

All About Play

Your child's most interactive activity of the day is perhaps during play time. Every child enjoys play time as soon as their eyes are able to see a colorful toy, their hands can grasp the nearest object, and their mouth can produce sounds of verbal expression. Although every child engages in "play", it is important to note that there are various levels of play. The different types of play included in the hierarchy range from no existing form of play to simple forms of play to more complex forms of play. The levels of play based on the hierarchy are as follows:



1. **No Play:** Your child may engage in a limited amount of games such as Tag or Hide & Seek.

Example: If your child has a toy to play with, he/she may chew on it or throw it on the floor. Play skills with objects is lacking at this stage.

How you can help- Provide your child with his/her favorite types of toys. For example, if your child has a favorite cartoon character, it would be a useful tool to help your child build play skills.

2. **Unconventional Play:** If and when your child exhibits unconventional play, you will notice that he/she is playing with objects and toys in a way that may be atypical.

Example: Your child may choose to stack his toys into a tower instead of playing with them like other children do.

How you can help- As a parent, you can utilize parallel play in order to model the conventional way of playing with the child's toys. For example, you can sit across from him and use the objects to show your child how the objects should be used by playing with them yourself, as opposed to explaining verbally.

3. **Functional Play:** This form of play is considered to be the typical or "correct" form of play.

-Example: Your child is able to play with objects in a way that you would expect. Instead of piling the cars on top of each other to make a tower, your child plays with them by rolling them on the carpet.

How you can help- You can enhance your child's functional play by adding a language component to the activity. Some ways to facilitate language during functional play include incorporating number counting or singing into the activity.

4. **Constructive play:** Using objects or materials to form a new object is known as constructive play. Although it is similar to functional play, constructive play requires "building" towards a goal that was set before starting the activity.

-Example: Many children enjoy building with blocks or legos as a form of constructive play.

How you can help- At this stage, you can tie in language by talking about the color, size and shape of objects. You can also sing the rhythm to the London Bridge song by altering it to, "Build a tower up so high up so high up so high, build a tower up so high and knock it down."



Constructive play is a great time to target core vocabulary words such as adjectives (higher, up), verbs (fall down, build), prepositions (on-top), and nouns (colors, numbers).

5. *Pretend Play*: This form of play is known as symbolic or “imaginary” play.

-Example: Playing with dolls, playing dress-up, pretending to be a fireman, having a tea party, etc. are all forms of pretend play. Use your child’s favorite toys to find ways to facilitate pretend play. Whether it is taking a doll to the store or dressing up as his/her favorite character, pretend play is a great way to practice communication skills, imaginative play, and learning about emotions.

How you can help- You can encourage your child to take part in pretend play by offering to play together. For example, you can take a toy doll and rock it in your arms and say “Shhh” in order to tell your child that everyone must be quiet since the baby is sleeping. Another idea is to tell your child that you are very hungry. You can ask him/her to cook you dinner in the toy kitchen. There are many great activities that you can play together with your child in order to facilitate pretend play.



6. *Games with Rules*: Any game that is usually played a specific way and has rules is categorized as this form of play.

There are many board games that you can play together with your child. It is important to note that games with rules are not set in stone. You can alter the game in order to promote success for your child. Some examples include:

Monopoly– Simplify the game by limiting it to taking turns and moving the toy pieces. Counting, pretend play, and social interaction will be reinforced.

Uno cards– Put one card in each color on a table face up. Play the game by sorting the rest of the cards by their colors. Turn taking and sustained attention will be targeted during this game.

Chutes and ladders– Simplify this game by focusing on targeting vocabulary, especially prepositions such as up/down, above/below, & on top/under.

How you can help- Playing with games that have rules is an effective way to reinforce social skills such as turn taking, sharing and joint attention. Simply playing together with your child and altering the rules of the game to fit your child’s needs is the most important step.

Adapted from: *More Than Words* by Fern Sussman & *The Out-of Sync Child Has Fun* by Carol Stock Kranowitz