



# Open Minds Open Doors

*A newsletter by Dr Esther Joosa about the power of open-ended play  
as a pathway to inclusion*



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## Open Minds Open Doors

*Updates about the OMOD program and Play  
Practices*

Welcome to the fourth issue of the Open Minds Open Doors Newsletter.

In this issue, Dr Esther Joosa reflects on her design of Pathways through Play as the foundation of OMOD. She looks ahead to the future, and the focus shifts towards guiding families and making visible how play supports children's development, thinking, and learning.

Over the year ahead, we will continue to offer a series of play sessions and parent workshops. Dr Esther will remain available to respond to your questions and support your understanding of the role of play in development.

Charlotte Goh  
Executive Director, Playeum

# Pathways Through Play: A Framework to Support Your Child

BY DR ESTHER JOOSA



Pathways Through Play did not begin as a fixed programme, but as a collaborative research initiative and partnership between Playeum and myself through the Open Minds Open Doors initiative. It started in 2019 with a central question: how can open-ended play support children with diverse needs to participate more fully in the world around them?

Over the years, through close work with families, children, and educators, the approach has continued to evolve. Each phase has been shaped by lived experiences — from creating safe entry points during COVID-19, to working with community partners, training educators, and in 2025 with a grant from the President's Challenge to further support families.

At its core, the framework focuses on three interconnected areas: increasing participation, strengthening relationships, and supporting children's development, agency and meaning-making through play. For parents, this means recognising that play is not simply an activity, but creating conditions for children to explore, communicate, and understand their world.

There is no single pathway. Each child navigates their own way. As the work has grown, so has its reach. Pathways Through Play has been developed into a parent guide and continues to evolve alongside the children and families it serves.

**For parents who want to learn more join us in our social media conversations and workshops**

During the upcoming workshop on 20 June 2026 in collaboration with Playeum, I will share insights, examples, and ways of seeing play differently — not as an activity, but as a pathway to participation, communication, and belonging.

In the meantime, follow @estherjoosa.play to explore new ways of understanding your child through play.



# A POSITION STATEMENT: THE FOUNDATION OF PATHWAYS THROUGH PLAY

*By Dr Esther Joosa*

In collaboration with community partners, Open Minds Open Doors and Playeum open their play spaces twice a month to families with children of diverse needs. The design of the programme does not aim to fix, train, or normalise children. Instead, it creates conditions in which participation and autonomy for the most vulnerable in our community can emerge on their own terms.

Throughout its development, I created Pathways Through Play, a parent facilitation guide that will soon be available. It has evolved into a framework and a deliberate alternative to conventional intervention models. The design of the play model does not direct outcomes. Instead, it responds to conditions, individual abilities, and what unfolds through play as a pathway towards an inclusive world. This position is intentional. Pathways Through Play is not a quick solution. It does not offer predictable results but removes fixed instructions, expectations of outcomes, and singular definitions of success. This is not a weakness. It is work that builds on children's strengths and responds to the conditions of the present and the future.

These conditions require a shift from adults. It asks us to reflect on our beliefs. Not to manage behaviour, but to observe, to create time to engage, and to make sense alongside the child. To create spaces that prioritise agency over compliance, participation over performance, and belonging over correction.



***Open-ended play as the foundation of Pathways through Play is not a quick solution. Its foundation in Open Minds Open Doors led to creating pathways that encourage autonomy for the most vulnerable in our community***



# Pathways Through Play: Learning the Four Conditions That Support Your Child's Engagement in Play

By Dr Esther Joosa

I am often asked how to let a child engage in play. There is no single answer. How a child engages is shaped first by interest and understanding of play. Secondly by the following four conditions: time, space, materials, and facilitation.

## **Time**

*Children need time to settle, explore, and return to ideas. Learning is not immediate. Repetition and pauses are how children make sense of their experiences. Give your child time, even when the play may not seem purposeful at first.*

## **Space**

*The environment shapes how safe and confident a child feels. The real world is uncertain and requires flexibility. Open and predictable spaces may feel challenging at first, but they allow children to move, observe, and choose how to engage. In these spaces, children begin to find their own way.*

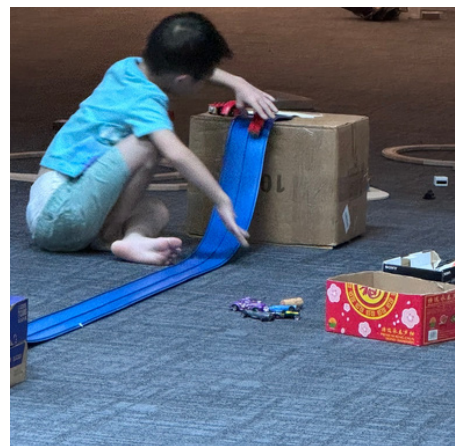
## **Materials**

*Simple, open-ended materials invite exploration. Blocks, boxes, and everyday objects can be used in many ways. They allow children to test ideas, express themselves, and stay engaged without pressure to perform.*

## **Facilitation**

*Adults matter. Not as instructors, but as observers, learners and partners. Rather than directing or correcting, we begin by watching. We respond to what the child is doing and support their engagement. This builds trust and allows children to take the lead while feeling understood.*

Together, these four conditions create opportunities and pathways for children to participate, connect, and grow in ways are meaningful to them. Observing small shifts in the way children play can make a significant difference. They allow us to learn about their strengths and provide opportunities that create pathways to the community.



## **Play Dates April/May 2026**

- 25 April OMOD Kids Space, Dempsey
- 9 May OMOD venue t.b.a.
- 30 May, OMOD venue t.b.a.

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