

## Play

Play is very important for the development of Speech, Language and Communication skills – it provides many opportunities for children to learn new vocabulary, learn how to take turns and learn how to think flexibly.

### How Can You help?

Keep it fun! Children will learn best when they are engaged and interested in the game/activity.

Follow the child's lead. This means letting them choose how they want to start playing and/or when they want you to join in a game. They are more likely to remain on task.

You can help your child learn through play by:

- providing the toys and opportunities,
- watching how they play,
- showing them how to play in new ways.

Provide a running commentary of what they child is doing. For example, whilst building a tower, you could say *'Wow building blocks. Let's build. 1...2...3...oh no crash! Let's try again. Red brick...blue brick. A big tower.'*

Try to limit how many toys are available at once to avoid overstimulation and lack of engagement due to the child fleeing between activities.

This will help your child to build new skills.

**Repeat. Repeat. Repeat.** Children learn through repetition. Yes - this means playing the same game over and over, reading the same story multiple times and singing their current favourite song.

There are several types of play which a child will learn gradually as they develop. These are:

- **People Play** - Children need to learn how to engage with, and play with people before they play with toys.
- **Sensory & Exploratory Play** - helps children to learn about the world around them.
- **Cause and Effect Play** - helps the child to learn that their actions can have an effect in or on something else.
- **Physical Play** - helps children to develop movement and coordination. This type of play is particularly useful for active children who have difficulty concentrating.

- **Construction Play** - Provides a sense of achievement and helps a child to:



- develop hand-eye coordination and movement skills
- understand how parts fit together
- improve memory through practice



- **Creative Play** – helps to develop hand movement, encourage imagination and experiment and feel with different materials/textures.
- **Pretend Play** – detailed further below.

### Games/Ideas to Develop Different Stages of Play

**People Games:** People games are games without toys. For example, singing nursery rhymes, throwing your small child in the air, bouncing them on the bed or trampoline, spinning them round, and then wait and watch for their response; if they are enjoying it – they will come back for more. Use language such as:

- “I’m coming to get you....”
- “1...2...3...tickle...”
- “Ready, steady.....”
- “I’m going to tickle your... nose/toes/tummy/hand”

Try to build the anticipation of the tickle or fun part, and give the child a smile or a cuddle at the end to indicate the game/rhyme has finished.

#### **Sensory & Exploratory Play:**

- Help child to bang, shake, examine, drop and throw objects.
- Support child in putting safe objects to their mouth.
- Explore sounds using bells.
- Use baby oil to massage rattles and musical toys. a child’s hands and feet.



#### **Cause and Effect Play:**

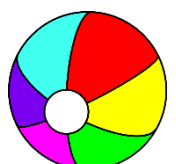
- Toys to squeeze and shake.
- Build a tower and knock it down.
- Pull and push along toys.
- Play with musical toys such as shakers, drum, keyboard, xylophone, musical push-button toys.
- Lift the flap books and books that make noises.
- React to the child’s actions and sounds with a fun familiar response, for example, every time the child drops a toy, say “uh oh!”
- Play with pop-up toys such as a jack-in-a-box, pop-up animals.
- Play with toys and objects that are brightly coloured, shiny, lit-up.
- Play with a range of messy activities such as sand, water, play dough.
- Help the child explore touch and feel books.
- Make shakers out of pots filled with dried pasta or rice.
- Encourage the child to try a range of tastes and smells through messy play with food.
- Gather together objects that have different textures, such as rough, smooth, spiky, feathers for the child to feel and explore.

#### **Construction Play:**

- Hide toys under cloths or boxes or bury objects in sand.
- Put things in and out of containers and bags.
- Play with stacking rings and stacking cups.
- Use chairs and sheets to make dens.
- Build towers, bridges and houses out of bricks.
- Do jigsaws. The easiest kind are simple inset puzzles.
- Play with shape sorters and other posting games.

#### **Physical Play:**

- Sing and act out action rhymes with child such as, ‘Row Row Your Boat’.
- Play ball games at a level the child can enjoy.
- Play hide-and-seek and chase games.
- Encourage young children to splash and kick in puddles.
- Visit a soft-play centre or include a soft-play area in your



**Creative Play:**

- Cook together – make biscuits then decorate with coloured icing, make faces with raisins!
- Make animal masks from paper plates.
- Try potato printing – cut out patterns then print using paints.
- Make collages by sticking materials on to card.
- Make play dough – model into shapes.
- Use jam, chocolate spread, peanut butter, honey etc for finger painting.
- Try drawing around hands and feet.
- Make models from old food packets, containers and boxes.

**Pretend Play:** Pretend play is particularly significant when thinking about language development because language often develops alongside pretend play. Pretend play helps to:

- Develop an understanding of what objects are used for.
- Understand that a word can represent/symbolise an object just like a toy can be used to represent a real object.
- Develop flexible thinking and imagination.
- Learn about real-life situations and act them out.

**There are five stages of pretend play:**

**First Stage**  
pretend play with real objects. This shows that a child understands what objects are and what we do with them.

**Second Stage** – Pretend play with teddies and dolls.

**Third Stage** – sequences of pretend play. For example, everyday activities at home such as sweeping, washing cups, cooking etc.

**Fourth Stage** – small world play. Play becomes more imaginative and less dependent on the real objects.

**Fifth Stage** –complex symbolic play and role play. Real life situations can be acted out and stories can be made up using a variety of miniature toys



**N.B: Don't Worry About Gender** – Encourage girls to play with trucks and trains and boys to play with toy kitchens and baby dolls.

Play also follows a developmental sequence. These are as follows:

- **Solitary/solo play:** When engaged in solitary play, children play by themselves and are quite rigidly fixated on the toy/activity of their choice. At this stage of development, they are unaware and/or uninterested in others playing around them.
- **Spectator play/'looking on' play:** At this stage of development, a child is still only observed to play by themselves but they are now becoming gradually more aware and/or more interested in others playing around them and will fleetingly glance at others whilst they play.
- **Parallel play:** Between the ages of 2.5 and 3.5, a child is typically observed to play alongside others and sometimes mimic each other. This does not necessarily mean they will interact with others but they will engage in similar activities with other children and will share toys/areas more willingly (e.g. sharing the home corner).
- **Associative play:** At this stage, a child will start to fleetingly interact with other children and may play with the same toys/objects etc but are not yet working together to create something or to achieve the same goal.
- **Co-operative play:** Between the ages of 4 and 6, children typically begin to engage in co-operative play where play finally becomes organised into groups and teamwork is seen. Children are now fully interested in both the people that they are playing with as well as the shared activity at hand. Children will work together to create something or to achieve the same goal by sharing ideas and negotiating/compromising with one another.