

What you will learn in this module

How to help children with disabilities join peers in play

Children learn by playing — play teaches children how to think.

How to give young children with disabilities the physical support they need

All children need to move around and explore their environments.

How to help children develop the secure attachments they need in order to learn

All learning starts with relationships.

You already know a lot about how children learn

You know that as children mature, their play advances through predictable stages.

Teachers help expand children's experience in each play stage, and encourage them to move on to the next. Children with disabilities are learning even if they play differently than other children. Teachers can support their development by involving them in a variety of experiences and activities.

You know that babies find out about their world by playing.

Play gives infants and toddlers time to practice new skills and acquire concepts that help them learn. Sometimes young children with disabilities can't move around and explore as easily as other children. Teachers may need to adapt toys and objects so the children can play with them.

You know that children need to form secure attachments with other people in order to develop their ability to learn.

Children's attachments to other people make a big difference in their ability to pay attention and learn. Some disabilities make it difficult for children to make connections with parents and other caregivers. Teachers may need to give them extra support to build the security and self-esteem they need to develop their ability to learn.

How to help children with disabilities join in play

Play helps children learn to connect familiar objects and actions to concepts and words.

This process of connecting and concept-building, which is called cognition, includes three stages. First, children play with an object. Second, they find out what the object is used for; for example, a chair is something you sit on. Third, they form the idea of a chair, and play with the concept. They can pretend that there's a chair at the table even if it's not there, because they understand the concept of a chair.

Concepts about actions are learned best through physical activity. As babies, we learn to pick things up. Picking up is a physical skill. After we've had a lot of experience doing that, we learn the concept of picking things up. It means reaching out, grasping an object, and lifting it. We find out that we can pick up different things — toys, blocks, cookies. We find out there are some things we can't pick up — soap bubbles, wet cheerios, heavy things. Through these various experiences, we build the concept of picking up in our mind. Once we've built a concept, we're ready to learn to communicate it in words, signs, gestures, or whatever method we use. But cognition comes first.

