

Play is the key way children learn about themselves, others and the world they live in. It is essential to their learning, development, health, and physical, mental and social well-being – and it's FUN! Play provides the building blocks to be ready for school.



## Fun with animals

**Animals can become companions, play partners and loved ones to young children. They can provide comfort especially during times of stress and change.**

### Did you know?

Animals can help your child calm down and self-regulate (manage their emotions, behavior and activity level) as heart rate and blood pressure decrease when stroking a warm, furry pet.

### Add language

Making comments and comparisons about animals e.g. their size, what they eat and how they move, helps build the language for grouping (known as classification and categorisation). Learning to classify and categorise is important for developing memory and for maths and science skills. Asking occasional questions that require some thinking and reasoning skills e.g. "How are they the same?", "What else has four legs?" also helps your child develop these skills.

You could help build their word knowledge or vocabulary by using some more complex words with older children e.g. "camouflage", "nocturnal", "hibernation".

### Other development

Helping to care for a pet helps your child to understand the needs and feelings of others. It can also help develop a



sense of responsibility. These are all important in developing independence, social and emotional skills.

### Variations

Why not visit your local library together and choose books about favourite animals? Visits to the zoo, pet shop, or baby animal farm are fun ways for children to see and interact with animals.

### Safety and health

Even well-known animals and young children can be unpredictable. Close adult supervision reduces health and safety risks to both your child and the animal.

Note: Getting a pet is a big decision – the adult is making a long-term commitment as they are responsible for the welfare of the animal (and the children).

- Playgroup WA has a treasure trove of play activities for babies, toddlers and 3-5 year olds, for home and playgroup. These play activities cover a balanced diet of play across sensory, movement, language and thinking skill areas.

You can find them at [www.playgroupwa.com.au/playideas](http://www.playgroupwa.com.au/playideas) or visit [www.facebook.com/playgroupwa](https://www.facebook.com/playgroupwa)