

THE PLAY LAB FOUNDATION'S

LEARNING LAB

If you've taken a peek at our weekly possibilities, you'll see a section labeled "Self-Help Skills." You may have wondered, What's that all about? Self-help skills are the building blocks of independence, confidence, and resilience. By giving children opportunities to practice these skills, we're not only helping them feel capable but also supporting their fine and gross motor skills, problem-solving abilities, and emotional growth. At Play Lab, self-help skills are a key part of our philosophy, as they allow children to feel more engaged and connected to their everyday routines.



Trusting our little one to lead the stroll to the park.

CONFIDENT & CAPABLE: ENCOURAGING INDEPENDENCE AT EVERY STAGE

Each age group explores self-help skills in developmentally appropriate ways. Here's one example for each group:

- **Scouts (14–17 months):** Learning to wipe their hands and face after snack time.
- **Rangers (18–24 months):** Putting away toys in their own special spot.
- **Explorers (Preschoolers):** Practicing putting on and taking off their shoes.

Encouraging Independence at Home: What to Expect & How It Often Looks

- **15–18 months:** Eager to try but may spill or drop items as they work on balance and coordination.
- **Two's (24–36 months):** Capable of simple tasks (like putting on shoes) but may need reminders or mix up steps.
- **Preschoolers (3–5 years):** Can handle more complex tasks (such as dressing) with occasional backward shirts or mismatched shoes—proudly independent!

Want to Learn More?

Listen here: [How to Build Independence in Preschoolers](#)

Thanks for tuning into The Learning Lab! Each week, we'll bring you more insights to support your child's journey. See you next Monday for another edition. Have a wonderful week!

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Have you ever found yourself wishing for a week of uninterrupted rest? Or maybe even six? Most of us know the feeling of getting through the day on minimal sleep. It's like operating on low battery—you're forgetful, you lose track of things, and everything feels harder. Personally, I'm at my most forgetful when I've gone without sleep. Losing my phone, forgetting what I walked into a room for—it's all part of the fog that comes with being sleep-deprived!

This struggle isn't just tough for us as adults; for children, proper rest is essential for growth, focus, and emotional balance. Sleep is like fuel, and it's critical to their development and resilience, allowing them to learn, play, and manage emotions.



REST, RECHARGED: UNDERSTANDING SLEEP AND ITS IMPACT ON LEARNING

Here's a quick guide to recommended sleep ranges for little ones, including how naps and nighttime rest contribute to their overall well-being:

- **1-23 Months: Approximately 14-17 hours per day**
 - Naps: Several short naps totaling 3-4 hours
 - Night: 10-12 hours (may wake for feedings)
- **24-36 Months: Around 12-14 hours per day**
 - Naps: 1-2 hours in the afternoon
 - Night: 10-12 hours
- **3-5 Years: Approximately 10-13 hours per day**
 - Naps: Optional, 1 hour or less
 - Night: 10-12 hours

Debunking Sleep Myths

- **1-23 Months: Myth:** Napping disrupts night sleep.
- **Fact:** Quality naps support better nighttime sleep.
- **24-36 Months: Myth:** Skipping naps eases bedtime.
- **Fact:** Skipping naps can lead to overtiredness, making bedtime harder.
- **3-5 Years: Myth:** Preschoolers outgrow naps.
- **Fact:** Many still benefit from short naps or quiet time, especially after busy mornings.

Listen Along!

"If you keep children up, they don't get tired; they get wired." This line—and so many a-ha moments—from the Everything ECE Podcast even has me rethinking our 1:30 nap time! Give it a listen [here](#), and if you're curious, check out Mcall Gordon's book Why Won't You Sleep? [here](#).

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For many, the holidays are a time of joy and connection, filled with laughter, love, and moments with the people we care about most. But alongside the magic, there's another common holiday guest: burnout.

Anyone who has spent the holidays with small children has seen it: a little one reaching their limit with mood swings and meltdowns. It's no fun to witness, less fun to manage, and least fun for the child experiencing it all.



Striking a pose for Play Lab holiday cards we didn't send. :)

THE HOLIDAY HUSTLE: PROTECTING KIDS FROM BURNOUT

Holiday Hangover Hacks

Here are five quick tips to help kids avoid holiday burnout:

1. **Stick to a sleep schedule.** Consistent rest keeps kids balanced.
2. **Plan downtime.** Leave space for unstructured play and rest.
3. **Offer balanced meals.** Keep treats in check with nourishing foods.
4. **Set clear expectations.** Prepare kids for transitions and events.
5. **Avoid overstimulation.** Create quiet moments to help kids recharge.

So why does this happen? Here's what's going on:

1. **Overtiredness.** Lack of consistent sleep during busy holidays makes it harder for kids to manage their emotions and energy.
2. **Disrupted routines.** The loss of familiar patterns can leave kids feeling unsettled and out of sync.
3. **Too much sugar.** All those holiday treats? They wreak havoc on little bodies, causing crashes and mood swings.
4. **Overstimulation.** The bright lights, big gatherings, and constant activity can be overwhelming for young minds.

Making the Most of the Holidays (Without the Burnout)

Check out a holiday Instagram post [here](#), where I share a quick 20-second tip to help navigate holiday burnout. Wishing you all a joyful and manageable start to the holiday season! Take care, and I'll see you next week.

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Parenthood often brings up words like “selflessness” and “sacrifice,” but how often do we talk about your joy, hobbies, and well-being? Let's change that. Recently, I had a fall—not just a physical one, but a metaphorical crash, too. When life comes crashing down, whether it's patience, frustration tolerance, or your ability to be flexible, it's a reminder: you can't pour from an empty cup. As they say, “Put your oxygen mask on first before helping others.”

The work of loving and caring for children is not about martyrdom. Sacrificing your health and happiness is not sustainable. And here's the truth: children are watching. If they see us prioritizing everyone else at our own expense, they'll believe that's the way they're “supposed to be.” Let's rewrite that narrative. Caregiving means giving care to children, to others, and to yourself.

“Taking care of yourself doesn't mean me first, it means me too.”
— L.R. Knost



THIS GOES OUT TO YOU: THE GROWNUP EDITION

Three ways to start prioritizing self-care:

- **Slow down.** It doesn't all have to be done at once! Taking a pause often reveals that the “urgent” things can actually wait.
- **Give yourself grace.** You've only been a parent for as long as your oldest child has been alive. You're learning and growing right along with them. Be as gentle with yourself as you are with your child.
- **Find small moments for joy.** Revisit an old hobby, spend 10 minutes journaling, or sip your coffee in peace. Small joys can have a big impact on your day.

Recognizing Compassion Fatigue: Caring for Yourself to Care for Others

Lastly, compassion fatigue is real, and it's important to recognize when you're feeling it. I highly recommend this insightful article on Exchange Press: [Compassion Fatigue](#).

Take care of yourself—you're worth it.

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We've all seen it: Children running circles in the house, full of boundless energy. A child dumping a container of toys or other items seconds after you've tidied up. That infamous peer-on-peer whack to claim a coveted toy.

As activating as these moments can be, they're part of something much bigger—necessary intersections of learning, development, and skills yet to be acquired.



One of our crew living her best life at our neighborhood park.

RETHINKING PLAY:

Shifting Perspectives on Play in Early Learning

Question of the Week

What if dumping, crashing, and disarray aren't misbehavior, but the building blocks of problem-solving, resilience, and creativity? Which of these skills wouldn't you want them to learn?

"We are never more fully alive, more completely ourselves, or more deeply engrossed in anything than when we are playing."

-Charles Schaefer

What's Really Going On?

- **Running in circles:** They're exploring their vestibular system (balance) and testing physical limits. They're learning how their body works in space.
- **Dumping items:** This is linked to enclosure and containment schemas. They're figuring out boundaries, cause and effect, and control.
- **Hitting:** As challenging as it is, it's often about impulse control and learning how to express wants and needs socially.

Looking Ahead

As we head into the new year, we'll be leaning into our ethos—embracing the "why" behind play. Together, we'll explore how these moments, though chaotic to the untrained eye, are rich opportunities for learning, growth, and connection.

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SEEING, SPEAKING, AND HONORING BLACK CHILDHOOD

"Does your face light up when your kid walks in a room? Your kid or anyone else's? Does your expression say, 'I'm so glad you are here?'" What **Toni Morrison** describes in this quote is a **Black-Child Affirming practice**.

As we begin **Black History Month**, I want to walk you through what it means for the Play Lab to be a Black-Child affirming space—and how we make those values visible. It goes beyond history lessons or superficial decor. Affirmation is in the way we see, speak to, and think about Black children—making space to honor their full humanity.



AFFIRMING BRILLIANCE: CENTERING GENIUS, JUSTICE, LOVE, AND JOY

If you've ever emailed me from my personal account and noticed my email signature—or if you've paid attention to our Play Lab gear—you know my favorite line:

"We need humanizing pedagogies that center the **genius, justice, love, and humanity** in our children."

These pillars embody **Black-Child Affirming pedagogy**. They are not just ideas—we actively weave them into our daily practice. **Here are three ways** they guide the work we do every day

- **The Power of Language (Genius)**

Shifting from deficit to strengths-based language affirms each child's genius and helps them believe in their brilliance.

- **Protecting Black Childhood (Justice)**

Affirmation means giving Black children the freedom to be themselves—expressing, exploring, and leading with confidence and joy.

- **Cultivating Connection and Belonging (Love & Joy)**

Love and joy are reflected in the way we nurture play focused, inclusive spaces where children feel seen, trusted, valued, and know that they matter.

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THE POWER OF PLAYFUL LANGUAGE

If you've spent time around young children, you know that words like fart, booty butt, and what the heck? hold a special kind of magic. But why do kids latch onto these "taboo" words? More importantly, what does it tell us about their development?

At the heart of this language play are three key developmental skills:

- **Call and Response** – They say the thing. Grown-ups or peers react. Whether it's laughter, shock, or an exaggerated "Oh my goodness!"—the reaction is half the fun.
- **Belonging** – They say the thing to fit in, whether with their friends or the adults they admire. Testing out language is part of figuring out where they belong.
- **Power and Play** – They are learning that words have impact. Language is a tool, and experimenting with it teaches them cause and effect—what they say (and do) matters.



The Crew at the sensory table—where language comes to life!

SILLY WORDS, BIG MEANINGS: HOW LANGUAGE SHAPES PLAY AND CONNECTION

Want to Give Them New Words? **Make It Playful.**

Instead of battling against colorful language, offer an alternative that feels just as exciting. **What in the pickles?!**—now a Play Lab favorite—was born when a child kept saying "What the %!@!" Instead of giving the phrase more power, we asked: **"What can we say instead?"** We threw out silly ideas, and the one that got the biggest laugh—pickles—stuck.

Kids love language that **feels special to them**. When they get to co-create the words, it still gives them the **thrill of surprise**, the **connection** of shared language, and a **sense of belonging**—without the words you'd rather not hear on repeat.

Bringing It Back to the **Big Question**

"Which of these skills do you actually wish your child wasn't developing?"

Language is power, humor is connection, and playful words are a win-win.

Until next time—**Booty Butts**, Stay Gold.