

Learning Through Nature Play Day Professional Development Hours: Here is the link to the form or the QR code for those interested in earning PD hours by attending the Learning Through Nature Play event.

The fee is \$25 payable to the RIROE.

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdLWRPf-KFAnilvoqTUDy6iISn2tHICLBafyNm0b6_n4oZiew/viewform?pli=1



**Gateways' credentials for Early Childhood Educators are provided **

[Register HERE for Gateways Credentials](#)

Keynote speaker, Rusty Keeler- a natural playground designer and published author who For 35 years has been working with state and regional parks, schools, and municipalities to create inclusive nature-based play environments that connect children and families to the natural world through exploration and discovery.

Information on sessions:

- **Keynote Address: The Joy of Messy Play (Space C):** This session will focus on the philosophy and power of natural, loose-parts play and on designing landscapes for deep childhood connection.
- **Risky Play Roundtable (Block 1):** This session focuses on mastering strategies to confidently support children as they test their limits in a safe, intentional environment.
- **My Backyard Wilderness: Simple Nature Play at Home (Block 2):** This session encourages embracing risky play and provides strategies to support children as they explore their boundaries in a safe, supportive environment.

2. Sage Marske- AOK Networks (Space A)

- **The Why Behind Play (Block 1): The Why Behind Play – Supporting Regulation Through OT & SEL**

This training explores the connection between play, sensory processing, and social-emotional learning (SEL) in early childhood. Participants will learn how children use play to develop skills in regulation, communication, and problem-solving. The session highlights how sensory experiences influence behavior and provides strategies to distinguish between sensory-driven responses and intentional behavior. Attendees will engage in interactive activities and leave with practical, easy-to-implement tools to support children's development through both indoor and outdoor play.

3. Quad City Botanical Center- BI

That's not just a twig! (Block 1)The breakout session, "Artists Play in the Garden," will cover the top ten experimental nature art techniques. The session begins with a brief overview, followed by a demonstration and modeling of some techniques, and sharing experiences. Participants will then receive studio time with art supplies and natural materials for exploratory and educational play, with facilitators available to answer questions throughout.

4. Melissa Nicholas- Unity Point Robert Young/Caregiver Connections

- **The Rewired Brain: The Neuroscience of Nature Play (Block 2):**

Ever wonder why children are more focused and calmer after playing outside? Join us to uncover the "why" behind the magic of nature. We'll break down the science of how outdoor environments soothe the nervous system, sharpen focus, and act as a natural buffer against stress. Leave with a new understanding of how the simplest outdoor experiences provide the most complex benefits for a child's mental health.

Conference Timeline

The conference will take place on Saturday, May 16, 2026, at the East Moline **Early Learning Center**, 3100 4th Avenue, East Moline, IL.

<https://www.emsd37.org/o/pre-k>

Here is the master schedule of events:

- 9:15 AM: Presenter & Vendor Setup
- 10:00 AM: Doors Open to All Attendees (Arrival, registration, and informal networking)
- 10:15 AM: Welcome & Introductions

- 10:30 AM – 11:30 AM: Keynote Address ("The Joy of Messy Play")
- 11:30 AM – 12:30 PM: Lunch & Networking Break
- 12:30 PM – 1:30 PM: [**Concurrent Session Block 1**](#)
- 1:30 PM – 1:35 PM: Break
- 1:35 PM – 2:35 PM: [**Concurrent Session Block 2**](#)
- 2:35 PM – 2:45 PM: Break
- 2:45 PM – 3:00 PM: Closing Remarks & Raffle
- 3:00 PM: Conference Concludes