

East Lothian Play Association's

The logo features a central blue dot with eight colorful lines radiating outwards in pink, green, yellow, red, blue, and purple. To the right of this graphic, the word "SPARK" is written in large blue letters, "THE PLAY" in smaller yellow and pink letters, and "CHALLENGES" in green letters below it.

SPARK THE PLAY CHALLENGES

#chooseplay #sparktheplay



This pack includes:

1 x information card
5 x blue cards labelled 1-5
5 x green cards labelled 1-5

5 x pink cards labelled 1-5
5 x red cards labelled 1-5
5 x yellow cards labelled 1-5

HOW TO PLAY: you decide!

Pick a challenge, any challenge!

Each challenge has a unique colour and number combination.

You could make a pair of dice with the cards' colours and numbers on them.

Or you could simply select one at random!

What ideas can you think of?



Adults! Children are full of play and ideas. Here are a few simple things we can do to help.

These Play Challenges are starting points... the play can fly off in different directions. Go with the flow, the fun and follow children's interests.

A collection of open-ended resources such as fabric, tubes, crates, boxes as well as string, tape and scissors will work well for most of the challenges. Watch how children use these and build your resources according to their interests.

Stand back, watch and enjoy the play. Join in when invited but try not to interrupt when the play is flowing. With your sensitive support, children will learn to manage risks and problem solve.

As children follow their interests, you will see a broad and complex range of responses to each challenge. Play types are a way to categorise the different responses and behaviours we see when children are playing. Recognising these play types indicates a wide range of benefits and choice for children.

Each Challenge Card includes a list of the relating play types that children might display. You can find out more about these in the Play Types Toolkit which can be found in the resources section at www.playscotland.org.



Den Building

Build, decorate and hang out in your very own den.

There are many ways you could make a den. What can you find to use?

Trees, blankets, rope, pegs and cardboard are all useful.

Once made, the den is your space to spend some time alone or with friends.



Play spark

Children build dens for lots of reasons – as a quiet space to hide and be alone, or it may be a communal space. Building the den can be a challenge that takes a long time or a den can be incredibly simple.



You might notice...

When building a den, children are often problem solving, learning new skills, being creative, determined, developing practical and social skills. Notice where children build dens and what they do in them.



Top tips

A den is important to children because it is their space. Dismantling a den can be hard as it may represent a lot of work or be an important space. Give plenty of warning before tidy up time.



What's next...

Consider if there is a way dens can stay up for a while or even be permanent.



Play types

Creative play, exploratory play, mastery play, object play, communication play, social play, fantasy and imaginative play, recapitulative play, symbolic play.

Shark Island

Use furniture, loose parts or anything you can find to make your very own island.

But beware...

Keep an eye on the waves...

Be careful not to touch the floor as you may get caught by the sharks!



Play spark

This is a quick and easy play spark, similar to 'The Floor is Lava'. You can create a very quick Shark Island to start the play.



You might notice...

Children inventing their own solutions and lots of noise and excitement.



Top tips

This activity is great for burning off energy. When playing, children are often physically active and having fun.



What's next...

Children may want to play this for a long time or it could spin off into other interests. Whatever happens, try to go with the flow.



Play types

Creative play, exploratory play, mastery play, object play, communication play, dramatic play, role play, social play, rough and tumble play, locomotor play, fantasy and imaginative play, symbolic play.

Parachute Play

Parachutes are fun to wave around in the wind. They are also great to run around with!

Gather up lots of leaves and place them on your parachute. How high can you toss them in the air?

If you don't have a parachute, large sheets like bedding and towels work just as well!



Play spark

Parachute games can make physical activities lots of fun. They work the arms, shoulders and torso.



You might notice...

Playing with a parachute can be a very sensory experience. Children may be interested by the sounds and motions they experience as the parachute moves around in the wind. Playing in a group encourages cooperation and teamwork.



Top tips

A bedsheet is an example of a good alternative for a parachute. They are also easy to store and to take with you to a park. They can also be used for den building or as a magic carpet.



What's next...

You don't always need to organise games to play with the parachute. Try leaving it out and watch how children use it.



Play Types

Creative play, exploratory play, object play, locomotor play, communication play, social play, imaginative play.

Karaoke

Grab your microphone and sing your favourite songs.

Why not put on a concert?

Ask people for song requests and encourage them to join in.

You could even write and perform your very own song!



Play spark

Children can take this in any direction. Some will sing straight away, others may prefer to create costumes, build a stage or to watch for a while. A microphone can be a cardboard tube, rolled up newspaper or even a hairbrush.



You might notice...

Some children will play like this often, for others it may be difficult. It's fine to choose a different challenge if children don't want to do one.



Top tips

If you enjoy singing and performing, feel free to join in. Children love seeing adults joining in the fun and being a little silly.



What's next...

How about putting on a performance? Use the skills of everyone in the group to plan, promote and perform the concert.



Play types

Creative play, mastery play, communication play, dramatic play, role play, social play, fantasy and imaginative play, symbolic play.

Water Play

Water is a lot of fun to play with.

You may need to collect some or be lucky enough to find a big puddle.

Have fun running in the rain and splashing in puddles.

What else can you use to explore the water?



Play spark

Many children will instinctively play with water, it can be a source of joy, laughter and discovery. Adult reactions provide permission to explore this fantastic play resource.



You might notice...

Children can be very focused when exploring water. For some children, the sensory aspects can be very calming.



Top tips

It is important for children to play outside in all weathers. Share the benefits with parents and carers and ask that children dress appropriately for the weather. Make sure adults do too!



What's next...

If you are able to leave containers outside, these will collect rainwater making an accessible play resource. Larger items like pipes and guttering can make exploration more challenging.



Play types

Creative play, exploratory play, mastery play, object play, dramatic play, role play, social play, locomotor play, fantasy and imaginative play, symbolic play.

1

GREEN

Make Your Own Game

Do you have an idea for a new game or a game you could improve?

What are the rules? What is the aim of the game?

GREEN

1



Play spark

You can create your own rules. Is your game silly or serious? Is it a board game? This one is definitely about the children being in charge!



You might notice...

Rules changing throughout the game. When children get to be in charge they find ways to make a game more pleasing to them. This can be an empowering experience.



Top tips

Games that are very physical often include an element of risk. Taking risks is an important part of child development. Adults can support children to develop their own risk management skills.



What's next...

Games can continue and evolve over days. Perhaps you remember this from your own childhood.



Play types

Creative play, exploratory play, mastery play, object play, communication play, dramatic play, role play, social play, rough and tumble play, locomotor play, fantasy and imaginative play, symbolic play.

Puppet Show

It's show time!

Make up a story or use one you already know and put on a puppet show.



Play spark

You could make a silly sock puppet by gluing wool and googly eyes onto a sock. You could draw your characters on cardboard, cut them out and then attach them to sticks ready to take the stage.



You might notice...

Children making up their own stories. They might change their voices and facial expressions when performing as different characters. This activity often involves a lot of concentration and an exploration of different emotions.



Top tips

Performing for others is a great way to build confidence. Show them your support and if they ask to perform for you, give them your full attention.



What's next...

You may hear snippets of stories and have ideas about useful materials to extend the play. Don't interrupt the play, simply drop the materials nearby for the children to spot for themselves.



Play types

Creative play, communication play, dramatic play, role play, fantasy and imaginative play.

3 GREEN

Rediscover and Reinvent

Find a toy or game you haven't played with for a while and invent a new way to use it.

You can do this challenge with anything at all – it's up to you!



Play spark

There are no rules for this challenge. Allow children to take the lead and follow their ideas. This challenge encourages children and adults to look at things in new ways.



You might notice...

What children choose to use and the different ideas they have.



Top tips

By standing back and observing, you will learn a lot about the children and how to support them.



What's next...

Share the children's ideas, some may even develop into new favourite games!



Play types

Creative play, exploratory play, object play, communication play, dramatic play, role play, social play, locomotive play, fantasy and imaginative play, recapitulative play, symbolic play.

4

GREEN

Things You Can Do Upside Down

Do you ever lie on your back and pretend to walk on the sky or ceiling?

How many upside down ideas and activities can you think of?

GREEN

4



Play spark

Can you write your name upside down? What about inventing some interesting new yoga poses?



You might notice...

When playing, children often practise and get good at new skills, and they may not even realise it.



Top tips

Be careful not to get too dizzy – take some right-side up breaks!



What's next...

Did you know that your eyes actually see things upside down? This happens because the front part of the eye is curved and when light reaches your eyes it produces a flipped image on the back of your retina. Your brain is so clever it knows to flip what you see back to the right way up.



Play types

Creative play, exploratory play, mastery play, communication play, dramatic play, role play, social play, locomotor play, fantasy and imaginative play.

Laser Maze

Use rope, string or wool to create your own maze.

Try to travel through it without triggering the lasers!



Play spark

This challenge could go in different directions depending on children's interests. Some children may be interested in creating the maze; some may enjoy the fun of going through it; others may create fantastical stories.



You might notice...

Children may use fine motor skills to create the maze and gross motor skills to move through it.



Top tips

There is a risk of entanglement, ensure children are supervised and safety scissors are available.



What's next...

You can make this challenge trickier by adding costumes or objects to carry. Follow children's interests – if children have been fascinated by the string, make this resource readily available or add costumes to develop a storyline.



Play types

Creative play, exploratory play, mastery play, object play, dramatic play, role play, social play, locomotor play, fantasy and imaginative play, symbolic play.

Invent and Build a Machine

What will your machine do?

What could you use to make it?

Maybe you could build a machine that helps you put on socks?

Or what about a machine that can transport food?



Play spark

There are already lots of inventions but you could come up with something new! Draw your machine or gather up a mix of resources and recycling to build it.



You might notice...

Watch how children play, who they play with and how they solve problems. Does this change as the machine develops? Are you surprised by any of the children's interactions?



Top tips

Sometimes children will need or ask for help – respond when they need you. Before offering suggestions, consider how you can encourage children to solve problems for themselves.



What's next...

Once built, the machine may spark dramatic or fantasy play, attracting different children. You could provide props or costumes to support the play.



Play types

Creative play, mastery play, object play, dramatic play, role play, fantasy play and imaginative play.

Bull's-eye!

Practice your aiming skills!

You could draw target boards and hang them up.

You could build a tall tower to knock down. Make it out of recycling materials, loose parts or toys.

How far away can you hit your target from?



Play spark
Building up and knocking down are equally important for children. Both offer a lot of joy and satisfaction.



You might notice...
Children's skills develop as they repeatedly build and take aim. Watch out for rules developing and changing.



Top tips
This challenge gives children permission to explore an interest in things falling down or over. This may be a lot of fun, release frustration or be an exploration of cause and effect. If necessary, involve children in choosing a safe area for this play and discussing any rules.



What's next...
If your aim is really good, try taking a few steps back from the target. Try the same activity with different objects.



Play types
Creative play, exploratory play, mastery play, object play, communication play, locomotor play.

Shadow Play

What is the most intriguing shadow you can see around you?

Can you make an interesting shadow?

Does your shadow move quickly?

Can you catch it?



Play spark
Shadow tig is a great game to play when it's sunny and you don't need any resources. Some objects cast shadows that have unexpected shapes. What do they look like? Can you trace them?



You might notice...
Children's curiosity about what's around them and how they interact in new ways.



Top tips
Adults can have fun with this too! You can make shadows or show objects that have interesting shadows.



What's next...
If children enjoy this challenge, you could put on a shadow puppet show. You can use your body or make puppets out of cardboard and paper to create your shadows. Build your shadow theatre by setting up a sheet in front of a light source and you will be good to go.



Play types
Creative play, exploratory play, mastery play, object play, communication play, dramatic play, role play, social play, locomotor play, fantasy and imaginative play.

Go on an Adventure

Your imagination can take you anywhere!

Where will you travel today?

Is it warm? Is it cold?

What might you need to take with you?



Play spark

Start your adventure on a magic carpet. Find a rug or sheet to spread on the ground. All aboard! The carpet can take you to many magical places. What do you see? Who do you meet?



You might notice...

Stories developing collaboratively. Working together requires children to listen to others, adapt and negotiate – all great social skills.



Top tips

Children often return to the carpet after a period of playing away. Don't be too quick to tidy up. With time to develop, the play and stories become richer.



What's next...

Try putting on some music or changing the lighting. Gather some props that could be used to develop a story and leave them for children to find.



Play types

Creative play, exploratory play, mastery play, object play, communication play, dramatic play, role play, social play, locomotor play, fantasy and imaginative play, symbolic play.

Try Not to Tumble!

Do you accept this challenge?

Winner is the last one standing – not the one falling over in giggles!

Set your own rules and let the contest begin!



Play spark
Set up a contest – you could duel with pillows or make an opponent out of cardboard to knock down.



You might notice...
Watch out for children's awareness of others. Do they play differently with different children?



Top tips
Rough and tumble play develops emotional and social skills. Less adult intervention enables children to develop judgement and social skills. Involve children in discussing and setting any boundaries.



What's next...
Rough and tumble play is often discouraged in organised play spaces but has lots of benefits for children. Can you find a way to allow this important play type in your setting?



Play types
Creative play, mastery play, object play, communication play, dramatic play, role play, social play, rough and tumble play, locomotor play, fantasy and imaginative play, recapitulative play, symbolic play.

1

RED

Potion Making

Create your own magic potions.

You can make magic potions outside in any sort of container such as pots or buckets.

If playing inside, you can make magic potions at the sink, put down a tarpaulin and use large bowls.



Play spark

Children love to play in water, this challenge adds some magic to the mix.



You might notice...

Children may be very focused on pouring, mixing and exploring the water. Complex stories can emerge and spin off into other areas of children's play.



Top tips

Be prepared for some mess. Being prepared allows adults to say yes and to support children's play with fewer interruptions. A selection of containers and appropriate clothing are important outdoors. If inside, have an area for water play, with towels handy.



What's next...

If children enjoy this activity, collect a range of interesting containers of different sizes as well as utensils for mixing. Add smells or colours to make the potions more sensory.



Play types

Creative play, exploratory play, object play, communication play, dramatic play, role play, social play, fantasy and imaginative play, symbolic play.

RED

1

Obstacle Course

What can you find to build your own obstacle course?

Is it a race or competition?

You set the rules!



Play spark

By creating their own obstacle course, children can make it theirs, as easy or as challenging as they like.



You might notice...

Children are being active and having fun. Watch out for children's skills and confidence developing.



Top tips

Stand back – let children take the lead in what they are doing and how they organise themselves. Before interrupting, consider if children are managing risks or how you could support them to do so.



What's next...

How fast can you finish the circuit? Maybe you could have a race! Can you do it with a cup of water in one hand? What about if you balanced a book on your head? Think of different ways to challenge yourself.



Play types

Creative play, exploratory play, mastery play, object play, communication play, social play, locomotor play, fantasy and imaginative play.

3

RED

Copy What You See

There are things all around us that move – trees blow in the wind, toasters pop, a bird flies past.

Can you copy these movements? What else can you imitate?

RED

3



Play spark
Look around you. What can you see that moves? Are there objects you use everyday that move?



You might notice...
This challenge can be about big physical movements, small subtle movements or even be about noises.



Top tips
Some children may need help to get started. It's ok for adults to join in and offer ideas, then stand back when they are ready.



What's next...
Copy what the people around you are doing, making sure they are willing first! What are they doing? What emotions can you see? You can even ask them to challenge you by performing a range of facial expressions or poses.



Play types
Creative play, exploratory play, mastery play, communication play, dramatic play, role play, social play, locomotor play, fantasy and imaginative play.

4

RED

Rainbow Hunt

Collect colourful items and then arrange them together in an exciting colour pattern.

Is your rainbow big or small? Does your rainbow grant wishes?

Maybe there's some treasure at the end of it!

RED

4



Play spark

This challenge could be a scavenger hunt or creating patterns and pictures. It can be done solo or collaboratively.



You might notice...

There may be a lot of communication about what's needed and how objects are used. When busy, children may be very active without realising.



Top tips

Don't be too set on creating a realistic rainbow. Stand back – let children take the lead in what they are doing and how they organise themselves.



What's next...

Take pictures of the children's creations to share if they would like to. If the children enjoyed searching for objects, they could create a scavenger hunt with a different theme.



Play types

Creative play, exploratory play, object play, communication play, social play, locomotor play, fantasy and imaginative play, symbolic play.

Painting

Paint using anything you can find.

You could make stamps from things like sponges or leaves.

Did you know that if you blow hard on a blob of paint it can spread out into an interesting shape?



Play spark

As a quick and easy activity, try painting with water. Water painting works well on pavements or cardboard, anything that changes colour when wet. Once water dries, it disappears and you have more room to paint again.



You might notice...

Children might experiment with colours and textures. When painting with a mixture of resources children can investigate and learn how things feel, smell and sometimes taste.



Top tips

Be prepared for some mess. A messy play area often means children are having lots of fun!



What's next...

Try making marks with different things, like sticks and leaves. You can make chalk paint by crushing chalk and mixing it with a little water.



Play types

Creative play, exploratory play, object play, locomotor play.

1

YELLOW

Make Your Own Instrument

Use objects around you to create your own musical instrument.

A musical instrument is described in the dictionary as “an object or device” that can “produce musical sounds.”

Anything can be an instrument!

YELLOW

1



Play spark

Provide a range of objects made from different materials and with different textures. Pots, sticks, plastic tubs, elastic bands and tubes all work well.



You might notice...

This challenge may be noisy or rhythmical. Children may explore alone or play together.



Top tips

Notice the different ways children explore. Join in and have fun, dancing and singing is allowed!



What's next...

If children enjoy this challenge you could gather objects that make different sounds or make a music wall together.



Play types

Creative play, exploratory play, mastery play, object play, communication play, dramatic play, social play, locomotor play, imaginative play, symbolic play.

10 Ways to Play With a Loose Part

A loose part can be any object that is used for play, regardless of its original purpose or function.

Pick an object and see if you can come up with 10 or more different ways you can play with it!

How many ideas can you think of?



Play spark

Gather a selection of objects then pass this challenge over to the children to show their creativity and imagination.



You might notice...

Children's interests and knowledge may come through in their suggestions. Watch out for the ways play can flow as ideas spark other ideas.



Top tips

Listen and allow children to take the lead. Some children may need help to get started. It's ok for adults to join in and offer ideas, then stand back when the children are ready.



What's next...

Repeat the challenge, combining two or more objects – what can you do with these? Can you invent a new game?



Play types

Creative play, exploratory play, object play, communication play, dramatic play, role play, social play, fantasy and imaginative play, symbolic play.

Act It Out

Think of a favourite book, film or TV show and act out the story in your own way.

You could make a puppet or model of your favourite character, dress up, sing a theme song...

...the list goes on!



Play spark

This challenge gives children a chance to share their interests and explore other people's.



You might notice...

Some children will play like this often, for others it may be more difficult. Think of ways to support children who find performance difficult. Perhaps you could work in pairs or find a quiet area?



Top tips

Knowing children's interests is a great way to engage with them. Acting out screen-based stories and characters is a great step for children less used to other types of play.



What's next...

How about putting on a performance for your friends? You could make it a game like charades where they have to guess what you're doing.



Play types

Creative play, mastery play, communication play, dramatic play, role play, social play, fantasy and imaginative play, symbolic play.

What's Your Superpower?

If you could have any superpower, what would it be?

Flying, remembering everything, or maybe talking to animals?
You decide!

Maybe you have a silly superpower?



Play spark

It's fun and can be therapeutic to imagine the world as it could be.



You might notice...

Children experimenting with new ideas or showing sides of their personality that you don't usually see.



Top tips

If there is an opportunity, chat with children about things you noticed – their real superpowers! Superhero play can develop into rough and tumble. There are lots of benefits to this type of play – bonding, exercise, exploring boundaries, rebalancing power, having fun.



What's next...

Create an outfit that shows off your amazing superpower. Make sure you have all you need for your secret mission. You could also draw a picture of yourself using these powers.



Play types

Creative play, exploratory play, mastery play, object play, communication play, dramatic play, role play, social play, locomotor play, fantasy and imaginative play, symbolic play.

Let's Dance!

It's disco time!

Sing or play your favourite songs and have fun.

Do you know the **Cha Cha Slide**? Maybe you could make up a fun song and dance of your own.



Play spark

When you listen to a song, how does it make you feel? How does it make you want to move? There are many different types of music and ways of moving... embrace them all in this challenge.



You might notice...

Children sharing ideas and skills. While playing, children can spend a long time practising skills and getting good at them. Notice where children like to practice and perform.



Top tips

Dance can empower children and dancing in front of other people can build confidence. If children ask to perform for you, give them your full attention.



What's next...

Think of different ways and times you could add music during a play session. How would this change the atmosphere?



Play types

Creative play, mastery play, communication play, dramatic play, role play, social play, locomotor play, fantasy and imaginative play.