

# Invitations to Play Overview



## WHAT?

Invitations to play are sometimes called invitations to learn, provocations, or makerspaces. They encourage children to learn through exploration by providing materials that “invite them to play” in a creative, non-directive way with no criteria for success. It is a way to set up children’s play and invite them in to a new and different way to spark their interest and expand their thinking.

## WHY?

Children learn through first-hand experiences and build self-confidence in their ability to control their own motivation, behavior, and social environment. Imagination is set free to explore, attempt new things, fail, and try again. Children make their own choices and act independently, sparking curiosity, wonder, delight, and a joy of learning. Self-directed, meaningful play strengthens autonomy and internal motivation and provides opportunities to practice goal setting, negotiating, and making and sharing ideas. Novelty and surprise spring from child-initiated exploration inspiring curiosity, fascination, and engagement. This encourages learning from mistakes, taking risks, creating, exploring, pretending, and inventing. The love of learning increases the sense of belonging, pride, and sets the stage for academic and social success.



## HOW?

There are usually three elements to create an invitation to play:

1. Open ended activities - They often include open-ended activities (or loose parts) that can be used in a variety of ways (such as shells, pinecones, or stones that can be counted, weighed, sorted, used in games, or in art).
2. Arranged together - They are arranged in a well-defined space, making the invitation to play inviting, self-explanatory, and requiring little adult direction. These are in addition to learning centers.
3. Little direction from an adult - There is little direction by the teacher and should be self-explanatory for the children. The children are invited to think and explore an idea and the direction of play is decided by the children.

Invitations to play are also well-thought out, engaging collections of materials arranged to spark a child’s interest and imagination, encourage exploration and creativity, and extend a child’s ideas and learning.

They can include photos, pictures, books, and written or verbal questions that spark children’s interest.



## WHO?

- Educators provide the materials and general directions, when needed, and invite children to think about or explore an idea.
- Children take the initiative to investigate and explore the materials in ways that interest them.



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