

Play-based learning at home

Why a cubby house?

Constructing a cubby house involves learning and development in multiple ways. Most of all, because it is open-ended, it is hours of fun! And a cubby can be built inside or out.

This imaginative play helps to develop and extend:

- Expressive (talking/communicating) and receptive (listening/comprehending) language
- Empathy when caring for the dolls and teddies
- Listening and considering others/sharing or turn taking if there are siblings
- Science and maths concepts such as light/dark and height/width/measuring/size
- Problem solving during construction
- Resilience and persistence when there are challenges
- Noticing of shapes/colours/textures in fabrics
- An appreciation of nature, noticing and feeling weather, fresh air for health if outside

Cubby House Experience

- Positive feelings of joy/pride in accomplishment
- Disposition for learning – we want children to want to learn.

Here's what you'll need:

- Paper and pencils to draw a plan (optional)
- A table or space to construct – inside or outside
- Large sheets/rugs/pieces of fabric/old curtains or doona covers
- Cushions or mats to sit on or to make beds for the dolls and teddies
- Pegs to join fabric together (great for developing finger strength – important for controlling implements for drawing and later on, writing)
- Loose parts such as cardboard rolls, an upturned box for a table, sticks to hold up fabric
- Dolls/teddies/soft toys

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- Some unbreakable kitchen items such as plastic cups, plates, or a tea set
- Collect some natural items for pretend food – gum nuts, leaves

How to start:

- Draw a plan (optional)
- Agree on a space to build and what materials are allowed - you may want to start with a washing basket or box of items to keep it manageable
- Move any breakable items or items not to be used
- Help get started throwing the first sheet over the table together
- Agree that there will need to be packing up time – or leave it for the next day.

Here's how to do it:

- Encourage your child to first draw a plan for their cubby house to practice fine motor development. “What do you want your cubby house to look like?”

- Talk about what they will do first, what they will do next, to encourage the use of language and to plan and help keep focus and attention to the task
- Stay and play if you can, allowing your child to take the lead or check back in from time to time with some words of encouragement – “I like how you used the chairs to make the cubby bigger.” Positive reinforcement will help keep the play purposeful.
- Encourage your child to think for themselves to resolve problems eg “I wonder what we can do to stop that falling down?”
- If the play is becoming unconstructive, that is you notice voices getting louder, redirect quickly by:
 - adding some books to read to the dolls or teddies
 - offering some pencils and paper for signs or to write letters to post to grandparents or friends from kindergarten/ELC – “I wonder what street this house is on?” “Grandpa would love to see your cubby, lets draw a picture for him”

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Here's how to do it continued:

- quietly turning on some soft, calming music
- whisper so your child has to stop and listen without giving attention to the noisy behaviour - "I think teddy is hungry, would she like some morning tea?"
- Serve morning/afternoon tea/lunch in the cubby house, if appropriate - ensuring you can see inside to supervise in case of choking
- Put a mindfulness or meditation app on to play
- Celebrate their hard work and what they have achieved - "you kept trying until you fixed it." "I like the way you waited for your turn for the teapot - good work."
- At the end of the play, pack the items into a box to use again another day - singing a song as you go to make it fun - "This is the way we fold up the sheet, fold up the sheet, fold up the sheet, this is the way we fold up the sheet early in the morning."

