

# big PLANS *in print*

*Connecting Big Plans' Parents to their Communities*

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## PLAY with Big PLANS

### Free Enrichment Program for Big PLANS Families

Big PLANS for Little Kids is excited to announce a new initiative called PLAY with Big PLANS. This program began in April to enhance our current services by providing more direct-access time to our certificated teachers. This program is free to our families; however, children must be on the Big PLANS caseload and enrolled in one of our partner preschools to attend the program. We are offering different program options that rotate each week. This allows parents to choose which programming option(s) best meet their child's needs at a time that does not conflict with their regular preschool program. Please note that PLAY with Big PLANS is not available to siblings unless they are on our current roster.

#### Programming options include:

- **Physical and Motor Development** (fine motor skills, gross motor skills, and sensory play activities)
- **Academic Readiness** (colours, numbers, shapes, letters and word recognition)
- **Early Language and Speech Development** for all learners; including English Language Learners
- **Social and Emotional Development** (self-regulation, interaction with others, social thinking)
- **Parents & Play** – every Friday we welcome parents to join the program to learn a variety of parenting strategies to help their child develop needed skills through play (see more on this program on the next page).

#### How to get started:

Each family must complete a one-time registration form for the location of their choice and drop it off at the PLAY with Big PLANS location 24 hours before their child attends the first class.

Visit "PLAY with Big PLANS" at [www.bigplans.org/programming.html](http://www.bigplans.org/programming.html) to view the calendar of programming and registration forms. Parents wishing to attend class with their child must have a copy of a current police clearance before they may join in the classroom.

Cover story continued next page . . .



### This Issue:

PLAY with Big PLANS..... Page 1

Snack Time..... Page 2

"Get to Know " Nature Program  
..... Page 3

At Home Activity..... Page 3

Stay n' Play Programs..... Page 3

Nature Color Hunt..... Page 3

Play for the Brain..... Page 4



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[www.bigplans.org](http://www.bigplans.org)



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[bigPLANScalgary.org](http://bigPLANScalgary.org)

## Parents & Play Fridays

More than just a chance to have fun, play is an integral aspect when it comes to a child's health and development. From peek-a-boo to hide-and-seek, the many forms of play enrich a child's brain, body, and life in important ways. Despite its many benefits, statistics show that the amount of time children get to play has been declining, so we welcome parents to join us every Friday to learn a variety of parenting strategies and to discover how to use play to help meet their child's health and developmental milestones. From physical health and well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, language and thinking skills, to communication and general knowledge, play is essential. One parent or caregiver may sign up for this class with their child. Each classroom has space for 12 children and 12 parents. Parents will require a valid police clearance (a photocopy from another location is sufficient) and alternative care for siblings will be necessary on Fridays as only children registered in the program may attend.

### Located in the North and South

This year we are offering the PLAY with Big PLANS program at both a North and South location. Tanya Komori and Meghan Sparks are the PLAY with Big PLANS teachers in the North, and Carmen Wallin and Olga Knight are the teachers in the South. You can read more about our PLAY with Big PLANS teachers when you visit <http://www.bigplans.org/programming.html>

### More Questions?

Please email [play@bigplans.org](mailto:play@bigplans.org) or visit the website at [www.bigplans.org/programming.html](http://www.bigplans.org/programming.html) to view the calendar, our frequently asked questions and more!



Carmen Wallin & Olga Knight at our South location



Meghan Sparks & Tanya Komori at our North location

## Snack Time!



Fruit and cheese in a fun package. Simply put your snack in a plastic bag and twist a pipe cleaner around the center. Curl the ends to make antennae. Photo from [kraftrecipes.com](http://kraftrecipes.com)

Trade in the crackers for this brain-boosting snack - cucumber and cheese sandwiches! Found on [skinnymom.com](http://skinnymom.com)





# get to know your wild neighbours

The City of Calgary Parks is proud to partner with the "Get to Know" program. The Get to Know program has been inspiring connections between children and nature in the outdoors for over a decade. We hope you can participate in one of these exciting opportunities and "get to know your wild neighbours!"

## agents of nature

Psst, have you heard of the super-secret Agents of Nature mobile app? Download the game for free, head to a participating Calgary park, and get ready for adventure! Explore the park while solving fun nature challenges to earn coins and rewards! The game is available at these City of Calgary parks:

- |                    |                      |  |
|--------------------|----------------------|--|
| • Devonian Gardens | • Sandy Beach        | <i>Please check the website as some parks may be temporarily closed.</i> |
| • Bowmont Park     | • Ralph Klein Park   |  |
| • Nose Hill Park   | • Prairie Winds Park |  |

Be prepared for adventure, mystery, and a whole lot of fun! Kids learn more, have more fun, and feel more connected to nature when they play Agents of Nature (compared to a self-guided or an interpreter-led tour of a park). There's even a study to prove it! Rise to the challenge. Join the Agents of Nature. Download the free app at **Agents of Nature** <http://agentsofnature.com> and get ready for a game that's a real adventure!



The not so secret, secret agency dedicated to working & playing outside to solve challenges, explore local parks, and connect with the natural environment. The Game is free and is available to download and play on all Android and Apple iOS mobiles. Once downloaded, choose a Mission Site to start your adventure. You play the game your way, right at the Mission Site! Each Mission Site will have hidden challenges that you unlock by scanning QR codes with your super secret Agents of Nature scanning device (your phone). Use the hints and clues from your surroundings to solve the riddles. Become an Agent of Nature Today! <http://www.calgary.ca/CSPS/Parks/Pages/Programs/Get-to-know.aspx>

## City of Calgary Stay n' Play Programs

Looking for some free, high quality programs for your kids? The City of Calgary offers programs that are open to everyone at no cost. These drop-in programs offer many different activities including crafts, games and active play for children ages 3-12 years in various community locations across Calgary. Programs will set up a tent in the park so parents and children can easily locate the meeting space. The 2019 program schedule will be available soon.

### Stay n' Play

These safe, supervised programs help young children and adults make new friends and stay active through a play-based learning environment. Participants will engage in games and activities that they can use on their path to healthy and active lifestyles. Children must be accompanied by an adult and programs may be weather dependant. Ages: 3 - 5 years + Adult (Monday - Friday, 10 a.m. - 12 p.m.)

<https://www.calgary.ca/CSPS/CNS/Pages/Children-and-youth/Seasonal-programs/Park-n-Play-and-Stay-n-Play-programs.aspx>

## At home Activity

Group games like tag and hide-and-seek teach children to follow simple rules. Children also practise solving simple problems and learn to cooperate.



### Try cooperative musical cushions:

- put cushions in a circle, one for each child
- the children go around the cushions while music plays
- when the music stops, everyone must sit on a cushion
- take away one cushion, but leave all the children in the game and start the music.
- when the music stops again, some children must share a cushion.
- keep going until only one BIG cushion is left on which all the children are more or less sitting.

## NATURE COLOR HUNT

Gather a multi-compartment tray (ice cube tray, egg carton, baby food tray etc.), scissors and colored paper or foam for each section. Cut your foam/paper into pieces small enough to line the bottom of the tray/carton. For younger kids choose colors that you know they have a chance of finding a match. Head outside and start finding things to match. Start off by choosing a color with your child and both go looking. If they have a hard time finding a match, find one and narrow down the area for them. Continue working together or if they want to work all alone, watch your child explore and make connections, that is exciting and fun too!



[www.notimeforflashcards.com](http://www.notimeforflashcards.com)

# PLAY FOR THE BRAIN

by Betsy Mann

"The first years last forever," experts advise parents. Modern imaging techniques show how early experiences have long-term consequences by helping to determine the actual structure of a child's brain. It's as if what happens in early childhood is written on stone, as compared to later experiences, which might be likened to tracings in the sand, or even writing on water, as we get older.

While you, as a parent, might welcome expert confirmation that the enriched environment you provide will have a lasting influence on your child's future, you might also be feeling a bit intimidated by the heavy responsibility. The following simple guidelines will help reassure you that you are up to the job...and you don't need a degree in child psychology or a toy store in your basement!

## Learn about child development

When you have a general picture of what children can do at different ages, you can avoid feeling unnecessarily disappointed or frustrated. It's unrealistic to expect that your one-month-old infant should be able to shake her fancy rattle or that your ten month old should be interested in making a tower of blocks.

Knowing what to expect will also help you provide appropriate games, toys and activities at the right time. If you read that at eleven months most babies can pinch things between their thumb and forefinger, you will put some Cheerios or frozen peas on a tray so they can try out this new skill. If you know that language learning starts at or even before birth, you will talk, sing and read stories to your baby long before he or she can use words him or herself.

Look for information about typical stages in free pamphlets at public health clinics or family resource programs. Parenting magazines also often present easy-to-read articles on the subject. For more details, ask your librarian for books or web sites on child development.

## Follow your child's lead

Books and articles will tell you what is within the range of "normal" behaviour, but each child is unique. What interests your particular child? The books may say that massage is good for infants, but if your son squirms and turns away after five minutes, he's saying he's had enough. If your toddler is more involved in knocking down towers than in building them up, leave your demonstration of elaborate castle construction for another day. If your child becomes fascinated by dinosaurs, look at the library for books or videos on the subject.

When you follow the child's lead, you increase learning potential, and at the same time, you strengthen the attachment between you. Your attentiveness says, "What interests you is important to me. I care about you and I want to get to know you better."

## Keep it simple

Just because brain researchers use high tech equipment doesn't mean you need high tech toys to stimulate brain development. Computer games develop hand-eye coordination...and so does stringing pasta on a shoe lace. Experiencing the real world through all the senses creates the brain connections that will make learning at school come more easily later.

Similarly, development of the emotional and social parts of the brain depends on relationships with real people. A video may entertain a child, but when a caring adult tells or reads a story, cuddled up with a child at bedtime, they are laying the basis for future "emotional intelligence". An infant's best toy is still a caring adult's face.

## Relax

If you find yourself rushing from playgroup to music lesson to gymnastics club and your child never has time to just play, you may be overdoing the enrichment. When stimulation becomes

stressful, it interferes with learning, so leave time to relax.

## Have fun

Encouraging brain development doesn't mean sitting your three year old at a desk to trace over endless lines of printed letters...unless he or she is having fun playing school. Play remains at the heart of early learning. Children are naturally motivated to learn by exploring and manipulating their world. Caring adults help them to follow their interests by providing a safe setting and a responsive, stimulating environment. It can be as simple as having fun together.

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