

# Giant Step Newsletter

## January 2024

### Happy New Year!

We hope everyone was able to spend time with their loved ones to finish out 2023!

**We are going to be reading some variations of The Gingerbread Man to start the month out next week when preschool resumes. We have baking supplies ready to go for dramatic play. We hope to do some actual baking as well while the weather is still so chilly!**

### NAEYC Highlight

Parents and other caregivers often wonder if they are doing enough to support their child's growth and development. On the following page, I will be sharing an article from the National Association for the Education of Young Children about how to support toddlers' and preschoolers' learning at home.

You can also find the original article at:

<https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/families/support-learning-with-play>

This and similar links are also available on our website:

<https://giantstepcenter.com/what-is-a-play-based-approach-to-learning/>

### **You are welcome at board meetings whenever possible!**

We would like to encourage any family/community members who may be able, to attend our monthly board meetings. Current board members include president James Dillon, Marlo Coates, Caitlan Cameron, and Kirstie Kilduff.

Important decisions are made that affect how Giant Step serves our community. *Attendance does not obligate anyone to become a member of the board or to volunteer.* You can attend to observe and be informed only if that is all you wish. The next board meeting is expected to be held **Thursday,**

**January 11 at 6 pm.**

You can learn more about how Giant Step is funded, how we make decisions that affect us all and how we hope to grow in the future.

### *How To Support Children's Approaches to learning? Play With Them!*

By Gaye Gronlund

As a parent, you want your children to learn all that they can—to grasp math concepts, to be curious about exploring the world, and to learn to read and write. Did you know that you can help your son or daughter academically by playing with them? Play and learning go together!

What kind of play helps children learn the best? Play that really engages children—play that they will focus on and stay with even when problems arise. This kind of play helps children develop their approaches to learning—in other words, the ways they respond to learning situations. Curiosity about the world, initiative and problem solving, and focused attention and persistence are just a few approaches to learning that children develop through play.

In the early years, parents can help children develop the skills to be better students by playing with them. Yes, as they enter kindergarten and the elementary years, children need to have some understanding of letters and numbers. However, if they have not developed solid approaches to learning, they will not be as successful in school settings.

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## Encouraging Toddlers at Play

Joey is 20 months old. He has a basket full of toys, including rattles, soft plastic blocks, a set of stacking rings, stuffed animals, and cloth and plastic books. Joey's dad often sits down on the floor with Joey and invites him to play with items in the basket. Joey's favorite activity is to dump out all of the toys and put the basket on his head! This is typical toddler play behavior. Joey is curious about the world and is looking at it another way—through the slats in the basket!

Joey loves to shake the rattles to hear the different sounds or to stack two or three blocks and knock them down. His attention to each might be up to five minutes or so, which is just right for his age. He may solve problems as he tries to place the rings on the stacking post or to add more blocks to a tower.

Joey's dad encourages his curiosity. He comments about what he is doing: "I see you are trying to get that last ring on the post, but it just won't fit." Or he asks him questions: "Where did that ball go? Do you see it hiding behind the chair?" He connects his play to learning by responding positively to his interest: "I can tell you like to look through the basket, you silly boy. Does everything look different from under there?" He also encourages him by asking him to keep trying even when he gets frustrated. "Oh, those blocks keep falling down, don't they? Can you try to put just one on top of another gently? Let's see what happens. I'll help you." This encouragement fosters his perseverance, his attention, and his initiative at problem solving, all positive approaches to learning.

## Encouraging Preschoolers at Play

Alicia is 4 years old. She loves to dress up in her mommy's clothes, jewelry, and shoes and then pretend to go shopping, care for her baby dolls, and cook dinner. Through her pretend play Alicia learns to think abstractly. When she holds a block in her hand and uses it to pretend to talk on the phone, she is using the block as a symbol for something else. That's abstract thinking in action! And, since letters and numbers are abstract because they are symbols of what they represent, pretend play is one way a child develops her understanding of letters and numbers.

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Alicia's mom and dad have recognized that supporting her pretend activities keeps her engaged for 10 to 15 minutes at a time. They pretend right along with her, asking her to "bake some cookies" or to "go grocery shopping" for them. They give her paper and crayons so that she can pretend to write grocery lists. They encourage her to count how many items she has placed in her toy shopping cart. They accept her scribbles and letter-like shapes as her writing (just right for 4-year-olds) and help her when the numbers get a little mixed up.

Alicia will work with puzzles for long periods of time, too, especially if her dad joins her. Together, they figure out strategies for putting the pieces together. She may turn the pieces around, trying out different ways until she is successful. She is developing problem solving and persistence as she does so.

### Your Role as Your Child Plays

Playing with your child helps keep your child engaged in the kind of play where learning occurs. Your interest, questions, and comments as you play alongside will help your child use toys productively. And the two of you will have lots of fun together! Most importantly, you will be working toward your child's future success as a student by building important approaches to learning. Play and learning go together!

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Gaye Gronlund, M.A., is an Early Childhood Education Consultant. She works with teachers, families, and programs across the country and writes books and articles about play, standards, assessment, and curriculum.