

Adult-Led Time

Adult-led time refers to a play session that is directed by the adult rather than the child. It is a period of play in which the adult actively guides the child through play-based learning activities. This type of learning is more structured than “free play” and incorporates rules or instructions into the playtime. Balancing adult-led time with child-led time ensures that the student is learning cooperation skills and building trust with adults.

WHAT DOES ADULT-LED TIME LOOK LIKE?

- Adult-directed play that includes rules, games, assessments, reflection-based assignments, instruction, emotional processing, and/or dialogue
- Can be individualized play or group play
- Child makes their preference, adult guides the sequence and rules

WHY DO EDUCATORS IMPLEMENT ADULT-LED TIME?

- To facilitate cooperation and collaboration
- To assess a student’s competency level
- To facilitate fair play and rule-following
- To organize group activities
- To set and reinforce boundaries

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF ADULT-LED TIME?

- Helps teach important social skills such as taking turns
- Teaches the child through modeling and feedback how to follow directions
- Provides a model of various problem-solving approaches
- Offers exposure to a variety of educational opportunities
- Assists in enhancing fine motor and eye-hand coordination skills in younger children
- Promotes healthy emotional development, helping child feel understood and valued
- Promotes active listening skills, rule-following, dialogue, and requires cooperation
- Strengthens adult-child bond
- Allows opportunity to guide children through particular social, cognitive, or physical skills

HOW IS THIS DIFFERENT FROM CHILD-LED TIME?

- The direction of activity is not necessarily determined by child’s interest.
- Children are directed to follow rules and expectations.
- The child listens/follows adult lead and reflects upon and/or repeats what adult is doing.
- The adult models the behavior they want to see or expect during play.

EXAMPLES OF ADULT-LED ACTIVITIES

- Routine activities where the adult models and child participates: brushing teeth, washing hands, combing/brushing hair, packing a backpack or lunchbox
- Musical games where the adult instructs and enforces rules of play, and child participates: Hokey Pokey, Musical Chairs, Musical Statues
- Educational/Interactive games where the adult instructs and enforces rules of play, and child participates: Simon Says, Red Light Green Light, Duck Duck Goose, Twister, Bingo, Fruit Salad, Telephone

REFERENCES

- Cox, M. (2024, November 15). *Adult-led play & child-led play- differences, benefits, balance*. Mission Momplex. (<https://missionmomplex.com/child-led-adult-led-play-differences-balance-benefits/>).
- What is adult-led play?* (2024, November 15). Twinkl. Retrieved January 2025 from <https://www.twinkl.com/teaching-wiki/ adult-led-play>.