

# A Guide for Families of Children with Disabilities



**playworks**<sup>™</sup>

A place for children of all abilities to play, explore and be themselves.  
at the  
**Children's Museum  
of Manhattan**



**The PlayWorks™ exhibition** is a child-sized, whimsical environment in which children can feed alphabet letters to a talking baby dragon, roll balls on a ball run, play peek-a-boo or make music with a laser harp! The exhibition offers children with disabilities the opportunity to explore a wide variety of activities that provide tactile, visual and auditory stimulation. Children play and learn with all their senses as they look, touch, listen, and move to make discoveries.



The photos in this guide were taken during a special visit to the Children's Museum of Manhattan (CMOM) by the families from Sinergia, a community-based organization serving the needs of families with disabilities in New York City; and the students, teachers and therapists from TOTS, a preschool providing services for children with communicative disorders.

## Tips for a Great Visit:

**Start at your child's comfort level.** For example, if your child enjoys shapes and building with blocks, you may want to begin at the Movers and Shakers area of PlayWorks™. If your child likes tactile activities you may want to begin with the sand table or to experiment with the air tubes.

**Give your child choices.** Ask your child “Would you like to play dress up in the fire truck or make an art project?”

**Let your child observe others before joining in.** Children learn a lot from each other and your child may want to take a moment to see what everyone else is doing first.

**Talk to your child.** Sometimes children are ready to move on to the next exciting activity and sometimes they need more ideas about what they are already doing. Give your child challenging suggestions to help him get more out of his experience. Ask your child open-ended questions such as “How did that feel?” or “Tell me about what you did today.” to encourage your child to share further.

**Acknowledge what your child has discovered.** Repeat what your child has said using his own words, or introduce a new word as part of the discussion.

**Take calming breaks.** Some children may be overly sensitive to sights and sounds. Depending on what relaxes your child, you might read a book together in the Storytelling Nook or sit and listen to music on the Lullaby Couch.

**Pace your child.** There is a lot to see and do in PlayWorks™, but it doesn't have to be done all at once. Visit again another day to see more or to repeat your child's favorite activities.

**Make connections.** Many of the things in the exhibition can be connected to themes or activities you can do in your neighborhood or back at home.

**Ask a CMOM Staff person for help.** CMOM staff can be seen on the exhibition floor and are easily recognizable wearing a blue apron and name tag. Ask the staff about where to go next at CMOM or offer a suggestion about what CMOM can do better.



**Explore PlayWorks™ using the following pages.**



# Listen and Watch.



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## Help your child:

- Touch each animal.
- Hear each animal's different song.
- Listen to how the songs come together.
- Use words such as high, low, loud or soft to describe what she hears.

## Ask your child:

- Can you make a new song?
- What happens when you touch the animal?

## Your child can also:

- Start and stop the songs and movement by touching each animal.
- Create new songs!
- Compare and contrast the different sizes of the animals.
- Watch as the animal's move.

## You may also want to:

- Visit your local zoo.
- Listen to the birds and the unique songs they sing in your neighborhood.

# Recognize letters and their sounds.



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## Help your child:

- Pick a letter from the Alphabet Garden.
- Feed Alphie the letter.
- Listen to Alphie say the letter and word.
- Choose another letter to feed Alphie.
- Repeat the words he hears.

## Ask your child:

- What happens when you feed Alphie a letter?
- Can you find the first letter in your name?

## Your child can also:

- Trace the shape of each letter with a finger.
- See and trace a picture connected with the word.
- Sing the Alphabet Song with Alphie.
- Feel the different parts of Alphie including his tail, mouth and nose.
- Take turns with other children to feed Alphie.

## You may also want to:

- Look for letters on street or business signs as you go home.



# Pretend and Imagine.



## Help your child:

- Dress up like a firefighter.
- Role play.
- Steer the fire truck.
- Push the buttons.
- Use words such as “ride,” “drive” or “turn” to describe what he is doing in the fire truck.

## Ask your child:

- What do you want to be when you grow up?
- How do firefighters help us?
- What else can we do to put out the fire?

## Your child can also:

- Tell stories about his adventures fighting fires.
- Invite new friends along for the ride.
- Point and aim the fire hose.
- Slide down the fire pole.

## You may also want to:

- Visit your local fire house together.
- Count the number of fire hydrants that can be found on your block.

## Work with others.



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### Help your child:

- Shop for vegetables and fruits.
- Carry food to the conveyor belt.
- Listen to the scanner as food moves across.
- Take turns at the cash register.
- Use words such as “buy,” “sell,” “cost,” and “count” to describe what she is doing at the deli counter.

### Ask your child:

- What kinds of fruits and vegetables can you find?
- How many vegetables and how many fruits are you selling/buying today?

### Your child can also:

- Work with others to wash and cook food in the kitchen.
- Take turns preparing and serving food to a friend.

### You may also want to:

- Shop at your local fruit and vegetable cart, store or deli.
- Eat at a local restaurant and chat with the cook or chef.



# Build shapes and patterns.



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## Help your child:

- Choose a block and put it on the wall.
- Experiment with different shapes and sizes.
- Build a pattern.
- Describe what she is doing with blocks.
- Use words such as “high,” “low,” “long,” short and wide to help describe what she is making.

## Ask your child:

- What can we do with these blocks?
- Is there another way to put them together?

## Your child can also:

- Stack blocks and knock them down.
- Build tall or wide.
- Watch blocks tumble down!

## You may also want to:

- Look for shapes that are used in the design of buildings in your neighborhood.



# Count and sort.



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## Help your child:

- Pick and place colored pegs.
- Count the pegs.
- Move the pegs into new holes.
- Group pegs by color.
- Use words such as push, pull or sort to describe what he is doing with the pegs.

## Ask your child:

- How many pegs does it take to fill the board?
- Can you put the pegs into groups?

## Your child can also:

- Make a picture.
- Create a pattern.
- Sort pegs into the side bins.

## You may also want to:

- Count how many windows are lit at night in a building you can see from your window.

# Experiment with cause and effect.



## Help your child:

- Put her hand in the harp.
- Listen to the sound.
- Move fast and slowly to hear different sounds.
- Use words such as “wave,” “point” and “circle” to describe what she is doing with her hands, feet or head in the harp.

## Ask your child:

- How can you make the music start?
- How can you make the music stop?
- What do the different kinds of music make you think of?

## Your child can also:

- Press the button to change the type of sound.
- Try experimenting with an elbow, a toe or her whole head!

## You may also want to:

- Listen to a variety of styles of music together.
- Attend a local musical performance.



# Make discoveries.



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## Help your child:

- Feel the texture of the sand.
- Dig in the sand.
- Scoop and pour the sand.
- Use words such as “full,” “empty,” “dump,” “fill,” “more,” “less” to describe what he is doing with the sand.

## Ask your child:

- What does sand feel like?
- How does it feel to pour the sand from down low and high up?
- Which container holds the most sand?

## Your child can also:

- Fill different containers with sand.
- Pour sand from one container to another.
- Compare sizes and volume of containers.

## You may also want to:

- Take a trip to a nearby beach.

# Develop independence.



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## Help your child:

- Climb up the stairs.
- Go down the slide.
- Crawl through openings.
- Cross the bridge.
- Use words such as "jump," "step," "above," "below," "over" and "under" to describe how she is moving.

## Ask your child:

- What did you see inside the tunnel?
- What did you see from the tower?

## Your child can also:

- Go up the tower.
- Look through binoculars to find Alphie or the fire truck.
- Wave hello to friends!

## You may also want to:

- Explore your local park.



# Solve problems.



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## Help your child:

- Find the air source.
- Fit a tube in the hole.
- Play with the air—feel it on her skin.
- Watch what happens in the mirror as you blow her hair.
- Use words such as “switch,” “change,” “connect” and “test” to describe what she is doing with the tubes.

## Ask your child:

- How can you make the air blow on your face? on your hair?
- What kinds of weather does it make you think of?

## Your child can also:

- Connect the tube to another hole.
- Experiment with connecting tubes.
- Watch what happens in the cases.

## You may also want to:

- Experiment with wind by flying a kite.
- Blow up a balloon and watch what happens when it's released.

# Make careful observations.



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## Help your child:

- Name the colors she sees in the circle.
- Turn the round handle.
- Use words such as mix or blend to describe what is happening inside the color wheels.

## Ask your child:

- Which color floats on top?
- Which sinks to the bottom?
- How can you change the color?
- What colors do you see being made?
- What other colors can you make?

## Your child can also:

- Spin the wheel “fast” or “slowly”.
- Watch the colors separate out again.

## You may also want to:

- Paint a color wheel at home showing primary (red, blue, yellow) colors and secondary (purple, orange, green) colors.



# Invent and design.



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## Help your child:

- Pull or push her finger across the screen.
- Use words such as "short," "long," "straight," "curve" or "wavy" to describe what she drew.

## Ask your child:

- Tell me about what you drew.
- What do you call your drawing?

## Your child can also:

- Pick up her finger to begin a new line.
- Change the color of the line once or many times.

## You may also want to:

- Visit a local art museum.

## About the Guide

The Children's Museum of Manhattan (CMOM) created the PlayWorks™ for Early Learners exhibit space so that all of our young visitors could explore, play and learn at their own pace. Every exhibition component inspires experimentation, discovery and confidence, with activities that appeal to multiple learning styles and levels.

The PlayWorks™ Guide for Families of Children with Disabilities reflects CMOM's understanding of the Universal Design paradigm – a state-of-the-art protocol that calls for equitable and flexible use of the equipment simple and intuitive activities fail-safe design that accommodates different levels of participation and physical scale that adapts to the range of physical circumstances with which children might be living.

The Guide was created with the help of an advisory board of educators, community advocates and specialists in education and accessibility. In the process, CMOM has built strong partnerships with schools and community organizations that serve children with disabilities from low income neighborhoods. We hope that this new resource will make CMOM a more welcoming place for children with disabilities from communities everywhere.



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