

Playmaker University

Overview & Course Catalog



Behind every change-maker is a Playmaker

Many of the people who dedicate their careers to caring for our nation's most vulnerable kids were once vulnerable kids themselves. It took a special person to help them see their inherent goodness and value. To make them believe in themselves. We call those people Playmakers.

Our children are suffering. Today, we are facing a national mental health crisis. Rates of depression, anxiety and trauma are at their highest levels. All of which negatively impact social, emotional, and cognitive development. We believe that early childhood educators are perfectly positioned to be a powerful first-line of defense in addressing this crisis.

That's why we created Playmaker University. Playmaker University is a groundbreaking online learning platform designed to help early childhood educators use the healing power of play to address the children's mental health crisis head on. We provide training, resources and ongoing support to the frontline professionals dedicated to caring for our nation's youngest, most vulnerable citizens.

Playmaker U starts with yoU



We understand the challenges that early childhood educators face. Playmaker University prioritizes helping early childhood professionals develop practical strategies to spark and sustain their own sense of joy, inspiration, and community. Because we know that it is hard to share with children what you don't have in yourself.

Play isn't just for kids. It's a powerful way to combat burnout and to remember why you fell in love with teaching in the first place.

Our curriculum is research-based, trauma-informed and optimism-infused. All Playmaker University content is designed to support NAEYC program standards and fulfill your professional development requirements for Diverse Learning.

Playmaking is a team sport

As you progress through Playmaker University, you'll have access to live coaching and peer-to-peer support as well as both in-person and online events. Graduates of Playmaker University receive exclusive Life is Good® gear, advanced training opportunities, invitations to special events, and access to the Life is Good Superpower Kit which includes 100 amazing activities that support social and emotional learning.



We're saving you a spot

Playmaker University is designed for early childhood educators working with children under the age of ten. However, since the Playmaker approach can be easily adapted to work with children of all ages, those working with older kids are welcome to apply. After all, who couldn't use a little more play in their lives?

Take your own sweet time

We know you're busy. That's why Playmaker University offers flexible learning paths. After completing a 1-hour virtual kick-off event, you can complete your learning online at your own pace. For organizations interested in partnering with us, we also offer a blended approach that combines dynamic online training modules with in-person learning opportunities. Learn more about how to bring Playmaker Live experiences to your organization on our website.

Enroll today or learn more at
playmakerproject.org.





Playmaker University

Course Descriptions

Lesson 1: Playmaking

An Introduction to Playmaking

Building healing, life-changing relationships with children who are struggling with anxiety, depression, and/or traumatic stress requires a unique set of skills. In this introductory lesson, you'll learn the philosophy behind our play-based, trauma-informed approach as well as the core concepts that will serve as the foundation for the lessons that follow.

Lesson 2: Optimism

The Healing Power of Optimism

Optimism isn't simply about having a positive attitude or seeing the glass as half full. It's a pragmatic, evidenced-based approach to meeting challenges head on by leveraging the good in ourselves, others, and in the world around us. This course will help you learn how to find the opportunities that are often hidden amidst the obstacles.

Lesson 3: Toxic Stress

Understanding the Impact of Toxic Stress

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) trigger toxic levels of stress that can overwhelm a child's ability to cope. Without proper support, ACEs can disrupt healthy brain development leading to disease, disability and shortened life-expectancies. In this course, we'll look at the impact of toxic stress on children as well as explore key protective factors that can lessen their impact and promote resilience.

Lesson 4: Internal Control

Helping Children Build a Sense of Safety and Empowerment

Like all of us, children need to feel safe, worthy, and capable. Trauma robs them of those strengths, making them feel scared, invisible, and helpless. When children feel powerless to change their circumstances and make things better, their emotional health suffers greatly. In this lesson, we'll give you techniques designed to help children regain a felt sense of safety, empowerment, and self-worth.





Lesson 5: Social Connection


Building Healing, Life-Changing Relationships with Kids

Loving, trusting relationships with caring adults protect and insulate children from the harmful, long-term effects of toxic stress. However, building these types of relationships with children isn't always easy. In this lesson, we'll take a closer look at the importance of social connection and how we can help children – especially those who struggle to connect – form healthy attachments and develop a deeper sense of belonging through games, activities, and everyday interactions.

Lesson 6: Active Engagement

Helping Kids Discover the Magic of the Moment

With so many distractions in our lives, it's difficult for any of us to be fully present. It's even harder for children who have experienced trauma. They struggle to be present because of their preoccupation with the past and their fears of the future. The good news is that the ability to be fully present, known as active engagement, can be learned. In this course, you'll learn strategies and approaches for helping children tune into their bodies, maximize engagement, and discover the magic of the present moment.



Lesson 7: Joy

How to Spark & Sustain Positivity and Purpose in Children

Joy is an enduring sense of positivity that serves to remind us that behind even the darkest storm clouds, the sun continues to shine. Playmakers don't have the power to make children joyful. We do, however, have the power to create environments where children can discover their own joy. This lesson will explore how to prioritize joy in your practice with children and use it to spark and sustain their feelings of pleasure and purpose.

Lesson 8: Goodification:

How to Transform Any Activity into Play

Play is not defined by what you do. It is defined by the spirit and intention in everything you do. Any activity can be a transformative play experience if it is structured in a joyful, connecting, engaging, and empowering way. This lesson will introduce you to the concept of "Goodification" as a vehicle for modifying and adapting activities so that they best nurture childrens' social and emotional growth.

Lesson 9: Playful Guidance:

Understanding and Responding Lovingly to the Needs of Children

"Behavior Management" isn't part of the Playmaker vocabulary. Kids don't want to be managed. They want to be seen, valued and lovingly guided. By applying the Playmaker approach to our discipline strategies, we can better understand childrens' behavior and respond more effectively to their needs. In this course, you'll learn how to use the four domains of play to respond to, reframe and redirect challenging behaviors in a more joyful and empowering way.

Lesson 10: Playmaker Care

Building and Sustaining a Playmaker Wellness Practice

Let's talk about you for a moment. You can't spread to others what you don't have for yourself. If you want to nurture feelings of joy, love, inspiration, and empowerment in children, you need to nurture those feelings in yourself first. Or, in the words of the great Jazz Saxophone player Charlie Parker, "If you don't live it, it will not come out your horn." In this lesson, we'll explore the signs of burnout, gain tools to counteract it, and create a plan to strengthen your own physical, social, and emotional well-being.

