



Extending **BLOCK PLAY**

Jodie Clarke

The Empowered Educator

Hi Empowered Ed!

I truly hope you find this resource helpful.



A little about me...

Hi, I'm Jodie! I am a Mum in Australia to 3 girls - twins Ruby & Tara and my adult daughter Ashleigh. And I love the possibilities of early learning!

I'm passionate about helping educators **simplify** their documentation and planning and also enjoy more time engaging with the children in their care through **simple** play based activities & environments.

I enjoy creating blog posts, free tools and easy to use resources and training for educators, leaders and coordinators by drawing upon my 30 years experience in this profession.

I know what support educators really need because I have walked in your shoes. This profession is challenging enough so I aim to simplify not overcomplicate! My resources walk through the basics so you can take action.

The Facts.....

- I hold an Associate Diploma in Education (Child care)
- I hold an Advanced Certificate in Child Care
- I hold a Bachelor of Human Services Degree
- I have worked as an Assistant, Room Leader, Director, FDC Coordinator, IHC Coordinator, OSHC Coordinator, Occasional Care Coordinator, Project Manager, Service Manager, Family Day Care Educator, Presenter and Speaker in the Early Childhood and Community and Family Services fields.
- I have been writing and editing my blog now for over 6 years.
- I am the author of many E- Book resources for educators, A Postnatal Depression Workbook (& DVD) and a picture book for children.
- I have developed and presented webinars and online courses to support early childhood educators in their role.

Thanks for placing your trust in me....

Jodie Clarke

How to Extend Block Play for Early Learning

Blocks are one of my favourite budget friendly resources for parents and educators because you can keep extending block play in so many different ways with just a few simple loose parts!

Children of different ages and stages use and create with blocks in different ways. Toddlers love to carry blocks all over the place and can be very creative with putting them in and out of different materials to make this easier! They also begin to stack and form the first simple towers as they explore cause and effect, spatial awareness and balance.

Older children will begin to explore and experiment with engineering and problem solving skills as they start to build roadways, bridges, complicated structures and also use the blocks to connect to other areas of their play like dramatic and imaginary play.



There is absolutely no wrong or right way to play with blocks or even what the definition of a '*block*' might be! Every child is unique in the way that they choose to approach this material and that is why I believe blocks are such a valuable tool to encourage open ended play and learning.

By **observing** how children are playing and using the blocks we can gain ideas for how we might **extend and challenge that play** by the addition of a few simple loose parts.

How to Extend Block Play for Early Learning

By providing opportunities and invitations to incorporate different materials to what might be just the 'traditional' wooden or plastic blocks we allow children to decide how they want to play and extend their own learning.



Older children might ask for additional props or you might notice the toddler has a handbag full to bursting with blocks and needs something bigger. Observations and recognising schemas and new developmental stages and skills will help you to plan ahead and reignite interest in the construction area.

Although a basic material and the staple of many early years services and family homes blocks offer so many possibilities for play based learning. There is a reason they have been around for so many years!

How to Extend Block Play for Early Learning

When children play with blocks they...

Use their imagination – on their own or as part of a group.



How to Extend Block Play for Early Learning

Express themselves creatively and explore current themes and questions.



Work at solving problems, keep trying and manage their frustration.



How to Extend Block Play for Early Learning

Engage spatial awareness, stability, fine and gross motor skills.



Encourages social and emotional growth as they take turns, work as a group, share resources, make plans, build self esteem and pride in accomplishments, gradually extend attention spans.



How to Extend Block Play for Early Learning

Explore simple mathematical and scientific concepts like measurement, symmetry, balance, counting, cause and effect, trial and error, patterns, comparison, grouping, test out ideas and much more.



How to Extend Block Play for Early Learning



And that is just a condensed list of learning possibilities!

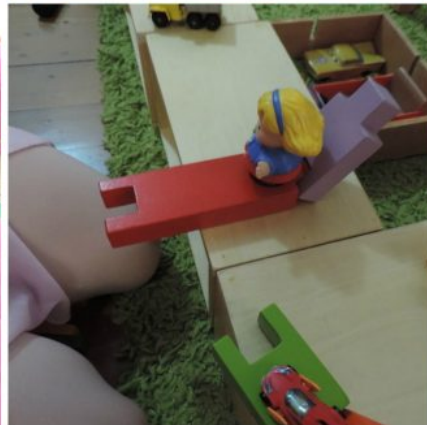
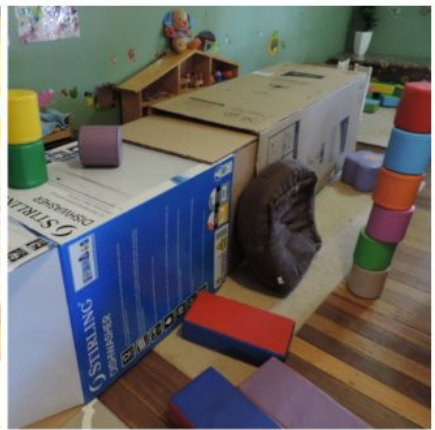
Adding basic materials (both large and small) helps children to expand upon their ideas, renew their interest in block play and also inspires them to try using the foundation blocks and everyday construction materials in different ways.

So how can you make this happen without it costing you a fortune in additional resources?

How to Extend Block Play for Early Learning

10 Easy Ideas for Extending Block Play

1. Add loose parts to the construction area – think about current interests and what you already have available that could be used in a different way. Collect and add natural materials to the block area as part of your loose parts collection.



How to Extend Block Play for Early Learning

2. Consider adding small tables and platforms of different levels to create stages and specific building areas. I often use pallets, tyres, mats, low to ground tables, wooden spools, tree stumps, flat boulders, wood cookies.



How to Extend Block Play for Early Learning

3. Incorporate mirrors of different sizes and shapes to encourage visibility and 3D effects while building. If worried about glass breaking start with acrylic versions that are easily available.



4. Add a basket of measuring tools like tape measures, rulers, pencils for marking etc.

5. Provide pictures of bridges, block constructions and other designs for them to try and copy or modify to their own plan. Add paper, pens, clipboards and other 'design' tools to help older children plan out and construct their idea.

6. Easy access to dramatic play props like kitchen utensils, material, saucepans, tins, recycled plastic containers, felt pieces.

How to Extend Block Play for Early Learning



How to Extend Block Play for Early Learning

7. Make blocks available both indoors and outdoors and allow children to select and add materials to the construction area.



How to Extend Block Play for Early Learning

8. Ensure there is plenty of room to build, create, extend and investigate. Think about ways you can record and display the hard work even after it needs to be packed away – consider not packing away if possible for a few days so the children can continue to revisit and extend upon the play.



How to Extend Block Play for Early Learning

9. Add props for road play including cars and trucks of different sizes, road signs, plants, road carpets, masking tape to make lines, velcro pieces, chalkboard blocks, figurines and people, boxes for garages.



How to Extend Block Play for Early Learning

10. Add props for filling, tipping and carrying. We love handbags from the op shop, small baskets, cardboard boxes (shoe boxes and tissue boxes are a fantastic size!) cars, trucks, cardboard tubes.



Block Play Extension Resources:

- Tyres for bases
- Material scraps
- Feathers
- Wood Cookies
- Measuring tapes
- Clipboards & pencils
- Rulers
- Tissue and shoeboxes
- Large cardboard boxes
- Pallets
- Milk Crates
- Plant pots
- Stones, pebbles, rocks
- Wood stumps & logs
- Branches
- Carpet squares
- Wooden floor samples
- Flowers, greenery
- Vegetables
- Seeds, seedpods
- Palm fronds
- Bamboo stalks and tubes
- Pine Cones
- Shells
- Wood cookies
- Sand, Dirt, Gravel
- Twigs, Leaves, Bark
- Mirrors
- Dolls & figurines
- Hats & tools
- Scarves
- Cardboard sheets
- Lino/vinyl offcuts

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- Trucks, cars, signs, car mats, trains, tracks.
- PVC Pipe
- Plastic corrugated piping
- Wooden planks
- Wood offcuts
- Spools & Reels
- Photos of bridges/buildings
- Rope & Chain
- Cardboard rolls & tubes
- Plastic bottles
- Buckets, trays & tubs
- Bowls, jugs, teapots
- Tree stumps
- Toy food and props
- Pool noodles (cut up)
- Small tables/platforms
- Real Bricks
- Traffic cones
- Guttering
- Baskets (different sizes)
- Hoses
- Chalk
- Handbags
- Bamboo pieces
- Saucepans
- Baskets
- Glass gems
- Suitcases
- Coloured pebbles & stones
- String
- Fabric and felt (green and blue make great landscapes and seas!)
- Blocks of different textures, shapes and sizes!

I'm sure you can think of more!

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Jodie Clarke

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