



Play

Play Resource and Education Booklet

For parents and carers to promote childhood development through the participation in play at home

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Contents

1. The Importance of Play
2. The Developmental Stages of Play
3. How to Overcome Barriers for Engaging in Play Within Your Home
4. How to Cater for Your Child's Sensory Preferences During Play
5. How to embed different types of play into your daily routine
6. How to Set-up an Effective Play Space in Your Home



“The ability to play is critical not only to being happy, but also to sustaining social relationships and being a creative, innovative person.”
- Stuart Brown MD

We recognise that every child is unique and that this content may not work for everyone. This content is general information and is not specific medical advice. We hope that these tips will serve as a starting point for finding the best approach, to help your child engage in meaningful play.

1. The Importance of Play

Opportunities to engage in play must be provided to the child in order for them to develop their learning abilities.

By helping a child's play develop, you also help the child learn and practice new skills, abilities and help them to build confidence. These skills are important for the child's overall development and assist with things such as: attention, concentration, fine and gross motor skills, motor planning, creativity, imagination, social skills, language, narrative competence, cognitive skills, self-regulation and problem solving.

Play has been shown to increase children's ability, particularly those with autism, to engage with their environment. Assessing a child's play ability gives you lots of information about how a child engages with their world and how they understand their world.

As children engage in play, it helps them to understand how people's behaviour can change in different social settings. For example: pretending to be an astronaut during play will cause you to model different behaviour and language than if you are pretending to be a hairdresser while you're playing with your child.



2. The Developmental Stages of Play

The Six Developmental Stages of Play:

1. Exploratory Play

2. Cause-and-Effect Play

3. Toy Play

4. Constructive Play

5. Physical Play

6. Pretend Play



1. Exploratory Play

This type of play is when a child explores objects and toys, but doesn't play with them. For example, feeling a teddy, holding a toy truck or putting an object in their mouth.

Through this play, the child learns about their world by exploring different sensory input, including different textures, colours, sounds.

To help your child with this type of play, encourage them to explore further as part of their daily activities. For example, if the child is having a bath, encourage them to splash the water, rub soap between their hands and pour water with a cup.



2. Cause-and-Effect Play

This form of play is when the child plays with toys that need an action to get a result. For example, pressing a button for the doll to make a sound.

This type of play teaches children that their actions have effects and gives them a feeling of control whilst they play.

This can be an opportunity for the child to learn how to copy the actions of someone else, take turns and ask questions.

To help your child with this stage of play:

Practice taking turns pressing a button to cause a response.





“Children learn as they play. Most importantly, in play children learn how to learn.”

- O. Fred Donaldson

3. Toy Play

Toy play is learning how to play with and use toys the way they were intended. For example: pushing a toy car, brushing the dolls hair, kicking a soccer ball.

Toys can help children develop thinking, decision-making, problem-solving and creative skills as they figure out how to play with their toys.

To help your child with this stage of play:

- Sit in front of your child so they can look at you, communicate with you and watch what you're doing whilst you both engage in this form of play
- Offer play options for the child (2-3 options) to allow the child to choose what they would like to play with
- Let the child lead the play
- Encourage participation. If the child is watching you play, saying "your turn to drive the car"
- Use positive feedback when the child engages in the play activity

4. Constructive Play

Constructive play is when children build or make things. It involves working towards a goal or product. For example, completing a jigsaw puzzle, making a tower out of blocks, or drawing a picture.

This type of play can help children develop motor skills, practise thinking and problem-solving skills, and enjoy being creative.

Help your child with this stage of play by showing your child what to do. For example, you could try building a tower with blocks to show your child how to do it, or you could use pictures or photographs that show how to build a tower.



5. Physical Play

Physical play is rough-and-tumble play, running around and so on.

This type of play gives your child whole-body exercise and helps them develop gross motor skills. It can also be a chance for your child to explore their environment and interact with other people.

To help your child in this stage of play:

- Encourage them to brainstorm their own play ideas
- Outdoor play
- Make a fort

6. Pretend Play

Pretend play is the most sophisticated form of play and involves a child using their imagination during play. Examples of this type of play include: pretending to feed a teddy bear, dressing up like a superhero, pretending to be driving a car, or pretending the couch is a sailing boat.

Pretend play helps children develop the skills they need for social relationships, language and communication - these include understanding what other people are thinking and feeling.

To help your child with this stage of play:

- Model some simple, everyday pretend actions that your child can use in pretend play, like driving a car, riding a horse or banging a drum
- Break pretend play activity into steps. You can use written or picture instructions to help your child understand what to do. You might want to make it funny. For example, try using a hair brush instead of a spoon to feed a teddy bear
- Encourage role-play by getting your child and others to act out a favourite story. Give the children costumes and suggest changes to the characters' voices and gestures

3. How to Overcome Barriers for Engaging in Play Within Your Home

Children will be more engaged during play if the child feels like the parent is having fun. If you're wanting your child to engage, try modelling this behaviour with positive tone of voice, facial expressions, body movements.

During play time, work with your child's learning strengths and meet them where they're at. If the child feels like the play is too challenging they are less likely to engage and may even find it stressful. You can introduce more complex types of play when the child appears to be - as they move into the next developmental stage of play.

If the child appears to be disengaged during play:

Limit-setting

First of all determine whether this limit is necessary or could be handled with another skill. There are few rules during play so the children can feel more relaxed and play imaginatively rather than focusing on rules.

Step 1 - State the limit in positive terms, and be brief. Give the limit in a clear, firm voice. E.g. "The paint goes on the table."

Step 2 - Reflect the feeling the child has when the parent sets the limit. E.g. "You don't like that."

Step 3 - Suggest alternatives, when needed by the child. E.g. "The paint can go on the paper."

Step 4 - Remind the child, depending on age and understanding, several times before giving a consequence. Give the consequence. E.g. "The paint will go away for today."

Step 5 - Remind child that they can do most other things in their play session

During pretend/ imaginative play:

Let your child lead the way when possible, reflect their behaviour and words to them, engage in play in ways that your child requests. Use words to help them develop their language skills. For example, if you are having a tea party, label the items such as cup, spoon, plate.

During structured play:

Explain the whole play story to the child : “First...we can do ____, after that we do ____, and then we do ____, then we will be done”.

Use opening and closing statements during play times E.g. opening statement: “This is when we play together. We will play with these toys here. If there’s something you can’t do, I’ll tell you.” Closing statement: “We have five minutes left to play. We have one minute left to play. Our time is up for today. We are leaving now.”

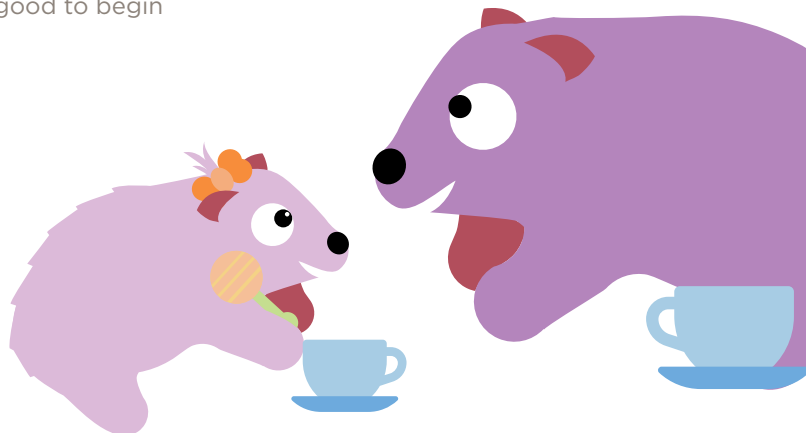
Activities that have a clear goal and end point can be good to begin with.

Social play stages:

1. Playing alone
2. Playing alongside others
3. Playing and sharing with others
4. Playing cooperatively with others

“The activities that are the easiest, cheapest, and most fun to do – such as singing, playing games, reading, storytelling, and just talking and listening – are also the best for child development.”

- Jerome Singer



Helping Children Learn About and Enjoy Playing with Others

Here are some ideas to get your child interacting and playing with others:

- Choose simple games like peekaboo, pat-a-cake, ring-a-ring-a-rosies, snap and memory. They are all social games that promote sharing and taking turns, but they're also structured with clear end points
- Use playdates or visits with friends or family whose children are around the same age as your child. You could also ask your child's siblings or cousins to help with showing your child how to play games, take turns and so on
- Teach your child how to join in. Again, siblings, cousins and friends might be able to show your child how it's done. For example, your child could say: "Hello, can I play with you?", or "Do you want to play with the trains?"
- If your child finds it hard to join in with others, watch carefully to work out why. Does your child need help with some of their play or other skills? You could speak to your child's school, preschool or early intervention teacher if you're not sure



4. How to Cater for Your Child's Sensory Preferences During Play

What is sensory play?

Activities which stimulate a child's senses- including touch, sight, hearing, smell, body movement.

Through a child's senses is how they learn and gain an understanding of their environment.

Benefits of sensory play:

- Helps develop brain connections which enables for more complex thoughts and tasks and encourages experimentation
- Also develops communications skills, fine/gross motor skills and social interaction skills

How to identify your child's sensory preferences:

- Observe your child throughout the day and look for times when they show interest in an activity, however ordinary it may seem to you

Sensory play ideas and activities

1. Create a sensory box

- Include objects of different textures and shapes. For example: uncooked pasta shells, feathers, rocks, leaves

Note complete with caution if your child is prone to put objects on their mouth*

2. Playing with food

- Great way to expose different foods to children who are picky eaters

3. Sound tubes

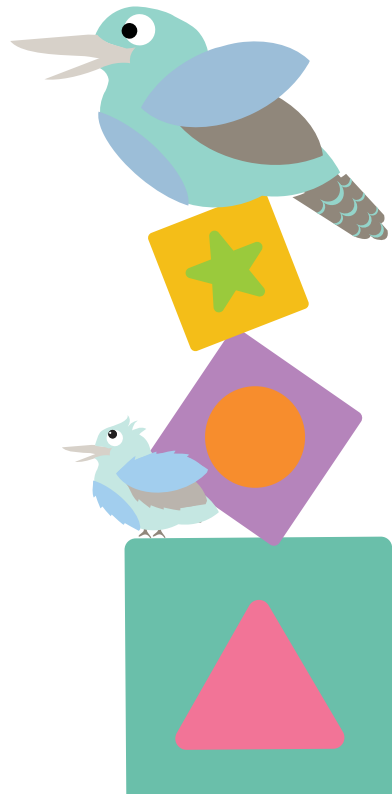
- Helps to connect with their auditory environment around them.
- A way to create a sound tube: save paper towel, add a variety of materials to go inside and tape the sides

4. Playdough

- Allows children to explore the soft and mouldable texture

5. Beading

- Offer the experience to explore different textured beads
- This can be done with pipe cleaners and beads



How to identify a child's sensory preferences

Proprioception

- Loves a tight hug or firm touch
- Holds objects too tightly
- Seeks tight pressure
- Fears uneven surfaces or stairs
- Prefers jumping or skipping to just walking

Proprioceptive strategies

- Provide a ball or wiggle cushion for seating
- Use grips for writing
- Practice walking over pillows and soft uneven surfaces

Vestibular needs

- Loves to hang upside down
- Craves movement that is fast or intense
- Loves to spin
- Always in motion

Proprioception strategies

- Access to a trampoline
- Access to a swing

Visual sensitivity

- Avoids bright light
- Shifts gaze to avoid eye contact

Visual strategies

- Sunglasses
- Utilise the bathroom mirror to practice eye contact
- Make sure the environment isn't visually overcrowded to prevent overstimulation

Smell sensitivity

- Super sensitive to particular smells E.g. Air freshener, coffee

Smell strategies:

- Use fragrance free
- Use a deodorisers like essential oils or electric air deodoriser

Tactile sensitivity

- Avoids clothing in general
- Touches things that are smooth
- Avoids walking barefoot or walking on grass, sand, carpet
- Avoids seams and wears socks inside out
- Cleans hands a lot
- Doesn't like showers or getting wet
- Doesn't like being touched

Tactile strategies

- Buy seamless or tag-less clothing
- Encourage putty play, fine motor games
- Encourage outdoor play

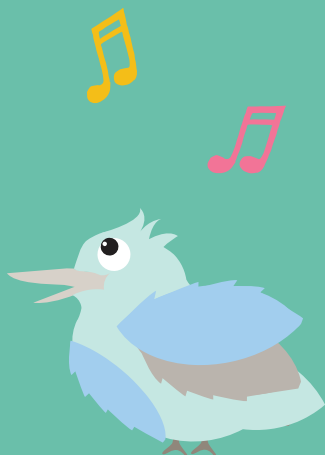
The senses offers the child a key to guide his explorations of the world

- Dr Maria Montessori



Auditory sensitive

- Easily startled by loud noises
- Complains about sounds being “too loud”



Auditory solutions:

- Prepare child for any loud noises which can be predicted. Whenever possible, give the child a verbal or visual warning before loud sounds occur
 - such as the lawn mower or fire alarm drill
- Adapt the environment or situation if possible
- Reassure the child that the noise isn't going to hurt them. Explain and discuss the source of the noise to increase the child's understanding
 - Use head-phones, ear-muffs or ear-plugs to decrease level of sound

Oral sensitivity:

- Bites
- Chews on sleeves, non-food objects, fingernails
- Picky eaters
- Doesn't like textured foods
- Doesn't like brushing teeth or having teeth cleaned

Oral strategies:

- Provide crunchy snacks
- Provide a favourite chewy to have on hand (if appropriate)
- Chewable necklaces, pencil ends and bracelets to prevent biting or chewing on clothing
- Drinking through a straw
- Decrease level of sound

5. How to Embed Different Types of Play Throughout Your Daily Routine

Find small periods of time throughout the day to encourage your child to engage in play. It can be 10 minutes if that's all that is achievable for your family. Schedule or create small periods of time for your child to be able to engage in play. Prioritise play when you can in your schedule.

Siblings can play together and help to engage your other child in play. Encourage siblings to play together when they can. Older siblings can model play behaviour.

Encourage imaginative/pretend play within your day-to-day tasks. For example: “let’s turn getting dressed into a game”, “let’s make our way through the swamp to get to our socks”, “we need to put our socks and shoes on so we can save the princess”. Model this if necessary to increase participation.



6. How to Set Up an Effective Play Space in Your Home

Follow the child's lead with play; join in, rather than just trying to guide it. Watch for signs of the child becoming disengaged

Engaging play ideas:

Pretend play:

- Use props
- Incorporate characters in play. Include your child's preferences

Active play:

- Indoor and outdoor active play
- Creating cubby houses
- Pretend objects can be different things. For example: a cardboard box is a golf buggy
- Create spaces where you can join your child in the role of play. For example, create a "shop" in the house and you take the role of a customer

Interactive play:

- Try creating playful moments with figurines and small toys when they child can hold. The characters can interact with each other
- Make playdough or slime. This is great for exploring different textures, smells, colours and activities with children in a playful way
- Encourage the child to write postcards to family and friends and deliver them. This develops communication and fine motor muscles
- Go on a treasure hunt around the house/backyard



Tips to consider as you create a “playful” environment in the home:

1. Less is more

- Avoid overcrowded boxes of toys/resources as this makes it difficult for the child to see what is available and therefore more likely to not engage
- Keep toys displayed at the child’s height so they can independently access them

2. Visual cues to help children self-manage their play space

- This can help remind the child where things belong

3. Floor space

- This allows the child to engage and explore in play activities

Provide an array of objects/toys to ensure different types of play can be completed



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