



# Learning Through Play

## A Handbook

November / 2021





**Kina**  
**Rwanda**  
Gukina ni ukumenya

# Introduction

Welcome to the Kina Rwanda handbook - your guide, reference book and creative aid for Kina Rwanda and the play movement in Rwanda.

Kina Rwanda is part of a global play movement that believes play can be a driver for social and economic progress in every community. Kina Rwanda and our partners are on a mission to unlock play experiences for children across Rwanda.

This handbook will introduce the concept of learning through play, Kina Rwanda's work and provide a guide to a toolkit of materials that can be a springboard to create content to inspire, entertain and engage parents, children, family-members and friends through the themes of learning through play.

Through this handbook and toolkit Kina Rwanda invites media houses and representatives to join the movement to encourage play experiences - at home, at school and in public spaces - and help ensure that all children have the opportunity to reach their full potential by learning through play.

## What is Learning through Play (LtP)?

When children play, they're feeding their imaginations, negotiating friendships, making themselves stronger and finding their own ways to fix and face the problems they encounter along the way. They're learning, growing and thriving today, while acquiring the skills that will make them successful, resilient and happy adults in the years ahead.

At Kina Rwanda the term learning through play describes how these playful experiences support children in developing the skills to serve them, their communities and society through a lifetime. By supporting learning through play Kina Rwanda aims to support children as creative, engaged, life-long learners.

**"Learning through play (LtP) is a term used in education and psychology to describe how a child can learn to make sense of the world around them when they engage in play activities. Through play children can develop social and cognitive skills, they mature emotionally, and they gain the self-confidence that is required to engage in new experiences and environments."**

*Source: Human growth and the development of personality, Jack Kahn, Susan Elinor Wright, Pergamon Press,*

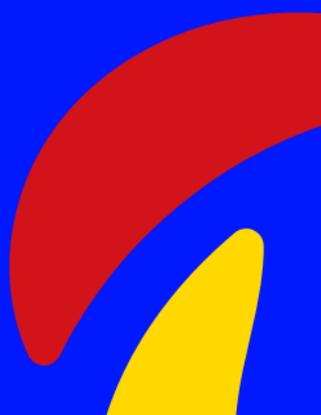
“

**Play is our favourite way to learn**

- **the two are like two wings of a butterfly**
- **one cannot exist without the other.**

*Carla Rinaldi – President of Reggio Children*

”



## A global movement

Since 2019, the global play movement - Together for Play - has encouraged parents and families to recognise the benefits of play, dedicate more time to play with their children and then demand more space and time for play to happen in their homes, communities, and in the classrooms. Through the movement, Together for Play and its partners have convened a wide range of organisations to embrace play as part of their programmes and initiatives, unlocking play for a more diverse and larger pool of children.

## About Kina Rwanda

Kina Rwanda is Rwanda's play movement that is part of the global movement. Founded in 2021, Kina Rwanda acknowledges that the reality for children differs across time, cultures and contexts. Kina Rwanda and the play movement in Rwanda has set out to explore ways to re-define play and re-imagine learning. Kina Rwanda aims to encourage people to recognise and value play as a cornerstone of children's development.

In April 2021, Kina Rwanda's 'Play for success' was a community engagement project to raise awareness of the importance of learning through play. It set out to inspire Rwandans to understand the importance of play in early childhood development so they can start intentionally planning as well as participating in their children's play time. For more on this project, see the website or view the social media spaces on Instagram, and Twitter.

Through Kina Rwanda projects, and with play movement partners, Kina Rwanda aims to build a future where learning through play empowers children to gain essential skills that will last a lifetime.





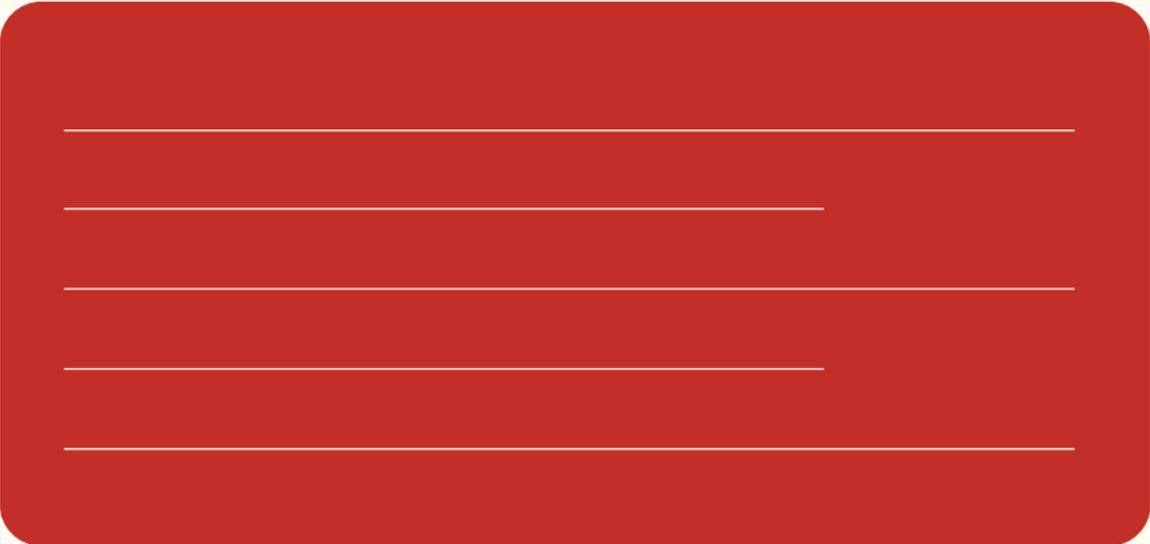
# The purpose of the handbook

This handbook is a reference guide, foundation of information and guidelines to help support media houses in producing learning through play content.

The toolkit includes a set of downloadable and shareable assets that can be used in content and programming. It provides materials that support media outlets to explore the concept of learning through play in Rwanda, and gives inspiration on how to create or cover content across media formats and encourage engagement from media audiences.

## Activity 1. Your learning goals

Use this space to note down three or four learning goals that you aim to achieve as you progress through the learning through play handbook.



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# The power of play

## What is play?

When we think of playing as adults, different games such as karere (soccer with hand made ball) and kubuguza (a counting game) come to mind with nostalgic memories for those of us who played these growing up.

While many recall experiences of play, it can be useful to explore further ...  
What is play?

“Play” can mean many kinds of experiences. It can range from ‘free play’ that is unstructured and child-initiated where children explore and discover with few constraints, to play that is more guided or structured. Where a child plays, like at home, in urban or rural environments plus access or lack of access to materials also frame play and how children play. Moreover, play is influenced by the culture, values and beliefs in the home as well as in the community at large.





## Activity 2. What is play?

Note down some words and reflections on how you would define play.

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In Rwanda, play is often associated with sport and physical activity, or it can be seen as an alternative to learning when it can actually support it, and even thought of for specific ages of children. In the following pages, we encourage you to explore the full range of play and join us in seeking to re-define play and re-imagine learning.



## Re-defining play

Research has repeatedly shown that play experiences are not merely fun – play also has an important role in learning and in preparing children for challenges in childhood and into adulthood.

From moments of playing saye (hide and seek), mabigibigi (a game played by 2 people or 2 teams clapping and hopping rhythmically), ikibariko (hopscotch), to pretending to discover a new country in their own home, play and childhood go hand in hand. These playful experiences can each provide an opportunity for the child to have fun and to learn.

Play does not need a dedicated space like a playground, nor does it need to cost anything. Playful experiences can take place in any space and with everyday materials found around the home or outside - for children, a playful experience is for everyone and can be found everywhere.



As we think of playful experiences, we encourage you to consider how play is perceived and reflect on the statements below:

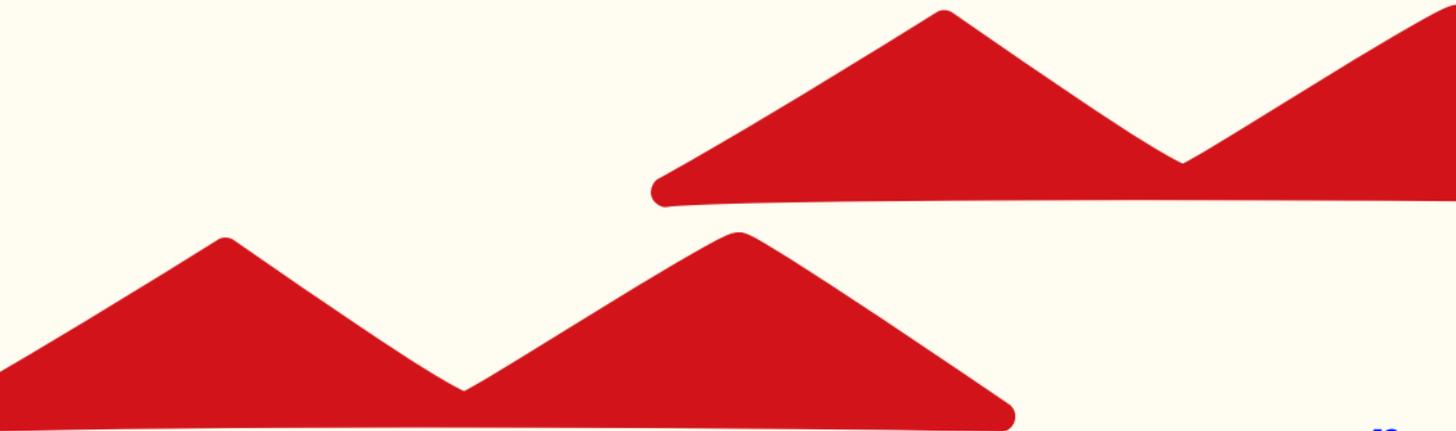
-  Play is our brain's favorite way to learn
-  Play allows children to explore, experiment, iterate and succeed
-  Play provides children with a fun way to connect with, relate to and interact with the world
-  Learning is sometimes thought of in the strictly cognitive or academic sense, yet research in child development has shown us that learning is much broader and interconnected. Play has deep impact on cognitive, social, developmental and academic skills

Sources: Play is our brain's favorite way of learning/LEGO Foundation Learning through play - A review of the evidence

## The Five Characteristics of Playful Experiences

Through this handbook and worksheets we encourage people to reflect on what play means. By doing this, we can start to unfold how playful experiences can lead to deeper learning.

For example, we can start by thinking about play experiences - mabigibigibi (hopscotch), saye (hide and seek) - and about the key elements that made them playful.



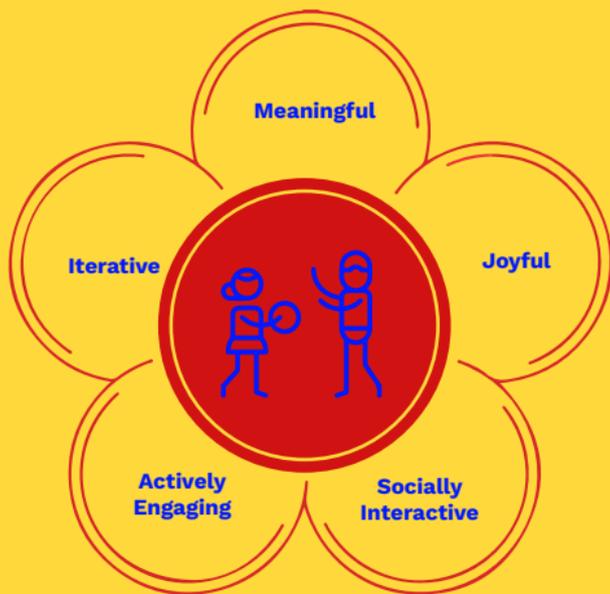
## Activity 3: The characteristics of playful experiences

In the space below, draw a playful experience from childhood or recently, and note down those elements that made it playful.



Through extensive conversations with experts and review of literature on play and learning, five characteristics of play have been identified. While we do not consider it to be a definition of play, these five characteristics are almost always seen no matter where in the world children play.

Tuvuga ko habayeho kwiga binyuze mu mikino iyo igikorwa cyabayeho cyatanze umunezero; bifasha abana guha agaciro ibyo bakoze cyangwa bize; bagiramo uruhare, kandi bose, ikintu cyatumye babasha gutekereza; hanyuma hakabaho kubaha amahirwe yo kuzagisubiramo, kukigerageza; noneho hakaza ubusabane. Ibi bintu bitanu biza bishimangira igihe abana bunguka ubumenyi kurusha ikindi ndetse n'uburyo bwo gushishikariza abantu gushyira umwanya wo gukina mu bikorwa byabo.







## Joy

It is at the heart of play - both enjoying a task for its own sake and the momentary thrill of surprise, insight, or success after overcoming challenges. Research shows how curiosity and positive experiences are linked to learning; for example, infants show more learning after a surprising event than after one that is expected. Joyful play is motivated by a child's inner motivation, something they choose to do because it is fun and something they like to do.

## Meaningful

It is when the child can relate new experiences to something already known. In play, children often explore what they have seen and done, or noticed others do, as a way of grasping what it means. By doing so, they can express and expand their understanding. If an environment is not familiar or a context not relevant, children will often lose interest and drop out.

## Actively engaged

Learning through play also involves being actively engaged. Imagine a child who's fully absorbed in finding the best hiding spot during a game (hide and seek). They are so engrossed in thinking about the most effective hiding place that they fail to hear a parent call. This mental immersion and ability to stay focused are especially powerful in the context of learning through play.

## Socially interactive

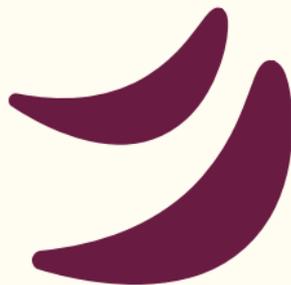
Social interaction is a powerful tool for both learning and play. By communicating their thoughts, understanding others through direct interaction and sharing ideas, children are not only able to enjoy being with others, but also to build deeper understanding and more powerful relationships. This might also be why most people think about play as a social thing. Something you do with parents, siblings or friends. There is so much that people playing learn from one another.

## Iteration

When children play they run experiments, learn through imagination, compare, predict, test and reflect. From a toddler playing with sand or with objects they find on the ground, or trying different ways to build a high tower with blocks, to a young child discovering how the slope of mountains in his neighborhood impacts the speed of moving objects, or that the angle of a slide impacts how far a marble will shoot across a room, iteration – trying out possibilities, revising hypotheses and discovering the next question leads to increased learning.

*Take a look at this video for a visual explainer:*

*<https://www.legofoundation.com/en/why-play/characteristics-of-playful-experiences/>*



“

**The predominant emotions  
of play are interest and joy.**

*Peter Gray, play researcher*

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## **What makes learning through play so important?**

For children, learning is a natural result of play – the more varied, the better. Offering children opportunities for different types of play not only cultivates a breadth of skills, it also keeps children more engaged.



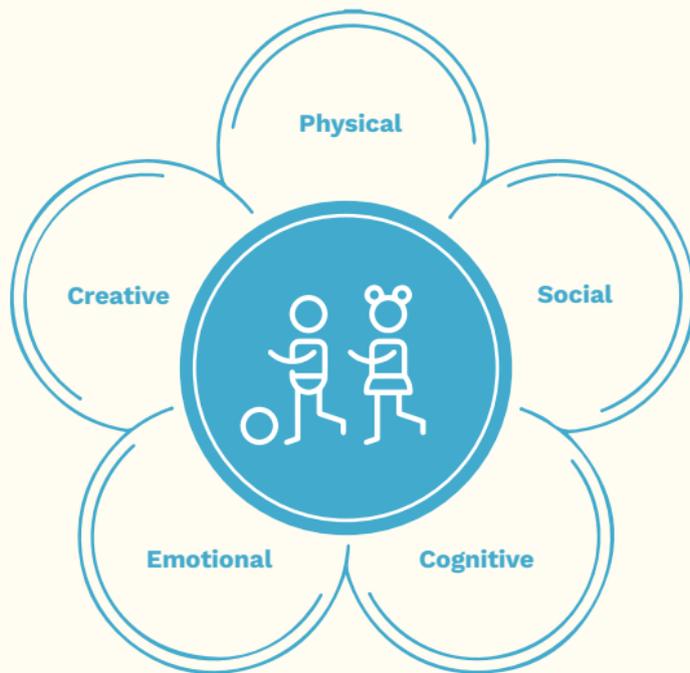
## Re-imagine learning

Research shows that a holistic approach to learning - where focus is also given to emotional, cognitive, physical, social and creative skills, better prepares and supports a child with the breadth of abilities needed in this ever-changing world\*. It is also recognised that all of these aspects of learning are not silos but rather interconnected, working together to create lifelong learners.

When children play, they are flexing, deploying and developing these interconnected skills, skills that can help them successfully navigate and thrive in an uncertain and ever-changing world.

\* (refer to page 67, for a diagram about longitudinal studies on how playful experiences equip children with holistic skills).

## The five skills for holistic development



## **The five skills for holistic development**

### **Cognitive**

By having good cognitive skills, children learn how to solve complex tasks in life – no matter if they are related to situations at school, work, or home.

Examples of cognitive skills are: concentration, problem solving, working memory and flexible thinking. Learning to tackle complex tasks and building effective strategies to identify solutions.

### **Creative**

By having strong creative skills, children can come up with new solutions to problems that the world of tomorrow will face. Creative skills support openness to new experiences and help transform ideas in meaningful ways.

Examples of creative skills are: coming up with ideas, expressing them and transforming them into reality, being OK with ambiguity, exploring possibilities, evaluating ideas, and identifying the best solution.

## The five skills for holistic development

### Physical

By having strong physical skills, a child will exercise their mind and body to maintain wellbeing towards a successful life.

Examples of physical skills are: being physically active, understanding movement and space through practicing sensory-motor skills, developing spatial understanding and nurturing an active and healthy body.

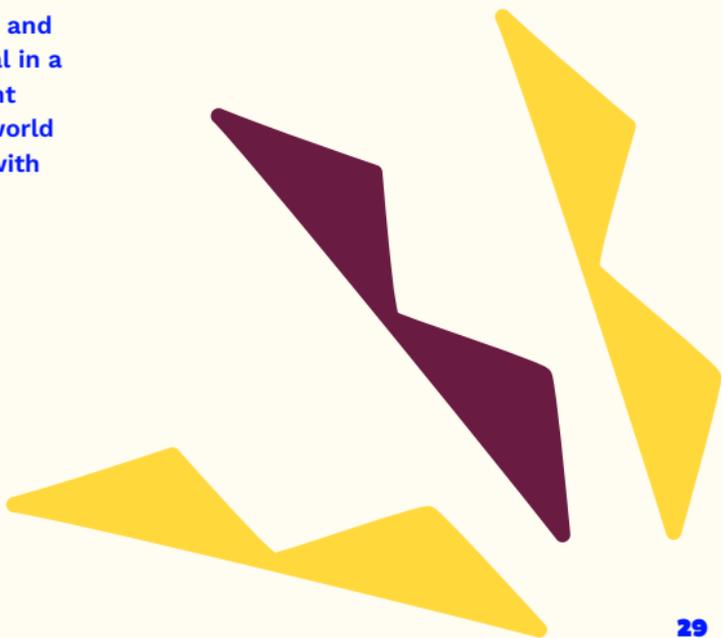
### Social

By having great social skills, children are empowered to be strong collaborators and communicators. Social skills also allow children to have healthy relationships with family and friends.

Examples of social skills are: collaboration, communication and perspective-taking. Sharing ideas, negotiating rules and building empathy.

## Importance of play in 21st century learning

Children's drive and motivation to learn, their ability to come up with ideas and imagine alternatives, as well as to connect with others and their surroundings in positive ways, is essential in a 21st-century world. Through active engagement with ideas and knowledge, and also with the world at large, children are better prepared to deal with both today and the future.



## 21st Century Skills

**Critical  
thinking**

**Problem  
solving**

**Communication**

**Collaboration**

**Creativity**

**Innovation**

These holistic and 21 Century skills developed through play are foundational to learning new things and can help children learn to deal with the unknown.

## Activity 4: Think about a popular game, like saye

This game helps children manage feelings about the unknown while also helping them to think about what other people know and see. Beyond enjoyment, playful experiences have the potential to give children the skills they will need in the future that go beyond facts.

Think of a game or playful experience and in the space below, identify what kind of learning is taking place and what kind of skills are being developed. Write your thoughts in the space below.

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**Rather than pushing children to think like adults, we might do better to remember that they are great learners and to try harder to be more like them.**

*Seymour Papert, Professor of Learning Research MIT Media Lab*

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# Sharing Goals in Powering Playful Learning

Through this handbook, Kina Rwanda invites media outlets to join the global play movement and join us in seeking to reframe play in Rwandan society.

In sharing mutual goals, we aim to come together to ensure an opportunity for each child to reach their full potential by learning through play. Together we hope to encourage people to see play in a different light, for them to recognise and value play as a cornerstone of children's development, and ultimately help unlock play experiences for children — at home, at school and in public spaces.

**Together we can:**

-  **Raise awareness of learning through play with parents, family and friends, showcasing the benefits and value of playful experiences**
-  **Contribute to and encourage conversation about learning through play - with parents, advocates, influencers and partners in the play movement**
-  **Create playful content that parents, caregivers and children enjoy and that will help create an impact for future generations**
-  **Help grow the Rwanda play movement by raising awareness of learning through play and help the community foster an understanding of the benefits of play in early childhood development (EDC)**

“

**When parents participate in play activities, children have more fun and they learn more. This also allows parents to bond with children, and also get to know their children's character, how they face failure or conflicts and hence parents can know how to give every child the support they need.**

*Emmanuel Murenzi, Director of Inspire, Educate and Empower (IEE) Rwanda*

”

# Why now?

In the current context, and in preparing for children's future as global citizens in the 21st century, there are factors that unite children across the world.

Moreso, over the last year the world has shifted dramatically with COVID-19 and never before has children's development and learning been so important. There is an opportunity for parents, teachers and systems to rethink how children learn, and play, under these changing circumstances.

In recognising this and how it relates to children in Rwanda, we can explore opportunities for people to see play in a new light and encourage people to engage in playful experiences.

Below are some factors that could be relevant for children in Rwanda.

## Resources and time:

Sometimes parents may not have access to a range of materials that can support positive playfulness for their children and may not actively consider allocating time and space to playful experiences with children as special.

### **Opportunity:**

In showcasing the contribution of playful experiences on early childhood development and as an aid to developing holistic skills and deeper learning, we can encourage people to see play in a new light, and encourage them to play an active role in children's education and development.

By using practical, real life examples we can show what's possible and accessible for people across Rwanda.

Please refer to the toolkit for play tips, play cards, did you know and how to for inspiration and assets.





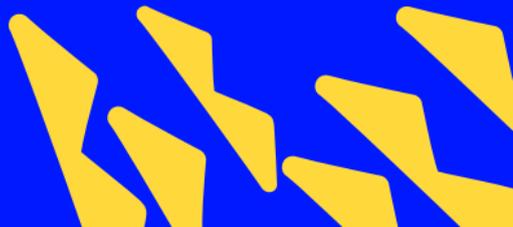


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**However much time we spend  
working, it's always good to find  
time to play with our kids.  
It's their way of learning.**

*Basile Uwimana, social media influencer*

”



“

**We can always find ways to make  
toys from our surroundings to  
awaken our kids' brains early.**

*Parent, Twitter*

”

## Play and bonding:

It is reported and appreciated that play can support bonding across families and with social connections [Reference, Play Well Report, 2018]. This bonding can include parents and wider family members at times when families and friends come together.

**Opportunity:** In supporting the understanding of the benefits of play for children, we can give ideas for parents, family members and caregivers to engage in playful experiences with children.

*Please refer to tactical timing ideas, play tips, play cards, did you know, how to for inspiration and assets.*

“

**I have discovered the secret in play. Not only kids have fun but are comfortable with you and learn a lot of things through play**

*Antoinette Niyongira, journalist*

”

“

**Playing with a kid builds up your bond, increases fun and helps kids learn in the early stage.**

*Parent, Twitter*

”

## **An Opportunity for ideas that can reframe play**

There is an opportunity to develop content that can help play and playful experiences be seen in a different light.

Together we can create new and engaging content on topics that will engage audiences with information and suggestions of play activities that can be done at home, at school and in communities. Content can show how fun play is, and at the same time demonstrate how it contributes to deeper learning experiences and indicate that play can lead to bonding between parents and caregivers.

We can share positive stories and examples to encourage people to make time for play, sharing tools that can be accessible to anyone in the community, and help parents build stronger relationships with their children.



# Tips and guidelines for creating content

In this section you will find suggestions, tips and guidelines for creating playful content that can appeal to your audiences and builds on the opportunities outlined in section 5. Find below three popular themes that can be a starting point for creating ideas and programming content that will both engage audiences and help raise awareness of learning through play and reframe how we perceive play.

**You can also find inspiration for content and programming in projects around the world.**

**Information can be found here:**

**<https://learningthroughplay.com/why-play/play-is-for-everyone-everywhere/>, including Talakani Sesame in South Africa.**



## Playful experiences are fun and support deeper learning

Play is often seen as an enjoyment and recreational activity, or an object of passing time, but as we have seen throughout section three of this handbook, it's also critical in learning and in preparing children for the future.

### Theme 1:

Through programming and media content we can show how different play activities contribute to learning. Potential content could feature:

-  How playing “agapira” helps children learn to interact in social settings
-  How singing songs helps children learn to express themselves in front of others
-  How saye helps children learn to think creatively and try things that are out of the box

*Please refer to tactical timing ideas, play tips, play cards, did you know, how to for inspiration and assets.*

## Playful parenting

In the previous sections of this handbook we have shown how finding opportunities for playful parenting can contribute to bonding as well as encourage learning experiences. Through creating content that encourages playful parenting we have an opportunity to normalise parenting that involves play. Potential content could feature:

### Theme 2:

- How play can be done at anytime and anywhere, in the backyard, in the kitchen, in the living room or even at school during break time
- How home chores can be turned into enjoyable play. Cleaning or folding clothes can be done in teams to encourage children's independence while also having fun with other family members.
- Commuting to school/work can be playful, as children can sing or recite their favorite poems on the way home
- How different aspects of daily life can be turned into playful experiences. Children can for example use a comb as a microphone while singing or a banana as a mobile phone during pretend play at home
- How things that we see everyday in our communities can be play time props. For example clothes can be used to build a clothes tower, paper can be used to make a boat, and tree leaves can be used to make an airplane

*Please refer to the toolkit for play tips, play cards, did you know and how to for inspiration and assets.*

## Play and bonding

Play time can be a strong bridge for bonding between children and adults. Play is not only a bonding opportunity for parents but also other caregivers, like family members and friends.

Through media and programming, we have the potential to not only tell but also show how playtime is a wonderful bonding time. Potential content could feature:

### Theme 3:

-  Showing how parents/caregivers and children enjoy collective play
-  Experiences of parents/caregivers and children who engage in play
-  A media personality engaging in play and sharing experiences

**Inspire: Creative  
springboard and  
play themes**

**Theme 1: Play is fun  
and supports learning**

**Theme 2: Playful  
parenting**

**Theme 3: Play and  
bonding**

**Media format**

Consider the format of the media outlet and explore content that is best suited for format, programme or segment, for example:-

Radio

Storytelling, story acting, singing

TV

Visual games, demonstrating making things, sports

Tactical timings – calendar dates and lifestyle/culture  
Print Bloggers

Tactical themes – calendar dates and lifestyle/culture

**Creating audience engagement  
and inviting audience voices**

Explore ideas that will initiate engagement with audiences. For example:

- Audience input, e.g., call ins
- Interactive polls
- Champion parent voices – e.g., call out for parents to share family play experiences
- Champion voices – how play shaped you
- Tactical themes – Call out around calendar dates, e.g., weekends, car free days, school holidays

# Summary and actions

Through this handbook, and with the toolkit, we hope that Kina Rwanda has inspired the media to see play in a new light and to join the play movement in Rwanda by developing playful content for media audiences.

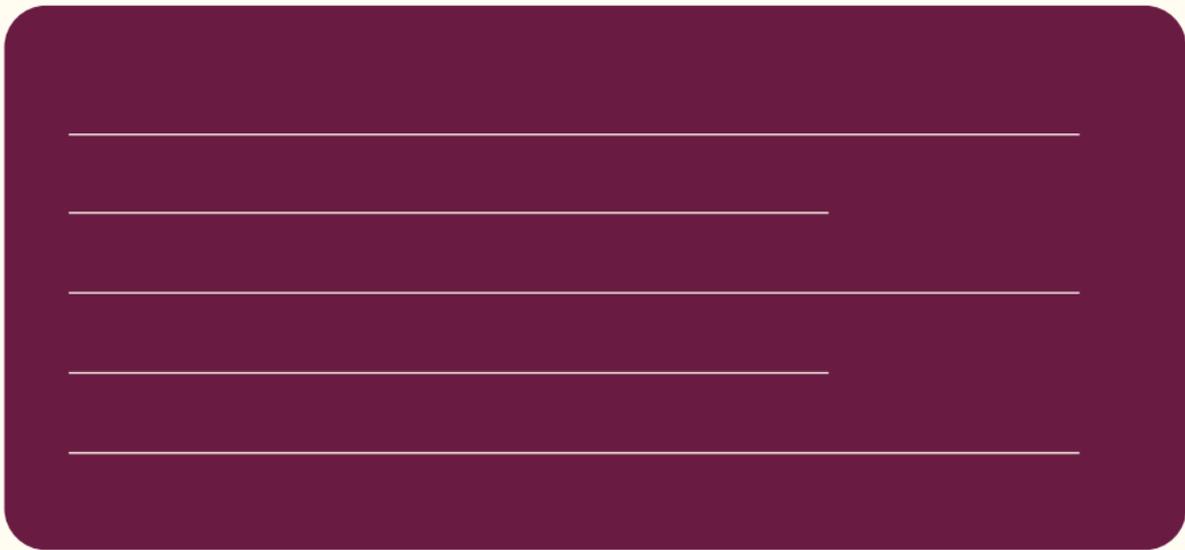
Kina Rwanda is keen to support media and partners in becoming part of the play movement and in content creation ideas, and invite media houses and representatives to contact us at [info@kinarwanda.com](mailto:info@kinarwanda.com) for any support and conversation that may be required.

**And finally, if you would like to join the play movement we encourage you to note down a personal or professional pledge to describe actions that you will take in joining the movement.**



## Activity 5: Pledge

Use the below space to write your pledge to join the play movement in Rwanda and the actions that you might take. Feel free to keep this for your personal information or to share it with Kina Rwanda at [info@kinarwanda.com](mailto:info@kinarwanda.com)



The **LEGO** Foundation 



**Together for Play is funded by the LEGO Foundation and powered by Purpose, working in partnership with allies and amplifiers in each country, including NGOs, education networks, and early childhood development organisations. For a full list of partners, please see more on our dedicated country pages at <https://www.togetherforplay.com>**

# Appendix

## **Appendix 1:**

Statements and statistics

## **Appendix 2:**

Resources and further information

# APPENDIX ONE

## Statements and statistics

The following are some broader statements and statistics about play that can be useful in considering content or conversation points. Please also refer to the references and further reading section for links to wider resources.

### Statements

-  Play is one of the most important aspects of children's upbringing. From the very early years throughout adolescence and into adulthood, play nurtures and develops the breadth of skills that enable us to be powerful agents of our own lives and positive contributors to our communities.
-  Learning through play reduces achievement gaps between children from different social backgrounds
-  Learning through play using creative digital platforms has real educational power, for educators and children alike.
-  Play can provide a supportive context for children to cope with the demands of their environment, respond to challenges with creative problem solving, and manage their anxiety in stressful situations

## Statistics

A global research study across nine countries, showed that today's parents are increasingly aware of the power play has to shape their child's personality, skills and emotional intelligence in the early years. More than 9 in 10 parents believe play is essential to their child's wellbeing, happiness and development. They recognise play helps build the skills that lead to academic success, but also how play helps foster creative, sociable, emotionally-resilient adults.



**95%**

Problem-solving



**96%**

Working or collaborating with others



**96%**

Socialising with others



**94%**

Being able to question and make up their own minds



**95%**

Curiosity



**96%**

Communication



**96%**

Creativity



**93%**

Emotional Intelligence (e.g empathy)



**95%**

confidence



**94%**

To learn from mistakes

Parents increasingly feel that life skills and playful teaching should be part of a child's schooling from the earliest possible opportunity.



**95%**

Of parents think play should be used as a **tool** for **child development and learning in schools**



**91%**

Of parents think play has a role in helping their child to **succeed in school**



**91%**

Of parents think children who play more will achieve **greater success in higher education and work later in life**



**91%**

of children say they **learn better** when it feels like play

While there are many ways of being part of a family, the benefits of play remain powerful and transformative – whatever form the family takes. Shared play, whether with friends, siblings, parents, carers or other adults, doesn't just benefit a child's development. It has many additional socio-emotional benefits for parents and families too.

+5 Hours

88%

Of families who spend **more than 5 hours a week** playing together who say they are happy.

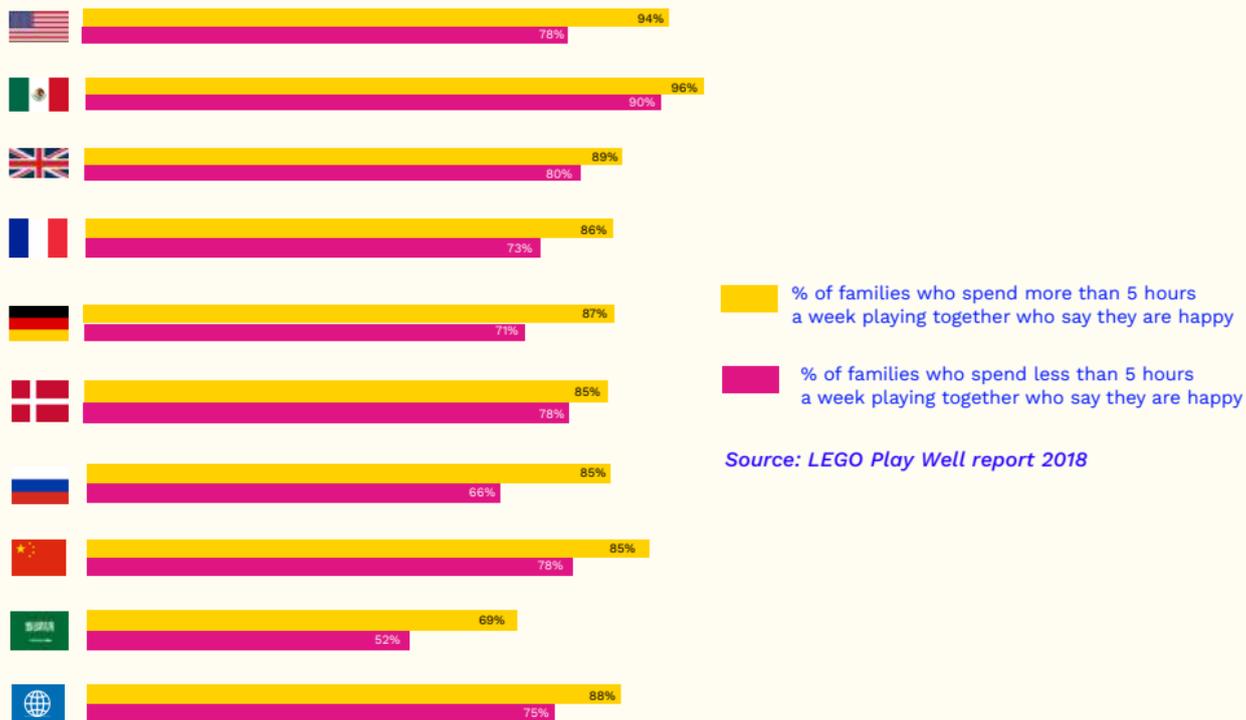


-5 Hours

75%

Of families who spend **less than 5 hours a week** playing together who say they are happy.

## Family happiness by time families spend playing together



Source: LEGO Play Well report 2018

## APPENDIX TWO

### References and further information:

UNICEF:

<https://www.unicef.org/rwanda/stories/learning-playing-powerful-approach-help-children-deal-uncertain-times-covid-19>

Links to videos on Kina Rwanda Youtube channel

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCuqhOGjv-NCELYXtuGRo4yQ>

What we mean by: Learning through play - The Lego Foundation.

[[https://www.legofoundation.com/media/1062/learningthroughplay\\_leaflet\\_june2017.pdf](https://www.legofoundation.com/media/1062/learningthroughplay_leaflet_june2017.pdf)]

Characteristics of playful experiences:

<https://www.legofoundation.com/en/why-play/characteristics-of-playful-experiences/>

White Paper: Longitudinal studies illustrate how playful experiences equip children with these critical skills -

[https://www.legofoundation.com/media/1681/play-facilitation\\_the-science-behind-the-art-of-engaging-young-children.pdf](https://www.legofoundation.com/media/1681/play-facilitation_the-science-behind-the-art-of-engaging-young-children.pdf)

Play facilitation: the science behind the art of engaging young children -

[https://www.legofoundation.com/media/1681/play-facilitation\\_the-science-behind-the-art-of-engaging-young-children.pdf](https://www.legofoundation.com/media/1681/play-facilitation_the-science-behind-the-art-of-engaging-young-children.pdf)

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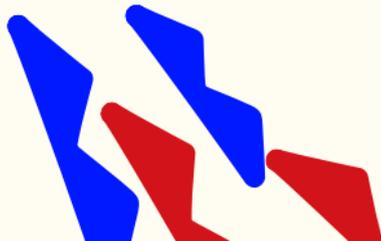
The science of learning, a review of the evidence on learning through play

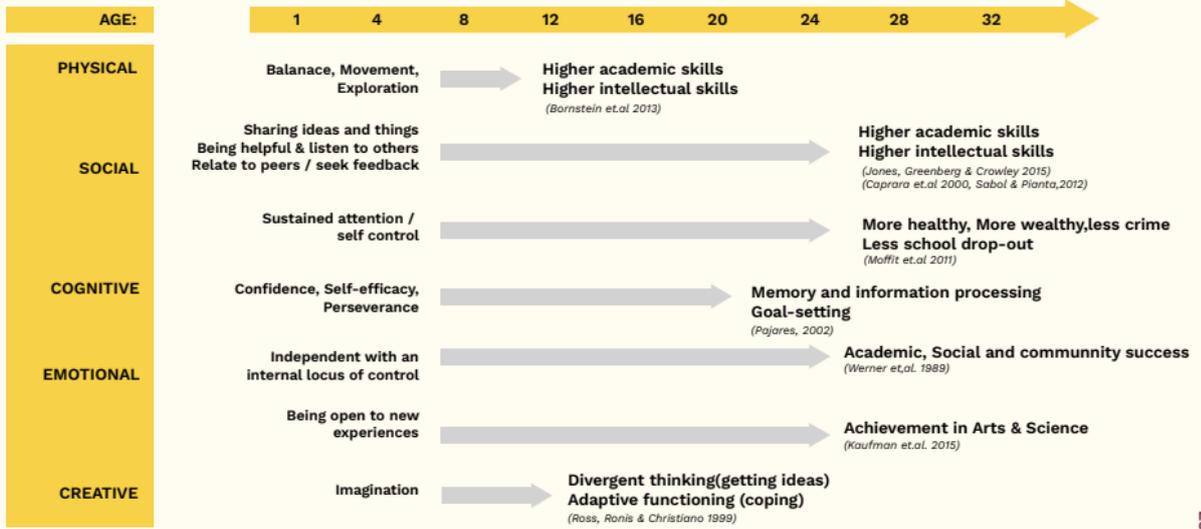
<https://www.legofoundation.com/en/learn-how/knowledge-base/learning-through-play-a-review-of-the-evidence/>

Characteristics of playful experiences: The Science of Learning: Hirsh-Pasek, K., Zosh, J. M., Golinkoff, R. M., Gray, J. H., Robb, M. B., & Kaufman, J. (2015). Putting education in “educational” apps: lessons from the science of learning. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 16(1), 3-34.

Playing together:

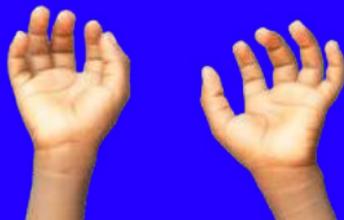
<https://www.legofoundation.com/en/learn-how/knowledge-base/playing-together-activity-manual/>











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