

PlayMatters - Return to School

Preparation Session for PTA Members and Other Caregivers (1 hour)

Facilitators note: This session is designed as a guide to help caregivers navigate the return to learning in the aftermath of a climatic change event, specifically a flood and unexpected school interruption. Following a period of extended school closures caused by the flood, the transition back to the classroom can be challenging for educators, children, and families. It is crucial to address the mix of excitement and concerns that may arise during this time. Therefore, this session will provide playful activities that serve as effective means to restore comfort, motivation, and foster connections among all individuals in the classroom. We appreciate your support in facilitating and assisting PTAs and caregivers through this process!

Preparation:

1. Read through the session. Make notes for yourself if that is helpful! You can underline things you think are really important or write little facilitation tips for yourself in the margins.
2. If available, make a flip chart with the session objectives or write the session objectives on a blackboard so that all participants can see (if caregivers in this area can't typically read, you can skip this).
3. Collect and bring 15 small objects, eg. bottle caps, pen/pen caps, erasers, pencils, small stones, other easily identifiable and portable objects. This will be needed for the activity "Find the Difference"

Introduction:

1. Welcome participants to the session and thank them for joining this important one- hour session focused on returning to school.
2. **Say:** Over the next hour, we will be talking about how playful learning activities can help your children learn, both at home and in school. Particularly for your children's teacher, play will be an important way of easing students' reentry into the classroom. We will also share a few activities that you can use with your children right away at home to get them comfortable, connected, and ready to learn.
3. Read the objectives of the session aloud:
 - By the end of this session educators will be able to...
 - Describe the value of learning through play activities at home and for children's transition back to school.
 - Practice 4 play-based activities to bring home to children.

Learning through Play (15 min)

1. Tell caregivers that you would like to play a short game with them.

2. Lead the group in 2-3 rounds of “Listen Close!” from the Pre-Primary Play at Home packet (activity #17). Use the activity instructions:

Ask everyone close their eyes while you make a sound from somewhere in the room. Have everyone keep their eyes closed and point to where the sound came from and what the sound is? For example, “that’s a cow mooing from there.” Then, invite them to open their eyes and call on one volunteer to name the sound. Repeat 1-2 more rounds, each time making a new sound from a different place.

Activity Instructions	<i>First, encourage one player to close their eyes while the other makes sounds from somewhere nearby. Next, the player with their eyes closed should try to guess where the sound is coming from and what sound it is. Finally, switch roles and try again!</i>
Adaptation Suggestion	To adapt for a group of caregivers, ask everyone close their eyes while you make a sound from somewhere in the room. Have everyone keep their eyes closed and point to where the sound came from and what the sound is. Then, invite them to open their eyes and call on one volunteer to name the sound. For example, “that’s a cow mooing from there.” Repeat 1-2 more rounds, each time making a new sound from a different place.

3. **Say:** That was so fun! Thank you for playing with me. This was a great game, but it was also a learning opportunity. What skills are children practicing during this activity?

4. Invite 2-3 caregivers to respond. Possibilities include:

- Listening skills
- Vocabulary
- Movement
- Focus

5. **Say:** Play is a very powerful tool for the learning and development of children at all ages. Play activates their natural curiosity, energy, and interests, making learning more engaging and impactful!

6. **Say:** Using play at home will also help your children learn and recover from stressful situations, and the major disruption in their lives. Being forced to stay at home, away from their neighbors, teachers, and friends, may have been confusing for them. The same is true when teachers use play at school. And now coming back to school, especially with new rules about cleanliness and/or masks and how they can interact with their peers, may be scary so playful activities help learning as well as easing stress.

7. **Say:** How do you think that play can help your children as they return to school?

8. Invite 2-3 caregivers to respond. Possibilities include:

- Play reminds them that school and learning is fun
- They can enjoy playing with their peers
- Play can be a bridge between an unstructured environment at home and the more structured environment at school
- Play lessens children’s stress

9. Remind caregivers that Play-based learning is emphasized as essential for both caregivers and teachers to recognize and implement at home and in school. Games and play activities, though

not always perceived as educational, are effective tools for teaching important skills. Allocating sufficient time for play supports children's success in both academic and personal aspects of their lives.

Practicing play

- 10. You will have all received the PlayMatters Play at Home packets, or if not, you will soon. Have you tried any of the activities with your children? Which one?
- 11. Invite 2-3 caregivers describe what they did.
- 12. **Say:** In addition to talking about the importance of play, we also want to practice play and learn some new games we can take home with us to teach our children.

Game 2 – Emotion Hatch

- 13. **Say:** Let’s try another game from the packets. First we’ll play it, then we’ll discuss what children learn from it.
- 14. Direct caregivers’ attention to “Emotion Hatch” (activity #4) in the PlayMatters Pre-Primary Play at Home packet. Lead the group in 2-3 rounds – *this should take a maximum of 2 minutes*. Use the activity instructions and the adaptation suggestion below:

Activity Instructions	<i>First, get low and be round like an egg. Next, jump up, name, and act out an emotion. Finally, other players must jump up and act out the same emotion. Take turns and choose different emotions!</i>
Adaptation Suggestion	Lead the activity as written. After each emotion, call out the name of a different student to name the next emotion.

- 15. **Say:** That was so fun! Thank you for playing with me. This was a great game, but it was also a learning opportunity. What skills are children practicing during this activity?
- 16. Invite 2-3 caregivers to respond. Possibilities include:
 - Listening
 - Movement
 - Naming emotions
 - Showing emotions
 - Decisions-making

Game 3 – Washing Song

- 17. Direct caregivers’ attention to “Washing practice” (activity #35) in the PlayMatters Primary Play at Home packet. Lead the group in 2-3 rounds – *this should take a maximum of 2 minutes*. Use the activity instructions and the adaptation suggestion below:

Activity Instructions	<i>Let the caregiver sing a common song liked by the children</i>
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Adaptation Suggestion	Select any song related activity from the packet. Lead as the activity is written. At the end of the activity let caregivers practice hand washing steps.
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18. **Say:** That was a nice song and fun to sing together. And it was also a learning opportunity. What skills are children practicing during this activity?

19. Invite 2-3 caregivers to respond. Possibilities include:

- Vocabulary
- Movement of their bodies (if they danced)
- Memory
- Social skills (brining voices together)

Game 4 – Find the Difference

1. Direct caregivers’ attention to “Find the Difference” (activity #18) in the PlayMatters Primary Play at Home packet. Lead the group in 2-3 rounds – *this should take a maximum of 2 minutes*. Use the activity instructions and the adaptation suggestion below:

Activity Instructions	<i>First, collect 15 small items (bottle caps, rocks – you choose!). Next, each player gets 6 and the remaining 3 are put in the middle. One player closes their eyes while the other adds or subtracts from the pile of items in the middle. Finally, the player opens their eyes and figures out the differences. Take turns. Add more players (and small items) to see who can find the change the quickest!</i>
Adaptation Suggestion	To adapt for the group of caregivers, have two volunteers sit on the floor across from one another and play the game as written in the instructions while the rest of the group observes. If time allows, do another round with a different pair of volunteers.

20. **Say:** This game is great for primary school age children. You can do it with your child, or with a larger of family members!

21. **Say:** Ok, you are doing great at reflecting at learning through play. This is the last time – what skills are children practicing during this activity?

22. Invite 2-3 caregivers to respond. Possibilities include:

- Mathematical operations (addition, subtraction)
- Focus
- Counting
- Problem solving
- Observation
- Memory

Closing

23. **Say:** Now, we have played some games together as adult. Did you have fun? How do you feel now, more or less stressed? What do you think children feel when they play?

24. Invite 2-3 caregivers to respond.
25. **Say:** Now to close, let's go around and each of us can make a commitment to play at home. (If you have a child, yourself, you can start by mentioning a game you plan to play at home with your own kids or relatives). What's one game you would like to try at home?
26. Go around the circle allowing each caregiver to mention one game.
27. **Say:** You can also ask your children about the games they play in their school once they return. Ask them to teach you some and play them together at home!
28. Invite caregivers to share any last questions they may have about play-based learning or the packets.
29. When time is up, thank caregivers for their participation in this session and wish them well.