

Action Guide

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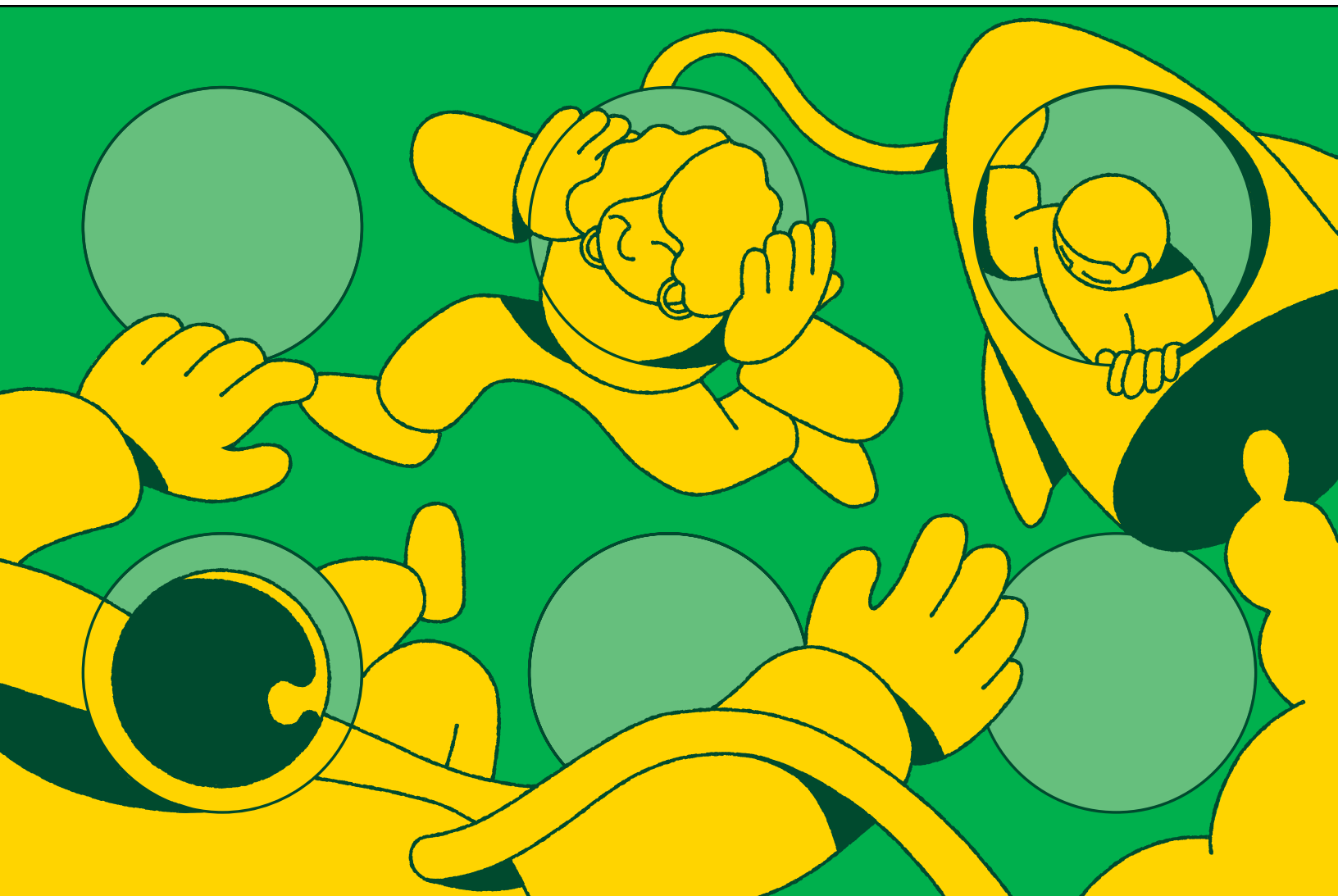
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Policymaker

Packed schedules, limited public space, and unequal access to safe environments have left many children without the freedom or opportunity to play. We need your help to create a world where every child's right to play is respected, protected and fulfilled.



How to get involved

Policymakers are essential enablers of play ecosystems. Just as teachers and parents shape children’s immediate environments, policymakers shape the systems that make play possible. When legislators understand and prioritize the value of play, they can unlock its benefits for children, families, and entire communities.

1 Expand playful parenting and caregiver support programs

Fund or scale programs that help parents and caregivers integrate play into daily life — including home visiting programs, public health campaigns, and caregiver workshops. States can integrate playful parenting into early childhood systems supported by health, education, and family agencies.

2 Adopt play-based learning standards in public education

Integrate required hours of play-based learning into state early childhood education standards. Encourage a balance of structured and unstructured play in Pre-K and Kindergarten settings to promote creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving from the earliest years.

3 Reimagine public spaces as play spaces

Leverage state parks, transportation, and infrastructure budgets to create more child-friendly, safe, and nature-based play environments. Prioritize green schoolyards, walkable neighborhoods, and play installations in areas where children live and learn.

What else can you do...

Whether you’re a city councilor, state senator, congressional staffer, or community leader, you have the power to help children thrive by making play a public priority. You don’t need to start from scratch. Use the examples, policy levers, and community momentum in this guide to take action now.

- **Adopt a resolution** recognizing June 11 as the **International Day of Play** in your city, state or country, or host a community IDOP celebration, increasing access to play and raising the importance of play
- **Introduce or support legislation** that advances play-based learning, parenting, or infrastructure
- **Fund a local pilot program** that expands access to play in underserved neighborhoods
- **Meet with families and educators** to co-create playful spaces and policies

What’s already been done?

Mandating play-based learning:

In 2018, New Hampshire passed a first-of-its-kind state law requiring public kindergarten programs to use play-based, child-directed learning approaches. The law emphasizes exploration, movement, and creativity, and has since led to statewide coaching efforts for educators. Early wins include deeper student engagement and stronger family buy-in for developmentally appropriate learning.

✦ Lesson: States can lead on creating playful spaces where it matters – early and often. And can focus on child wellbeing in the process.

Reimagining civic space through play:

On June 11, 2024, Boston celebrated the first International Day of Play with a public activation at City Hall Plaza. Children and families co-created a LEGO model of “What a More Playful Boston Looks Like,” alongside hands-on workshops, youth statements, and city leaders in attendance. The event sparked new conversations around public space, equity, and community joy.

✦ Lesson: Local governments can lead by example and let children help design the future.

Creativity as a national learning priority:

In 2022, Singapore added “Creative Thinking” to its national assessment framework for 15-year-olds, recognizing that innovation and adaptability are essential in a fast-changing world. This move followed years of curriculum design focused on problem-solving, group collaboration, and real-world application in classrooms as early as preschool.

✦ Lesson: Governments can signal what matters by what they measure.

Playful parenting programs:

A great success story has emerged from Bhutan, where the Bhutanese government has recently issued an executive order to make playful parenting support available to families with young children at all health facilities across the country. This follows the LEGO Foundation’s four-year grant to Save the Children Bhutan, who have worked with the government and other partners to scale up their playful parenting program nationwide. The scaling process was supported by implementation research from FHI360, which helped drive evidence-based adaptations to the program.

✦ Lesson: Governments can scale up programs to increase the impact for children by equipping families with simple, joyful ways to nurture their children’s holistic development.

Influencing education policy:

PlayMatters, a consortium of international partners working to improve learning outcomes for children in crisis through play-based approaches, played a key role in shaping Uganda’s Second Education Response Plan (ERPii). It helped position play-based learning as a recognised education innovation for refugee and host community contexts.

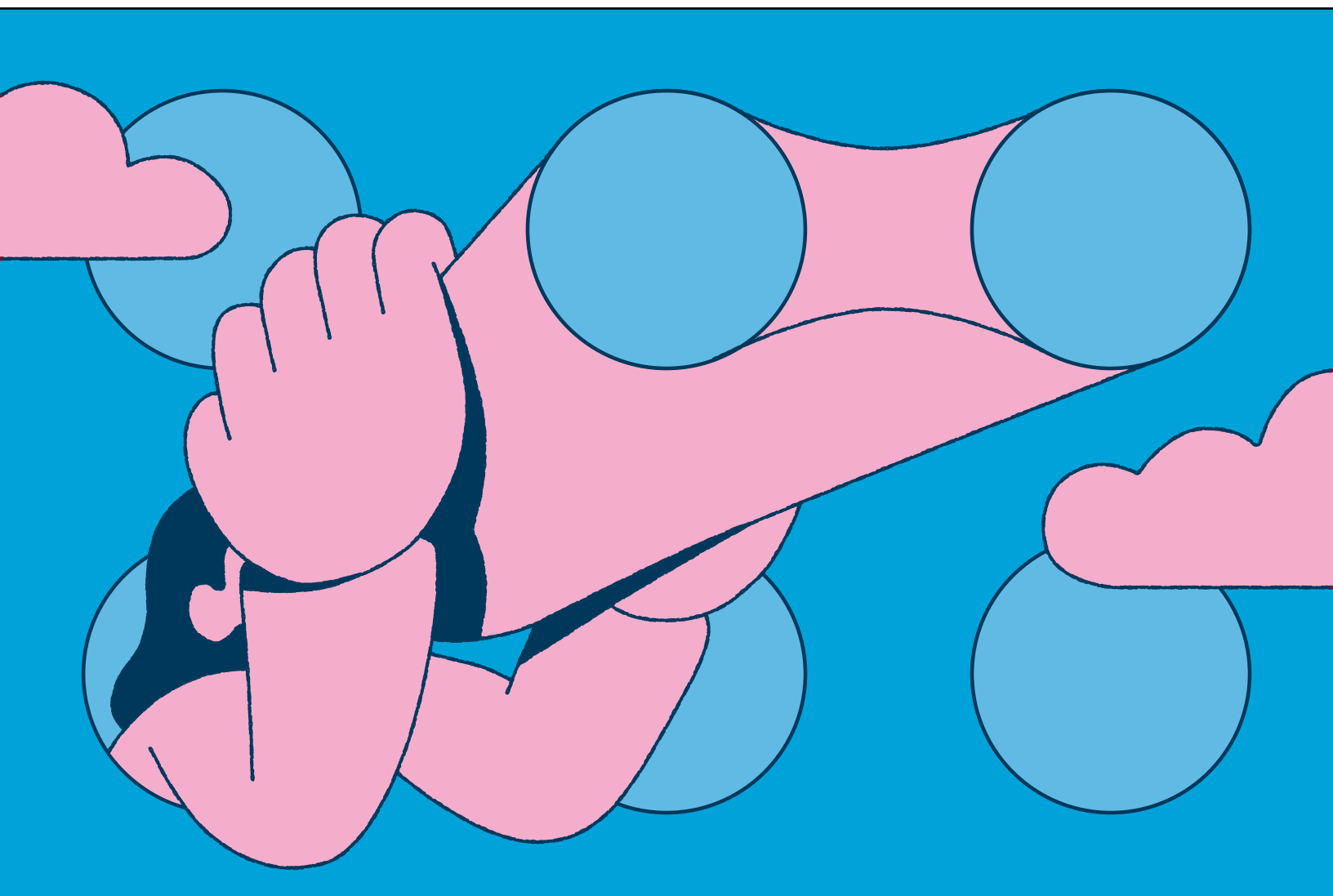
Working closely with the Ministry of Education and Sports, PlayMatters provided technical support to the development and implementation of the education response plan, strengthening coordination, resource mobilization, and financing. This contributed to increased investment in education in emergencies and greater prioritization of early childhood care and education.

✦ Lesson: Education response plans can enable the scaling of play-based learning, reaching a majority of refugee learners and improving learning conditions at scale.

Parent

Never stop playing.

Play doesn't require perfection, extra hours in the day, or elaborate plans from parents and caregivers. It shows up in small, meaningful ways — in laughter, in nudges, in curiosity, and in simply being present together.



How to get involved

Here are a few ways to think about the role play already has in your child's life with some gentle invitations for how you might support it and join in!

1 Play to connect

Play brings people together through shared attention, laughter, and imagination. It creates moments where children and caregivers can build and strengthen relationships.

Invitation: Join your child's play for a few minutes and follow their lead, or invite them into yours. Blast some music and have a dance party. Build something side by side. Play a video game together. Let connection lead.

2 Play to process

Through play, children explore experiences, emotions, and big questions at their own pace. Pretending, building, and storytelling help them make sense of what they're grappling with and wondering about.

Invitation: When your child returns to the same theme in play, stay curious and let the story unfold, creating a space for them to safely process their ideas and feelings. For more ideas, explore [Build Big Feelings](#) and [Build and Talk](#) to spark your thinking.

3 Play to explore

Play is fueled by curiosity as children test ideas, experiment, and discover how things work. Exploration can happen at the kitchen table, out in nature, within a virtual world, and anywhere in between.

Invitation: When you notice your child exploring, lean in with "What if?" or "I wonder..." and see where the curiosity takes you.

4 Play to express

Play offers children many ways to share ideas, feelings, and stories beyond words. Through making, moving, and imagining, they show what matters to them.

Invitation: Offer open-ended materials, both hands-on (like blocks, art supplies, and loose parts) and digital (like drawing apps, music tools, or photo and video tools). Provide space to explore, and notice what your child chooses to create and share.

5 Play in everyday moments

Play doesn't only live in special playtime. When playfulness enters everyday routines, ordinary moments become chances to connect and grow.

Invitation: Pick an everyday activity — cooking, getting dressed, tidying up — and add a playful twist together. [UNICEF's Playtime, Anytime!](#) offers more inspiration for bringing play into daily life.

6 Advocate for play-friendly spaces

Children thrive in communities and across spaces where play is welcome — in parks, libraries, sidewalks, classrooms, public spaces, and digital environments. As they move seamlessly between these spaces, each one shapes their development, wellbeing, and sense of belonging.

Invitation: Support and advocate for safe, inclusive, and joyful spaces where children play both offline and online. Be inspired by their ideas by using tools like [Build the Change Playful Cities](#) and [Build and Talk](#) to understand how they like to engage in these spaces and what makes them welcoming, fun, and meaningful. Use their insights to guide your conversations with other parents, schools, community leaders, and digital platforms, helping to advocate for and shape environments that will support children to thrive wherever and however they play.

7 Champion play in schools

Play doesn't compete with learning — it fuels it. Through playful learning, children build creativity, collaboration, problem-solving, and confidence.

Invitation: Stay curious about how play shows up in your child's school. Ask how creativity, exploration, and hands-on learning are supported. When opportunities arise, lend your voice to approaches that protect time and space for playful learning.

What else can you do...

Make “character voices storytime”

Pick a book and each take a character voice — silly, dramatic, or goofy — when you read aloud together. It turns a regular read-aloud into a performance your child will look forward to! (This comes from the idea of making reading lively by varying your voice.)

Create a daily 10-minute “story snack” routine

Set aside just 10–15 minutes every day for books — maybe after school, during breakfast, or before bedtime — where phones and screens are put away and you cozy up together. You’re building a habit and a special bonding ritual.

Take turns reading pages

If your child is starting to read, alternate pages with them. You read one, they read one — cheering each other on. Ask fun questions like “What do you think will happen next?” to keep them curious.

Start a mini “family book club”

Once a week, read a short book together and have a tiny discussion: favorite part, funniest character, or what they’d add to the story. You could even invite another family to join! This also fits with UNICEF’s idea of storytime and shared reading experiences.

Act out your favorite stories

After reading, use toys, puppets, or even just yourselves to act out the story. This is a playful way to deepen engagement and bring the book to life — and kids often remember the story better afterward!

“Passport to play” world games

Turn playtime into a mini-world tour! Try a simple game from another country together (think scavenger hunts, “Statues” freeze dance, or classic tag with goofy names). Use only household items — no special gear needed.

Outdoor play adventure

Head outside — even just in the yard, park, or driveway — and invent a nature scavenger list (find a leaf, something round, something blue). Fresh air + play = huge mental and physical benefits.

Play with purpose

Turn everyday routines into play:

- Laundry becomes a sock-sorting race
- Cooking turns into a “kitchen band” session with spoons & pots

These little playful moments can build problem-solving and cooperation skills

Storytelling adventure

After playtime, take turns making up a short story about something that happened during play (your kid’s “epic scooter race” or “the mystery of the missing sock”). Storytelling extends the joy and builds language skills.

Everyday playtime carousel

Pick one new play idea each day — something short and simple like Photo Puzzle or Magic Paper — and rotate through them all week. Change it up daily to keep things.

Craft & create session

Use simple materials (paper, markers, recycled items) to make a fun creation together. Try making Paper Planes, or Make a Pet, and chat about what you’re making as you go.

Family puppet theater night

Put on a homemade puppet show with socks or paper bag puppets. Ask your child to create characters and tell a story — you can even record it! (Great for imagination and storytelling skills.)

Superhero costume lottery

Make a quick costume from things around the house (scarves, hats, towels), then act out superhero adventures as a team. Use your imagination to solve a silly “save the day” challenge!

Photo scavenger hunt

Give your kid a list of things to find and snap around the house or yard — colors, shapes, or textures. This turns simple exploring into a playful mission.

Indoor/outdoor obstacle course

Use cushions, chairs, chalk lines, or backyard objects to build a simple obstacle course. Time each other, cheer each other on, and maybe create goofy awards at the end!

Educator

You don't have to start from scratch to bring play into your classroom. Explore curated talks and lessons in the **Play@TED Learning Lab** at ed.ted.com/play that show how play can transform learning, spark imagination, and open up new possibilities. Then use them to create meaningful, playful experiences for your students.

