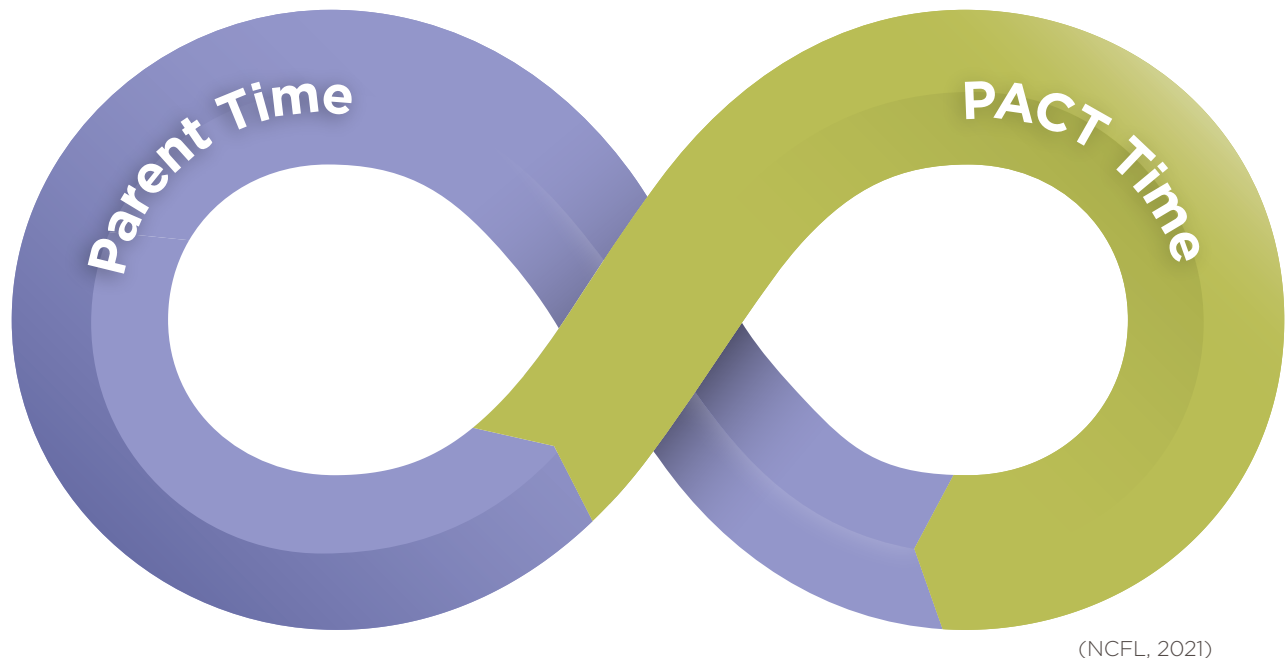
Documenting the activities offered and a family's participation in parent engagement activities at home may look a little different from in person. Engagement tracking depends on how you are communicating with families. Here are a few strategies and tools that will be helpful in documenting parent engagement:

- Practitioners and families can use the Family Engagement Log included in the Resources section of this booklet to track participation hours. Have a Parent Time session to familiarize families with the Family Engagement Log and share expectations for completion along with directions for sharing the completed document with you. You can use this form with in-person, distance, and virtual learning program delivery models.
- Distance learning happens when communicating with families without the support of technology. In addition to the Family Engagement Log, families can track their participation in activities by responding to Parent Time content and PACT Time reflections in a journal periodically shared with the teacher. The teacher comments on journal entries and sends it back to the family. Teachers can also communicate with families during an individual phone call or with the group in a conference call.
- Virtual learning happens when teachers and families communicate with the support of technology. There are free, web-based tools—such as Google Meets or Zoom—available to bring families together virtually to learn, share successes, and share strategies for overcoming challenges.



It will be up to your program to determine which strategies will work best for involving families around family engagement in-person, at home, and in their communities.

## PARENT TIME AND PACT TIME® FOR FAMILIES



(NCFL, 2021)

### Parent Time

Parent Time is a chance to engage parenting adults in strategies to help their children develop and learn. Parenting adults gain information to extend and develop knowledge of culture and language, child development, and healthy routines. Parenting adults explore ways to create PACT Time daily to increase connection with their child as their child's first and most important teacher.

### Parent and Child Together (PACT) Time®

Families and children work and play together during PACT Time. The parents support their child's development with information they learned during Parent Time. This is an opportunity for parenting adults to follow their child's lead and take part in their play. They learn how their children are developing, and how they work best through PACT Time interactions. PACT Time can happen in the classroom or at home. When families are interacting and playing during PACT Time, there is a lot of learning and fun that can happen!

# PARENT TIME AND PACT TIME<sup>®</sup> ACTIVITIES

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**Following Your Child's  
Lead During Play**

**Playtime Conversations**

**Writing During Play**

**Dialogic Reading**

**Math Play**

**Box Play**

**Storytelling**

**Water Play**

**Shadow Play**

**Outdoor Play**

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# FOLLOWING YOUR CHILD'S LEAD DURING PLAY

## PARENT TIME

### What We're Learning

Children have their own ideas about how to play, and child-led play lets them explore those ideas. One of the most important things you can do for your child is to allow them to lead their play. Following your child's lead involves stepping back and noticing what your child is actually doing and then going along with their plan. Also, when your child leads, they build communication skills and learn how they can influence things around them.

### Parents, Did You Know?

You don't need any materials or equipment to follow your child's lead during play. All you need to do is take part in whatever your child is interested in at the time. Following your child's lead is good because your child learns best when they are interested in an activity. When you follow your child's lead in play, you can take advantage of their interests to help them learn something new through play. They may be interested in a toy, or something in the environment like a bird or the sound of a siren. They may also be interested in you, and the funny faces or sounds you are making together!

- Observe your child to identify the toys, materials, activities, and people they find interesting. Things they spend a lot of time doing and that make them smile, laugh, or get excited about indicate their interest and possible times you can follow their lead.
- Encourage your child to interact with you by getting at their level. Get down on the floor with your child, look directly at them, and show interest in what they are doing. When your child does something to start interacting with you like saying something or gesturing to you, make sure your response is related to what your child said or did.





- Match your response to your child’s behavior. Make comments that match the topic of your child’s communication. If they are excited, your response should match their excitement. If they are puzzled, you are puzzled too and proceed to problem-solve with them.

## Next Steps

- Include enough time for extended play in your family’s daily schedule. This gives your child time and opportunities to choose and explore their interests.
- Arrange materials and toys so they are easily accessible to your child. This supports your child’s growing independence and ability to self-select activities.
- Focus on your child’s engagement and their learning—not on the activity itself. You help extend their play and support learning by focusing more on the “how” and “why” of their activity and less on the “what.”



# FOLLOWING YOUR CHILD'S LEAD DURING PLAY

## PARENT AND CHILD TOGETHER (PACT) TIME®

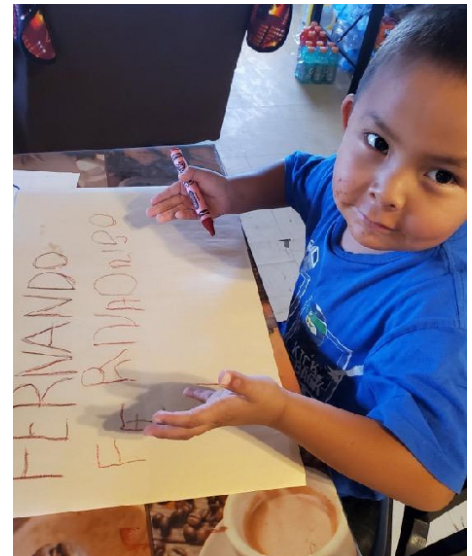
### Together Time

As your child begins to play, take a moment to observe before joining. This gives your child the chance to decide what and how they want to play, and it gives you time to see what they are interested in. It could be something they're playing with, like a ball, or something they're doing, like jumping over trucks.

### Activity

Ask your child if you can join in. Be okay if they indicate they'd prefer to play alone. Remain close by and observe the play. Your child may eventually invite you to join them when they see you watching. Try to avoid changing the way the activity is happening once you are invited to play.

- Imitate what your child is doing. If they are building a tower with blocks, you build a tower with blocks too. To extend the play, try adding two more blocks to your tower, making it taller than your child's. Watch to see how your child responds. Did they copy you and add blocks to their tower? Or, did they do something different that you can copy in return?
- Avoid trying to draw your child's attention to something different. It is okay to suggest new materials and ideas that extend your child's current interest. Trying to engage your child in something completely unconnected to their current play makes you the leader instead of your child.
- Ask questions and discuss the play experience. Statements such as, "I wonder what would happen if..." and "Can you tell me more about...?" give your child the opportunity to practice using language while playing and gives you an opportunity to extend your child's critical thinking skills.





## Hints for Success

- Your child’s interests may change often during a single playtime—continue to let them be the leader. For example, if they stop coloring and move to playing with a ball, move to playing with the ball with them.
- Children don’t always talk about their play—sometimes they just play. You can follow their eye direction to see what they are interested in. You can move that object closer to them to see if they engage with it or you can play with the object yourself. Observe your child’s response to determine if you are still following their lead and adjust your actions accordingly.
- Remember that your child still needs you to encourage and help them if they are having trouble or feeling overwhelmed.

## Reflection

Following your child’s lead involves your child participating in activities based on their interest. You support their learning and development by observing and extending their actions and interactions with materials and people and supporting their choices when their interests and activities change. When families follow their child’s lead, they help their children become more confident and capable learners.



### Children’s Books to Support This Concept

- “What We’ll Build” by Oliver Jeffers
- “Everywhere, Wonder” by Matthew Swanson
- “Imagination Vacation” by Jami Gigot

# PLAYTIME CONVERSATIONS

## PARENT TIME

### What We're Learning

Conversation skills are important for children's development and well-being. Being able to have conversations helps children make friends, be listened to, ask for what they need, and develop strong relationships with others. To develop good conversation skills, your child needs to learn words, simple sentences and turn-taking, as well as follow your family's rules about how you speak to each other and to others. When you spend time talking and playing together, it also strengthens your relationship with your child. And a strong relationship with you is essential to development, because it gives your child the confidence to keep exploring and learning.

### Parents, Did You Know?

Learning how to talk with and listen to other people is a skill that takes time and practice to master. Some children pick this up quickly, and others blossom with continued practice, prompts, and guidance. Children will often mimic or copy conversations that they have heard you or others engage in by repeating those conversations during their play. This type of role-playing during play is a safe and natural way for children to make sense of situations or words they have heard from others. When this happens, follow your child's lead, assume a role in the conversation, wait for your turn to talk, and respond to what you heard your child say to keep the conversation going.



- Sometimes your child may use inappropriate words or phrases during your conversations. If this happens, talk with your child about polite speaking and respectful conversation. It's important to talk with your child about conversational rules so they understand your feelings and expectations about what appropriate conversation is.

- Learning to take turns is a conversational skill that can be practiced in a variety of ways. Playing games, sharing toys, even waiting in line for your turn are common situations that can be used to reinforce taking turns. Waiting for a turn is sometimes difficult for young children. Have a conversation with your child about how they feel when they must wait. This is an opportunity to share words that help children name their feelings and emotions which also strengthens their social and emotional skills.
- If you are raising a multilingual or bilingual child, conversational skills can be practiced in any language! All languages offer the opportunity to share new words, practice using them to speak in sentences, and involve taking turns listening and talking.

## Next Steps

- Give words to your child. Preschool-aged children often have so much news to share that sometimes they may stumble over their words, stutter, and get frustrated—this is common and okay. Just give your preschooler time and keep listening. Other times, children get stuck because they do not know the correct word to say. When you notice this, ask questions to determine which word they need to complete their thought. When you think you have figured out the word they need, simply tell them the word and encourage them to use it to finish communicating their thoughts.
- Practice patience. Conversations with young children move at a slower pace than conversations with older children and adults. Give your child time to organize thoughts in their brains and then give them more time to move the thoughts from their brains to their lips.



## PLAYTIME CONVERSATIONS

### PARENT AND CHILD TOGETHER (PACT) TIME<sup>®</sup>

#### Together Time

Children learn best through play. Playing with your child gives you many opportunities to talk. And the more you play and talk together, the more words your child hears and learns to use. Pretend play can be a fun way to help them develop and practice using new words in longer sentences and engage in extended conversations.

#### Activity

Observe your child at play. Think about the activity that you are watching your child engage in and identify a few things that you could talk with them about that connects to their play. For example, if your child is playing with cars, talk to your child about how cars move, the parts of a car, or different models of cars. Other ways to engage your child in conversation while they play include:

- Ask questions about their play. Children are usually eager to talk about their playtime activities. Asking questions gets the conversation started. You can keep the conversation going by listening closely and connecting your response to what you heard your child say.
- Share new words or concepts that will add to their play. When your child refers to something as a “thing,” that usually indicates they do not know the name of the item. Give them the name of the object and encourage them to use the new word to tell you more about it.
- Model listening and turn taking during your conversations. Children learn from our actions as well as from our words.



## Hints for Success

- Sometimes children are so engaged with their play that they do not want to talk. Let them continue playing, wait until they are less engaged, and have a conversation then.
- Praise children when they're communicating well. This will make them want to keep doing it. For example, you could say, "I love the way you waited for me to finish speaking before you started talking." Or "You did really well with explaining the game to me. I understand how to play now!"
- Monitor the body language and tone of voice displayed by you and by your child during conversations. Both can be indicators that everything is okay, or that something needs attention.

## Reflection

- Play is the main way that young children develop, learn, and explore the world. When you watch your child play, you're able to see many connected topics that you can talk about with them. Your child will develop conversational skills as they listen and watch you speak with them and with others. Having conversations with your child as they play—and about their play—motivates them to use words more, stimulates their thinking, and strengthens your relationship all at the same time!



### Children's Books to Support This Concept

- "Preaching to the Chickens" by Jabari Asim
- "Herman Jiggle, Say Hello!" by Julia Cook
- "Shy" by Deborah Freedman

# WRITING DURING PLAY

## PARENT TIME

### What We're Learning

Learning to write is a process that begins with an exploration of writing tools, moves to drawing and scribbling, includes making letter-like marks, and continues through using recognizable letters to write words. Connecting writing experiences to your child's play is a natural way of encouraging them to explore and engage in the writing process. Providing a variety of writing tools and materials stimulates interest around writing.

### Parents, Did You Know?

Children's writing development moves through stages on their way toward becoming proficient writers. Young children need time and opportunities to explore writing tools like pencils and crayons. Through trial and error, they discover how to handle and manipulate the tools to make marks on paper, scribble, draw, and write letters. With your support and encouragement, your child's journey through the process will be full of meaningful and enjoyable experiences around writing. Here are a few additional things you can do to support writing during play:

- Provide opportunities for your child to use their hands to pinch, squeeze, roll, and flatten materials. These types of movements strengthen the small muscles in a child's hand that allow them to manipulate writing tools accurately and confidently. Playdough, puzzles, sand play, and cutting with scissors are all activities that develop muscle strength and finger control.
- Place writing tools and materials in a place that your child can access independently. Include tools like crayons, markers, and colored pencils. Provide paper in a variety of colors, shapes, and sizes. Children also enjoy writing on note pads, sticky notes, clipboards, and white boards.





Model writing. Your child will want to imitate your actions. Talk about what you write and why you are writing it. Share your thinking about your writing as you write. When you say, “We need to buy tomatoes when we go to the store. I am going to write ‘tomatoes’ on the grocery list so I won’t forget,” as you are writing the word on your list, you are helping your child to learn one of the reasons why people write lists—so they won’t forget. Writing to-do lists, notes, and invitations are examples of common adult writing activities that can be modeled and shared with your child.

### Next Steps

- Gather real-life examples of writing that your child can use during play. Including real restaurant menus during pretend play adds an element of authenticity and provides an example of how writing is used in the world. A real blueprint or drawing of a structure can motivate your child to write or draw about what they’ve built with blocks.
- Writing and reading are connected, but children need support making that connection. Fill your environment with examples of writing. Posters and calendars that display words and numbers provide your child with real life examples of writing that is read. Including a variety of fiction and nonfiction books in your environment will also strengthen the writing–reading connection for your child.



## WRITING DURING PLAY

### PARENT AND CHILD TOGETHER (PACT) TIME®

#### Together Time

Writing is an excellent way for children to express their thoughts, creativity, and uniqueness. Building your child’s interest in writing and developing writing skills can happen naturally as they play. Writing about play and as part of play is more instructive and meaningful to your child than tracing letters on a worksheet.

#### Activity

During play, look for opportunities to connect drawing and writing. Ask questions about your child’s writing to show them you are interested in their thoughts and ideas. Give positive feedback to keep interest in writing high.

- Take writing outside! Your child can write or draw with chalk or old paintbrushes and water on sidewalks or fences. Sticks can become pencils and used to write in dirt or sand.
- One of the first words children usually learn to write is their first name. Names are meaningful to children. Writing the first letter of their first name is typically cause for celebration! Provide your child with written examples of their name and upper case and lowercase letters that they can use when playing. You can support this interest during play by encouraging children to “sign” their artwork, because that’s what artists do. During pretend play as a doctor, encourage the doctor to “sign” their name on the prescription—because that’s what doctors do. Providing authentic reasons to write is motivating to young children.
- Model writing by offering to “write it down” for your child. When they have created a wonderful pretend meal for you, offer to write the recipe down. Invite your child to draw pictures of the food. The written recipe and the drawing can be put with others to make a cookbook that can be read repeatedly. This activity teaches children that what is spoken can be written and what is written can be read.





## Hints for Success

- Accept and celebrate every mark, scribble, drawing, or letter your child writes. Your enthusiasm and excitement will encourage them to continue taking risks as their writing skills develop.
- Teach your child how to properly take out and put away writing materials. Pay close attention to markers that will dry out if not capped properly. Placing caps securely on markers is also an excellent activity to strengthen small muscles in the fingers.
- Rotate the writing tools and materials that your child has access to. Children like to explore new things. Occasionally providing new and different writing materials helps keep children interested in writing.

## Reflection

Writing might seem like an easy process to adults, but it is actually a complicated process for children to master. Writing involves the mind and body working together to produce symbols that communicate thoughts and ideas to others. Examine your day-to-day life to see where you can find opportunities to model and share writing with your child. Connecting writing to topics that your child shows interest in is motivating and helps them to see how writing is used in our everyday lives.



### Children's Books to Support This Concept

- "A Squiggly Story" by Andrew Larsen
- "Chalk" by Bill Thomson
- "The Day the Crayons Quit" by Drew Daywalt

# DIALOGIC READING

## PARENT TIME

### What We're Learning

Reading aloud with your child is a powerful experience. One way to spark a conversation while reading together is to use dialogic reading. Dialogic reading means having a dialog or talking while reading. One way to use dialogic reading is to apply the PEER sequence. Following the PEER sequence while reading together will help you have a conversation with your child.

**Prompt** your child with a question about the book like “Where are they going?”

**Evaluate** the response your child gives by thinking about the answers. Did they give an accurate response? Was it more than one word?

**Expand** on what your child said by giving more vocabulary. If your child said that the characters were going to the store, you could tell them there are many types of stores and give examples like grocery or hardware stores to expand their vocabulary.

**Repeat** your child’s response and invite them to say what you said. Your child could say they are going to the grocery store to buy bread.

### Parents, Did You Know?

Reading aloud with your child is a powerful bonding experience. When you read aloud to your child, it creates physical closeness that feels good. Touch, like a hug, a back rub, or sitting close, is a way to calm your children. You can do this when you read a book together.

- Dialogic reading can help children extend and expand their language. This is a powerful and meaningful way for children to develop and practice language.
  - If your child gives a one- or two-word answer, the family can extend that response into a complete sentence.
  - If the family notices the child has a question, they can expand their child’s knowledge by providing an answer.



- When in doubt, ask a question using a word that begins with the letters WH. These WH question words get children thinking beyond the right or wrong answer. For example, instead of asking your child to name something in the story that is red, ask them **where** they noticed red in the story and **why** they thought it was in the story. These types of questions get children thinking:



### Next Steps

Reading a children’s book before you read it to your child has many benefits. By pre-reading you will plan questions to ask your child and point out words they may be unfamiliar with. Try pre-reading the next book you would like to read aloud to your child to see if it helps with dialogic reading.



## DIALOGIC READING

### PARENT AND CHILD TOGETHER (PACT) TIME®

#### Together Time

Reading aloud with your child is one of the most important things families can do together. It helps increase a child's interest in reading and improves their vocabulary. These are very important skills for early readers to have. Make time to read with your child every day; set aside 10 to 15 minutes to enjoy a story together. Remember, families can read a book more than once—children do not tire of hearing a favorite story.

#### Activity

When your child shows interest in a book, get close to them and read together. If you haven't read the book before, take time to pre-read the book. This will give you an idea of what questions to ask your child and exciting ways to read the book. Children get really excited when you change your voice during reading.

- Practice the PEER sequence while reading to your child. At the end of the book, reflect on the conversation you and your child had while reading.
- Read a book many times in the same week. As your child becomes more familiar with the text they can read along with you and will have more to say about the book.
- Look for similarities and differences in the books you read and talk with your child about them. Maybe you read a fiction book one day and a nonfiction book the next. Start a conversation with your child about the two books.



## Hints for Success

- Involve your child in choosing books to read. They will be more interested in the story if they have input on the topic.
- Make books visible and accessible to your child by keeping them in the same place or by creating a home library.
- Use libraries, the Internet, and the school as resources to increase the number of books in your home library.
- Add a twist to reading with your child and take the book outside. Reading outside is fun and families might make a connection between the book and nature.

## Reflection

Reading with your child is a powerful experience for both children and families. Reflect on how you felt about reading with your child and if you had a conversation while reading. Think about how you can adjust to meet your needs while providing your child with an important reading and talking experience. Making slight adjustments to your reading routine can make it more enjoyable and doable to fit in your daily routine.



### Children's Books to Support This Concept

- “The Little Mouse, the Red Ripe Strawberry, and the Big Hungry Bear”  
by Don Wood
- “Snowy Day” by Ezra Jack Kests
- “A Visitor for Bear” by Bonny Becker
- “Thunder Boy Jr.” by Sherman Alexie

# MATH PLAY

## PARENT TIME

### What We're Learning

Math is all around us and children are having math-related experiences every day that don't involve taking out flashcards during playtime. Enhance your child's math learning by asking questions that clarify, extend, challenge, and develop new understandings during their play.

### Parents, Did You Know?

Just like a house is built on a strong foundation, most advanced math skills are based on an early math foundation. Counting objects, recognizing numerals, and understanding size, shape, and patterns are some of the foundational skills that can be strengthened during play. As you play with your child, your engagement and encouragement help to build that foundation. You can support your child by introducing ideas like:

- Representing math ideas by using words, pictures, symbols, or objects. Suppose your child is playing with blocks and has built a tower. Helping them to draw a picture of their tower could lead to further conversations about shape and size.
- Recognizing and creating patterns. Patterns are things, numbers, shapes, and images that repeat in a logical way. Patterns help children learn to make predictions, to understand what comes next, to make logical connections, and to use reasoning skills—all important math skills.
- Problem-solving activities like puzzles, putting things together, or taking things apart require children to think about the possibilities and experiment with what works to find a solution. Being able to think through a problem or recognize that there is more than one way to solve a problem is not only an important math skill, it's an important life skill.





- Using math language when talking daily with your child helps to develop their understanding of math concepts. Using words such as **tall, short, heavy, light, today, tomorrow, yesterday, hot, cold, more,** and **less** help children compare size, weight, time, and temperature. Include position words like **under, over, front, back, behind, inside, outside, between,** and **middle** when talking about where something is located. Intentionally use number words when describing objects and people. For example, “We need to buy **three** lemons and **two** tomatoes when we go to the store,” and then counting to make sure you have the correct number.



## Next Steps

- Collect small items such as buttons, stones, or leaves that can be used for counting, sorting, and making patterns. Include your child in the collection process to ensure they are interested in the objects. Choose a special place to keep the collection so your child can access it whenever they want to play with the items.
- Identify parts of your child’s daily routine that could include math concepts. For example, sorting the laundry according to color; setting the table for a certain number of people; or helping to stir, measure, fill and pour when cooking are all activities that use math.
- Be positive! Your attitude matters, so have fun introducing and connecting math experiences to your child’s play.

## MATH PLAY

### PARENT AND CHILD TOGETHER (PACT) TIME®

#### Together Time

Math is much more than numbers. It is also thinking about shapes, patterns, size, weight, measurement and how they all fit together—or not! Math also has its own language. Numbers, symbols, and words are used to describe concepts. When your child is playing, use their natural curiosity as a guide to which math ideas you can connect to what they are doing or using.

#### Activity

Observe your child at play. Identify a math-related focus connected to your child’s selected activity. During play, look for opportunities to insert the math focus you’ve chosen by talking with your child and asking questions about what they are doing or how they are doing it.

- Listen to music together. Find the patterns in the music. Use your hands and feet to copy the pattern and play along with the music.
- Take a walk. There are many opportunities to compare (Which stone is bigger?), assess (How many acorns did we find?), note similarities and differences (Does the duck have fur like the bunny does?), and categorize (See if you can find some red leaves). You can also talk about size (Which tree or house is taller?), estimate distance (Is the park close to our house or far away?), and practice counting (Let’s count how many steps until we get to the corner).
- Collect small toys, shells, pebbles, or buttons that can be used to practice counting with your child. They can also be sorted based on size, color, or what they do. For example, all the cars in one pile and all the animals in another.





## Hints for Success

- Keep pencils, crayons, and paper available to allow your child to represent their math thinking in a new and different way.
- Talk about math wherever you are. Talking about math concepts helps your child’s vocabulary grow and deepens their understanding of language and math.
- Give your child time to play before inviting them to solve a problem. This gives your child a chance to explore and learn about the materials they are playing with before being asked to use the materials to problem-solve.

## Reflection

Math is everywhere! Before joining your child’s play, take a moment to watch what they’re doing. As you’re observing, identify the math that is naturally part of their chosen playtime activity. Encourage thinking around these concepts by asking questions and supporting your child to use math language in their playtime conversations.



### Children’s Books to Support This Concept

- “Ten on a Twig” by Lo Cole
- “Pitter Pattern” by Joyce Hesselberth
- “Inch by Inch” by Leo Lionni

## BOX PLAY

### PARENT TIME

#### What We're Learning

Children use play to drive their own learning. When young children are given the space and encouraged to explore, they develop understanding from their actions. When children explore and experiment with boxes, they are developing their creativity, testing ideas, and solving problems. A child who repeatedly climbs in and out or fills and empties a box is not just making a mess. Instead, they are exploring the “insideness” of the object—which will help them to understand concepts such as space and volume later in life.

#### Parents, Did You Know?

In 2005, the cardboard box was inducted into the Toy Hall of Fame! Children have always been attracted to boxes of all sizes and can play with them for hours. A big empty box is a great starting point for creative and imaginative play. Children can decide how to change the box into something they can use for pretend play, like a car or a house. Cardboard boxes can also encourage physical play. Often the first thing children want to do with a cardboard box is climb into it.

- Open-ended and free exploration play a very important role in learning. When children are given the freedom and opportunity to explore, create, fail, and reassess, we are helping them form connections in their brains. All engaging experiences—even ones from cardboard boxes—help children learn about the world around them and how they influence it.
- Focus on the process not the product. Your child may just want to smash a box and that's okay. There doesn't need to be a finished product for learning to take place. It's through trial and error and exploration where children learn the most.
- Talk about imagination and creativity with your child. Share stories about times when you've been creative or how you've overcome challenges when creating. Invite your child to share how they approach creating and overcome challenges they've encountered.



## Next Steps

- Design a place for creating and introduce your child to the space. The area doesn't need to be extra-large or fancy. It just needs to have enough space for the boxes and materials and room for your child to play.
- Take time for your own creativity. Children learn from watching the adults in their environment. When your child sees you engaged in creative activities it sends the message that creating and imagining are valued—and encourages your child to create and imagine too.



## BOX PLAY

### PARENT AND CHILD TOGETHER (PACT) TIME<sup>®</sup>

#### Together Time

Children are natural innovators with powerful imaginations. Learning happens during play as they try new things on their own and adjust their ideas as they go. Provide one big box or several boxes of different shapes and sizes to stimulate your child’s creativity. Observe the ways that your child interacts with the box and ask questions, make suggestions, or offer materials to expand their play with boxes.

#### Activity

There’s no “right” way to play with a cardboard box. It can be stacked, flattened, pushed, or pulled. Let your child decide what they want to do with the boxes and follow their lead. You could start by just talking about the box together. For example, ask, “How big is it?” “Can you fit inside?” or “What does it remind you of?” If your child needs suggestions to get started, you could try these ideas:

- Decorate the box. Let your child draw or paint on it. They can also stick paper or scraps of fabric of different textures inside and outside for a sensory experience.
- Use the box to encourage active play. For example, open both ends of the box and turn it sideways to make a tunnel. Or your child could be a jack-in-the-box—crouching low inside the box and then jumping up like they’re on a spring on your signal.
- A collection of boxes can be stacked and used to build in much the same way as blocks are used.



## Hints for Success

- Let it grow. Find a place to keep unfinished projects where your child can revisit and add to them. Your child will learn even more by building on their previous experiences and increasing the complexity of their projects or play.
- Follow your child’s lead. Let them decide how to play with their box. Active and self-directed exploration is engaging and educational. By letting your child be in control, you are helping them understand the world and express themselves.
- Ask questions and have conversations about your child’s box play. This will give you insight into how you can encourage and extend their box play.

## Reflection

Encourage your child to explore and create with boxes of all shapes and sizes using whatever is around them—the possibilities are endless. Don’t let your child limit themselves; help them learn to think, grow, explore, create, and imagine out of—or even inside of—the box!



### Children’s Books to Support This Concept

- “Not a Box” by Antoinette Portis
- “The Big Brown Box” by Marisabina Russo
- “My Book Box” by Will Hillenbrand

# STORYTELLING

## PARENT TIME

### What We're Learning

Stories are all around us. Everyone has stories to tell—whether it is a simple story about running an errand or a family story. Our lives are filled with stories worth telling and retelling. People love to tell and listen to them. They are how we pass information from one generation to the next. Some stories are spoken and some are written. There are many similarities between books and oral stories. They both have a beginning, middle, and end as well as characters and settings. Families can connect through storytelling by telling an oral story, by revisiting a written family story, or by reading a book.

### Parents, Did You Know?

Children will often ask to hear a story, and this is a perfect time to snuggle up and share one. Storytelling has many benefits that go beyond a bonding experience.

- Retelling a familiar family story increases your child's ability to remember that story, and it is an important literacy skill. Children love stories about themselves or their families, so they will be interested in retelling it.
- When you tell your child a new story, you can help them make predictions about what will happen next. By predicting what might happen next, children are using real-world experience in their response. Families can learn more about their child and add information by asking them what they think will happen next.
- When a child hears a story that is from another person's point of view, it helps them see someone else's perspective and build empathy. Families can use a story after a challenging time to help their child understand a different point of view about what took place. In this way, storytelling can help with social and emotional growth.



## Next Steps

- Children tell stories through their play—especially during make-believe play. Follow your child’s lead during make-believe play and help them tell a story. Retell the story with your child during a meal or when you are in the car.
- Find toys or materials around your home that can be used as props to retell the story. An example of this is using stuffed animals as a story’s characters.
- When you tell a story, think about: what happened, where it happened, who was there, and include any unexpected or surprising event that happened. An example of this is: I made cookies in the kitchen with my child. When we took them out of the oven, they slid onto the floor. We said, “Oh no!” This is a story that my child and I will remember and retell.





## STORYTELLING

### PARENT AND CHILD TOGETHER (PACT) TIME<sup>®</sup>

#### Together Time

Telling stories with your child can happen anytime, anywhere. PACT Time is a perfect time to tell a story with your child. As with all PACT Time activities, make sure you follow your child's lead. They might want to hear one of your stories. Make up a new story, tell a story about what they are doing, or listen to them tell a story!

#### Activity

Think about the parts of a story like when, where, who, and what happened when you talk with your child. Knowing this information can help them create the story with you. Children love hearing stories from the past and creating stories in the present. Once you and your child start telling stories, they won't want to stop!

- Share a story from when you were young.
- Work with your child to create a story about a family event—big or small.
- Write a story with your child, then draw a picture to go with it. Having a picture will help your child remember an event from the story when they retell it.





## Hints for Success

- Find stories everywhere—even when you are out on an errand.
- Keep it short so you and your child can retell the story.
- Put pictures you drew for storytelling in an important place, like on the refrigerator, so you revisit them.

## Reflection

What might seem like a small life event for an adult could be a very exciting and memorable story for a child. Examine your day-to-day life to see where you can find a story. One of our family stories is about finding a gigantic cucumber in our garden. We had forgotten to check that part of my garden and the cucumber was enormous. This story is one of our family’s favorite stories. We talk about it at the grocery store, when we plant a new garden, when we pick cucumbers, and when we eat them.



### Children’s Books to Support This Concept

- “Alma and How She Got Her Name” by Juana Martinez-Neal
- “Lola Plants a Garden” by Anna McQuinn
- “Blackout” by John Rocco
- “Feast for 10” by Cathryn Falwell

# WATER PLAY

## PARENT TIME

### What We're Learning

Playing with water is FUN! Think about how children like to splash and play during a bath or in a puddle. Water play is all around us and it is an important place for learning. In fact, most preschool classrooms have sand/water tables. Families can also set up a water table or play area at home. Remember to always remain near your child when they are playing with water to keep them safe.

### Parents, Did You Know?

Water play goes well beyond splashing; math, science, language, and creative thinking skills all can take place while playing with water.

- Families can address math skills when children are pouring by using words like more, less, full, and empty.
- Playing with water can lead to conversations about science. A few drops of food coloring in water is exciting to watch. A bottle with a pump to move water from one place to another is fun. Talking with your child while playing with water will increase their vocabulary around science.
- Children love to tell stories and make believe as they play. Water play is a good place for children to use their imagination. Families can play alongside their child to add to the story or learn something new. This is a chance for families to expand their child's vocabulary.



## Next Steps

- Family life can be very busy but look for natural opportunities to play with water that you can expand on during PACT Time. Think about a time when your child played with water—maybe in the tub or in a puddle.
- Water is fun to play with but there are other options to consider. Think about different materials children can safely play with like sand, dirt, packing peanuts, or pebbles instead of water.
- Water toys are all around the home. There is no need for special equipment or toys to play with water. Families can find fun and engaging water toys in the kitchen—like funnels, strainers, and squirt bottles; or in the recycling bin—like old pump soap bottles and other plastic containers.



## WATER PLAY

### PARENT AND CHILD TOGETHER (PACT) TIME<sup>®</sup>

#### Together Time

Spend time with your child looking for things to use during water play. Keep an open mind when looking for toys or materials. They are all around us if we are looking through the lens of play! Because there are endless possibilities, talk with your child about how they want to play with water. This will help when developing a plan of materials to have ready. Too many toys can become a big mess to clean up. Assure your child that they can play with water again and again.

#### Activity

Start by looking for household items or recyclables that would work well as water toys with your child. Families can have great conversations about what they found, items that would be great to play with in water, and ones that will not work. When it's time to play the water toys will already be collected and your child will be excited to use them. Below is a list of water activities to try with your child.

- Move water from one place to another with a pump or bucket.
- Use soap and sponges to “clean” a toy or material.
- Use items found in the kitchen and recycling bin like soap pumps and measuring cups.



## Hints for Success

- You don't need a lot of water or a lot of materials to have fun with water. A large bowl, plastic tub, or large aluminum pan is big enough.
- Set up water play in a place that is easy to clean up—or set it up outside.
- Include your child in the entire process of water play—from material collection to clean up.

## Reflection

Once the water play is over, think back on the conversations you had with your child and what their interests were. Your family could extend the conversation by reflecting on the play. For example, if they are pouring and filling containers with water and talking about making cookies, then you can set aside time to make cookies with your child.



### Children's Books to Support This Concept

- "The Puddle Pail" by Elisa Kleven
- "We are the Water Protectors" by Carole Lindstrom
- "Rain!" by Linda Ashman

# SHADOW PLAY

## PARENT TIME

### What We're Learning

Children love to play with their shadow. Light and shadows are all around us and they can engage children's imaginations. Once they get started, they will not want to stop playing with and drawing shadows.

### Parents, Did You Know?

You can take the joyful experience of making and playing with a shadow and add an educational twist. Encourage your child to draw lines and shapes, like circles and squares, and talk to them about math, science, and the solar system as you find or make shadows. Maybe tell a story with your child about the shadow they made. The most important thing is to have a conversation with your child when creating and playing with a shadow.

- Math words like larger, smaller, taller, and shorter naturally come up when children are playing with and comparing shadows. Use these math words as you and your child play with a shadow.
- Depending on where the light hits the object and how close the light is, the shadow will change. This idea can lead to a discussion about science and how the Earth moves around the Sun.
- After you and your child make a shadow, they can trace or draw the shadow. This is a great way for your child to practice writing and drawing. Children can use curved and straight lines to trace a shadow. This is great practice for writing letters because we make capital letters with straight and curved lines. Think about the letter "C"—one curved line. Or the letter "B"—one straight line with two little curved lines. Children need a lot of practice drawing lines before they write letters.





- Like seeing shapes in the clouds, shadows can look different to different people. Ask your child what a shadow reminds them of and share what you are thinking. Tell a story about the shadow you found or created with your child. Storytelling with shadows is a great place to play with your imagination.

## Next Steps

- Notice shadows in your home and in the world around you. When you see a shadow, point it out to your child and ask them, “What is that?” or “How did that get there?” Noticing is often the first step to play. Children are excellent observers of the world and families can notice their interests and build on them.
- Have conversations with your child about the shadows you find and ask about the ones they find. This is a great place to ask a child an open-ended question like “I wonder what...” “Have you ever...” or you can prompt them by saying, “Tell me more.”



# SHADOW PLAY

## PARENT AND CHILD TOGETHER (PACT) TIME®

### Together Time

Shadows can be found and created indoors and out. With your child, notice when and where shadows are cast. Once you look for them, you will find them everywhere! During PACT Time, follow your child's lead and play with a shadow. There are many fun ways to engage with your child when playing with a shadow.

### Activity

- Trace the shadow of a toy by placing a light source, such as a flashlight or the sun, behind a toy or object. Doing this will cast a shadow. Place a piece of paper on the shadow and, with your child, draw the shadow.
- Trace the shadow of a person in the sun. The sun is a great shadow maker! With a piece of sidewalk chalk, you can trace a person or object's shadow. This is a fun way to compare words like taller and shorter or shape words like circle or triangle.
- Plan a puppet show with your child. With a white sheet and a flashlight you can have a shadow puppet theater in no time. You can retell a favorite story with shadow puppets or make up a new one.
- Play with a flashlight and create shadows everywhere. Just playing with a flashlight can be creative fun. Your family can experiment with light—like changing the color of the light by placing a piece of fabric over it. Follow your child's lead and experiment with a flashlight or other safe light source.



## Hints for Success

- Use math words like longer and shorter; use shape words like circle, triangle, square, and rectangle. You can get children thinking by asking open-ended questions like “What happens when...?” “What will you do next?” Or “What do you think about when...?”
- Flashlights are just one light source. There are other sources of light in your home that could help cast a shadow, like a lamp. If your phone has the capability, use the flashlight function. The sun casts different length shadows at different times of the day. Your family can experiment with drawing the same object at different times of the day.
- Talk to your children about the shadows they made and take pictures. The pictures can encourage your child to want to do the shadow shape drawing activity again.

## Reflection

Children often find fun in the simple things around them and shadows are a playful example. Parenting adults can encourage playing with shadows by having a flashlight accessible to their child or by playing outside with shadows using the sun as a light source. Talking about playing with shadows inside or outside is a chance for simple, joyful play.



### Children’s Books to Support This Concept

- “Bear Shadow” by Frank Asch
- “The Gruffalo’s Child” by Julia Donaldson
- “The Black Rabbit” by Philippa Leathers
- “What Makes a Shadow” by Clyde Robert Bulla

# OUTDOOR PLAY

## PARENT TIME

### What We're Learning

Fresh air and sunshine can do wonders for our well-being. An added bonus is that most children love being outside. Playing outside is like being in a classroom—nature's classroom! Science, math, language, art, physical education, and more occur when you play outside. With this in mind, you can make your next trip outside an educational experience. If you have concerns about bugs, or being hot, cold, or dirty, think about how you can find a space that addresses your concerns while enjoying the benefits of outdoor play with your child.

### Parents, Did You Know?

Spending time outside with your family has numerous benefits for physical and mental health. It also creates learning opportunities.

- When children play outdoors, they encounter situations that involve risk like balancing on a log or curb, or climbing a tree or hill. Children thrive and engage their higher-order thinking skills when they manage risks themselves. A risk is different from a hazard.
- A hazard is something that could seriously hurt you; a risk involves trying something new or different. It is important for children to learn to take risks like climbing a tree so they can learn to take bigger risks later in life, like applying for a new job. Families need to stay nearby during outdoor play to help children know the difference between a risk and a hazard and encourage children to take risks.
- Families often tell children to get outside and move around to burn off some energy. Children have a need for big body movement and outside is the perfect place for that to happen. During this outdoor time, children can ride a bike, run, kick a ball, or climb. These types of play help children develop movement skills and strengthen their muscles. Physical activity is important to help children grow healthy and strong; being outside is the perfect environment for children to move.



- Notice the nature that surrounds your house and community. Children like learning about nature and exploring the great outdoors. Birds, trees, dirt, and bugs are all very exciting topics for children. The best part is there's so much to learn about nature. Have conversations with your children about things your family finds in nature. There are many opportunities for science and nature discoveries outside.

## Next Steps

Nature is right outside your front door—no matter where you live—and is always changing.

- Children often find bugs, leaves, and sticks—and they are good at noticing changes in the world around them. Families can notice what children are interested in and use that information to research or learn more about those things. Have conversations about what your family learned.
- Reflect on your feelings about the outdoors. Think about how you feel about being outside and how that feeling transfers to your child.
- Take activities outdoors. Consider taking activities like painting, reading, and playing with your child outdoors.





## OUTDOOR PLAY

### PARENT AND CHILD TOGETHER (PACT) TIME<sup>®</sup>

#### Together Time

Head outside with your child and follow their lead. Being outside can lead to unlimited options for play, so watch and listen to how your child wants to play. They may want to do a physical activity like running, biking, playing a game, play with a toy, connect with nature, or have a picnic. Most activities that families do indoors can be done outdoors as well. Families can help their child get outside more by suggesting taking an activity outside.

#### Activity

Make time to get outside as a family as much as possible. Start noticing what your child likes when they are outside. This will help during outdoor play because you will already know what they are interested in. If your child is interested in bugs, find one they like, have them draw and color it. Later as a family, you can look up bugs matching the description to learn more about them. This can spark an added interest in nature. Below is a list of things to do outside with your child.

- Read a book outside.
- Create a nature journal.
- Collect natural materials.
- Play a game.





## Hints for Success

- Be prepared with appropriate clothing, a water bottle, and sunscreen if needed.
- You do not need many toys to play outside. You can play with what you have at home or what you find in nature.
- Going outside often, even for a small amount of time, is beneficial. Movement and fresh air help our bodies stay healthy.

## Reflection

Being outside in fresh air and sunshine can help you and your family’s well-being. Reflect on how you felt after spending time with your family outside. Think about what was interesting to your child, what you played, and how you played. Think about ways the game or activity could be continued in either environment—indoors or outdoors.



### Children’s Books to Support This Concept

- “When the World is Sleeping” by Rita Gray
- “The Hike” by Alison Farrell
- “Windows” by Julia Denos
- “All The World” by Liz Garton Scanlon

# Resources

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**Family Engagement Log**

**Parent Time Template**

**Parent and Child Together  
(PACT) Time<sup>®</sup> Template**

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# FAMILY ENGAGEMENT LOG

Family \_\_\_\_\_

PACT TIME	PARENT TIME	DATE	LENGTH OF TIME	ACTIVITY	REFLECTION

## Parent Time

### What We're Learning

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### Parents, Did You Know?

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### Next Steps

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## Parent and Child Together (PACT) Time®

### Together Time

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### Activity

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### Hints for Success

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## Reflection

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## Children's Books to Support This Concept

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[FamiliesLearning.org](http://FamiliesLearning.org)