

The Parents' Quick Guide to the Hidden Power of Play

How to spot real-life skills inside everyday play



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How To Use This Guide

Dear Parents,

This guide builds on the ideas behind Third Bell Studio's work on learning through play.

Inside, you'll learn how to spot the same learning rhythm we explored together — the Play Loop — in two everyday games you can try this week.

- You don't necessarily need new toys.
- You don't need to "teach" anything.
- You just need to notice the moments when play naturally becomes practice.

This guide gives you:

- What to look for.
- What's actually happening in your child's brain.
- Simple things you can say.
- How to turn small wobble-moments into big skills.



One common learning rhythm looks like this:

Try → Feedback → Adjust → Succeed

The Loop

You'll see versions of this loop show up again and again in play— whether it's Bluey's Shadowlands, Muffin Fight, Lego, or Jenga.

The goal of this guide is simple: **Help you spot this loop in real life and know what to do in the moment.** At Third Bell Studio, we study how these loops show up in different forms — emotional, social, and cognitive — depending on the context.

Why It Works

Kids don't learn emotional skills by hearing about them.

They learn them by doing.

Play gives them:

- low-stakes challenges
- safe frustration
- practice bouncing back
- natural moments to collaborate and negotiate
- immediate feedback
- tiny wins that feel good

Play is their built-in emotional gym.

You're not trying to "fix" or avoid frustration— you're guiding them through it.



Try it at Home!

Jenga



Intro

Jenga teaches resilience, frustration tolerance, and try-again energy.

- When the tower wobbles...
- When their face scrunches...
- When they gasp and freeze...

That's not "bad behaviour.", that's the Challenge phase of the loop!

How you respond shapes their experience and how they feel about trying again.

This section shows you how.



What To Notice

Look for the micro-moment right before the crash:

- Shoulders tense
- Holds breath
- "no, no, no..."
- A flash of frustration across their face.

That's the emotional gym — they're sensing uncertainty and bracing for failure.

This is the moment you guide them - during the loop — not after the crash.



01 Why This Moment Matters



Children engage in active exploration, using real-world materials to enhance understanding.

02 The Loop Inside the Game

**Try → Feedback (wobble or crash) →
Adjust → Succeed (rebuild)**

Rebuilding is success — not perfection.

The win is the willingness to try again with a little more intention.



03 Skill & Life Lesson

Skill Built:

Resilience — tolerating frustration, regrouping, trying again.

Life Lesson:

Things fall apart. We breathe, reset, and rebuild.





How To Guide the Moment

1. **Pause**

Let the tower fall. Don't rush. Your calmness can help regulate their emotions.

2. **Say** (simple, neutral language)

"That was a big crash — let's take a second."

"We can rebuild it together."

Neutral > praise — it keeps the moment grounded.

3. **Ask** (invite adjustment)

- "What do you want to try differently?"
- "Where do you think the stronger spot is?"
- This shifts them from reacting → problem-solving.

Simon Says



Intro

While Jenga teaches resilience, Simon Says teaches focus, empathy, and rhythm.

This version isn't about catching mistakes. It's about staying in sync as a team.

Kids practice:

- noticing others
- taking turns leading
- managing impulses
- matching the group rhythm
- recovering from mistakes with laughter



What To Notice

Look for moments when:

- someone misses a move
- everyone giggles
- your child asks to lead
- the rhythm speeds up
- the group slips out of sync

Laughter = safety.

Safety = the best learning state.

This is where empathy and focus grow naturally.



01 Why This Moment Matters

Simon Says creates a cycle of attention → adjustment → shared rhythm.

Kids learn to notice the leader, match the pace, and reset with the group.

Mistakes become social feedback — not failure.

Your steady tone helps shift:

“Everyone messed up” → “We can reset together.”

Focus and empathy build in the tiny moments of noticing and re-syncing.

02 The Loop Inside the Game

Observe → Act → Reflect → Swap Roles

(the child version of Try → Feedback → Adjust → Succeed)

Kids practice:

- paying attention
- adjusting to others
- leading with clarity
- recovering when the group slips
- building empathy through shared rhythm

The goal isn't to win — it's to stay connected.

03 Skill & Life Lesson

Skill Built:

Focus & Empathy — staying attentive, adjusting to others, recovering with ease.

Life Lesson:

We stay connected by noticing each other, adjusting together, and trying again with warmth.

How To Guide the Moment

1. Rotate Leaders

"Your turn to be the boss."

2. Say

"That one was tricky — nice focus."

"Good catch."

3. Ask

"What helps you listen when it gets fast?"

"What did it feel like when everyone followed you?"

Questions turn fun into reflection — the heart of the loop.

Reframed Play Rules

A cooperative, rhythm-based version:

- Pick one child to be Simon. They give quick commands.
- Only follow the ones that start with "Simon says..."
- If someone moves at the wrong time, call: **"Team Rewind!"**
- Everyone copies the mistake on purpose — then freezes again.
- Rotate leaders every few rounds.

This creates shared rhythm, shared laughter, and shared learning.



Closing Message

Every game — Jenga, Simon Says, Lego, Mario Kart — hides the same learning rhythm.



When you guide the micro-moments, play quietly becomes practice for:

- resilience
- focus
- patience
- communication
- empathy
- confidence

You don't need more activities — just new eyes.

Thank you for being part of this session, and for giving your child the kind of presence that helps these skills grow.

Next Steps

Here are three simple ways to keep the momentum going:

1. Try one of the games this week:

Jenga for resilience.

Simon Says for focus and empathy.

Just notice the loop:

Try → Feedback → Adjust → Succeed.

2. Tell me how it went

Your stories help shape future tools for families.

 Scan the QR code to share your experience in under 60 seconds.



(One question: What did you notice when your child played?)

3. Stay Connected:

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About the Author

**Founder & Play-Learning
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I design learning tools that help people grow through interaction — whether it's adults practicing teamwork in immersive simulations, or kids developing emotional skills through everyday play.

For the past decade, I've led Red Iron Labs in building learning games for universities, fire departments, and companies like Exxon, blending story, loops, and interaction to make learning feel natural rather than forced.

My work centers on a simple idea:
people don't learn by being told — they learn by doing.
Play gives us the safest place to try, adapt, reflect, and build confidence.

This guide is one small piece of that mission: helping parents see how everyday play quietly becomes real-life practice.