



Learnings for Global Play: Building a globally recognizable world of play

Early education lays the foundation for lifelong learning. Yet millions of children around the world—especially those affected by conflict and crisis—have little to no access to early learning opportunities. That’s why Sesame Workshop created a first-of-its-kind library of globally tested educational content—*Watch, Play, Learn: Early Learning Videos*—designed to bring playful early learning to children everywhere, with particular attention to the unique needs and experiences of children affected by crises such as conflict or displacement.

An important goal of *Watch, Play, Learn* is to create a world that is both globally relevant and culturally rich, to bring learning to life through the eyes of children all around the world. As a foundational step in our process, Sesame brought together a team of global advisors—experts in early childhood development representing eight countries—to ensure that the end result would be high quality and relevant in many local contexts. These advisors provided feedback on everything from applicable curricular content to globally recognizable games to physical objects and props that could be easily found in their environments. Building on data collected from previous Sesame projects focused on play, the collective findings from this process allow *Watch, Play, Learn* to introduce children to a globally recognizable world of playful learning.



In this resource, you will find a snapshot of Sesame’s learnings on global play, including guidelines for adults who are facilitating play, commonly available objects that can be used for play, and ideas for games that have been globally vetted for relevance in many contexts around the world.

Guiding principles for adults facilitating play

GENDER: Both girls and boys can and should be involved in play! But games should not require that boys and girls touch if this is not culturally appropriate in the context.

SAFETY: Physical play can lead to injuries, especially if a game is being played in areas that are crowded or may have unexpected or unfamiliar terrains or objects. When introducing or demonstrating games, adults should model moving carefully and thoughtfully to avoid accidents.

RULES: Even when games have rules, children and caregivers can adapt them to their reality and context. This flexibility is important, as games encourage creativity and self-esteem in children, and can be encouraged by the adults guiding the games.

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING: Play is important to support social and emotional learning. Games don't have to be totally free of conflict: in fact, through almost any game, children can learn how to identify and express emotions and learn skills for negotiation, conflict resolution, sharing, and cooperation.

Objects commonly available around the world for play

Beans	Chalk	Pebbles	Sticks
Plastic bottles	Flowers	Bags	Stones
Plastic bottle caps	Leaves	Rope	String
Boxes	Mats	Sand	Cans
Buttons	Paper	Shells	Paper rolls



Examples of globally vetted games

Generally, the literature on play conceptualizes it as existing along a continuum. At one end, free play gives children the freedom to explore and discover with minimal constraints. At the other end is more guided or structured play. While free play and didactic instruction are both associated with positive learning outcomes, evidence suggests that child-led play with some degree of adult guidance is most effective for achieving positive educational outcomes with preschoolers.¹ For this reason, our examples tend toward guided play, which involves some level of adult facilitation, and games, which involve set rules and constraints.

MATH

Games suited to math objectives help children learn essential math concepts, engage in problem solving through play, and practice persistence.

I see: Guessing game where one player identifies an object that has a specific geometric shape and others must guess what it is

Let's make shapes: Children are divided into groups and use their bodies to make a shape that a leader calls out

Soccer and other ball games: Measurement and shapes can be illustrated by preparing the field/court

Kite flying/jump rope/rope tug: For all these games, the rope/string can itself be measured or used to measure other objects

Tag/red light-green light: Demonstrates the concepts of fast vs. slow

Limbo/leap frog: Demonstrates the concepts of over vs. under

SCIENCE

Games oriented toward science learning goals motivate children to imagine elements of the natural world they may have never seen and to learn about their surroundings.

Mystery bag: Different objects from nature are put into a bag; players sit in a circle and each player has a turn to choose an object from the bag without looking inside and guess what it is

Treasure hunt: Use a "map" to find things previously hidden in different areas of the natural environment

I spy: Guessing game where one player identifies objects in the environment and others must guess what it is

Pretend play: Children can imagine they are exploring new ecosystems, pretend to be an animal, pretend to cook using plants from their environment, pretend to be a farmer/vet/scientist, etc.

Make and fly a kite: Using materials found in nature and/or recycled objects

Finding animal shapes in clouds: Children can point out clouds that look like animals they recognize

CHILD PROTECTION, HEALTH, AND SAFETY

Games can teach children important lessons by demonstrating ways to play safely or by modeling healthy behaviors.

Mirror: Two children stand facing each other and one must mirror the movements of the other's body, emphasizing the different body parts used

Ball games/racing: Can emphasize the rules in the game that allow us to be safe

Hand clapping games: Can emphasize the need to wash hands before/after

Follow the leader: Can engage in health or safety activities and encourage children to follow along

Pretend play: Children can imagine that they are a doctor or a nurse, or that they are visiting the doctor (can practice receiving "vaccinations"), etc.

Any physically difficult game: Recognize thirst and establish the need to drink clean water



¹ Weisberg et al. "Guided Play: Principles and Practices." *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, vol. 25 no. 3. 2016, pp. 177-182. DOI: 10.1177/0963721416645512.

Example learnings from global early childhood development advisors

While the games and objects listed in this resource are commonly available across many cultures and geographies, it is of course still important to consider the realities of the context in which any resource will be used. Below are some examples of context-specific factors to consider:

LANGUAGE: There is a complex relationship between culture, language, and curricular objectives, which is why the feedback loop between global advisors and those creating educational materials is so important. For example:

- In the Rohingya language, there is no word for square. Several *Watch, Play, Learn* episodes had to deliver playful curricular messages about squares and rectangles without relying on the specific word.
- In Nigeria, suggesting that someone is a “tree” indicates that the person is lazy. This notion motivated recommendations to make small tweaks to the language of some social-emotional learning videos during the dubbing process to ensure that the characters are using the word “tree” in a positive way, such as telling characters to stand tall and strong like a tree rather than to be still like a tree.

CULTURE: Even something as simple as the way a character sits should be considered with care. For example, in some cultures it is more appropriate for a girl character to sit with legs crossed or off to the side than straight forward.

CONTEXT: When food is shown in a resource, even when used in play, it should be done carefully and intentionally, keeping in mind sensitivities around hunger that children may be experiencing.

In any context, play as a vehicle for learning has myriad strengths. Play allows the content to be presented through the eyes of a child. It also provides opportunities to discuss difficult topics (such as consent) in an age-appropriate way and in a way that children would more naturally learn vital social skills. Social-emotional skills and concepts are always part of children’s relationships with others—and so play allows these skills to be integrated even when there is another primary curricular goal such as math or science.

MORE ABOUT WATCH, PLAY, LEARN

Created as part of the Play to Learn project funded by the LEGO Foundation, *Watch, Play, Learn* is a set of 140 five-minute animated video segments designed for children ages 3-8. These videos feature Sesame’s beloved Muppet characters engaging in learning through play to promote skills in the four curricular domains of math; science; social-emotional learning; and child protection, health, and safety. This focus on playful learning is grounded in a substantial evidence base on how play supports children’s development across a wide range of outcomes, from physical health to cognitive and social-emotional skills.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT WATCH, PLAY, LEARN, PLEASE CONTACT:

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