
Learning to Cope Through Play

INSTRUCTIONS

This handout was designed for use with the article, “Learning to Cope Through Play,” from The LEGO Foundation. The questions and activities in this handout could be used in a work session (e.g., professional learning community, professional development session), for individual coaching, or for self-reflection.

Goals

- ◆ Understand the ways that pretend play can support children’s abilities to cope through trauma and adversity.
- ◆ Reflect on your current practices and determine ways to enhance children’s play opportunities to support the children in your care who may have experienced trauma.
- ◆ Create an action plan to enhance pretend play experiences to support the infants and toddlers in your care who have experienced trauma.

Activity

- ◆ Read the article.
- ◆ After reading, use the questions below to guide your discussion.
- ◆ Implement your plan and adjust as needed to support imitation and symbolic representation.

When combined with adult guidance, the benefits of learning through play are particularly powerful in promoting the coping and regulatory abilities that children... need to continue to thrive and adapt to change in the face of adversity.

The LEGO Foundation

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- ◆ What caught your attention from the article? What made that fact, excerpt, or example meaningful to you?

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- ◆ This article highlights the ways that children develop coping skills through play, which is particularly important for children who experience trauma. The author states, “Play can especially help children develop self-regulation... which is central in their coping and associated with long-term learning and development.”
 - What self-regulation and coping skills might children develop through pretend/dramatic play experiences? How might children develop or display imitation skills in their play? How might they use and strengthen their symbolic representation skills during play?
 - Consider the play schemes, play partners, and props used that may influence their development of these skills.

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- ◆ Reflect on the play opportunities you provide in your classroom.
 - What types of play opportunities do you offer for children (i.e., repetitive sequences, dramatic play, child-led, etc.)?
 - What role do you take in children’s play experiences? Do you model/narrate imitation and representation, join in their play, suggest roles, and/or encourage use of props?
 - How do you model and provide opportunities for developing self-regulation skills to help children who have experienced trauma cope through play?

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- ◆ What challenges arise during pretend play opportunities? What supports might you need to solve these problems and enhance children’s play experiences? How do you think additional support will benefit the children in your care who have experienced trauma?

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- ◆ Develop an action plan to enhance pretend play experiences to support the children in your care who have experienced trauma. The article provides 5 characteristics of learning through play that educators should consider when curating playful learning experiences.
 - Consider how you will build play experiences that are:
 - Joyful
 - Socially interactive
 - Actively engaging
 - Iterative
 - Meaningful
 - Observe children during play opportunities and determine ways to provide individualized support to encourage their development of pretend play.
 - Carefully monitor children’s progress and modify supports as needed.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Learn more about imitation and symbolic representation:

- ◆ **Source:** Childhood Education International
- ◆ **Article:** The Power of Play for Addressing Trauma in the Early Years
- ◆ **Link:** <https://ceinternational1892.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/TraumaPowerPlayBrief.pdf>
- ◆ **Description:** This article describes the ways that children can heal from past traumas through play experiences. It provides suggestions for supporting children's resilience through play.



- ◆ **Source:** Edutopia
- ◆ **Article:** How Children Process Grief and Loss Through Play
- ◆ **Link:** <https://www.edutopia.org/article/how-children-process-grief-and-loss-through-play>
- ◆ **Description:** This article discusses the benefits of play in supporting children through traumatic experiences, such as grief, while providing practical suggestions to support children.