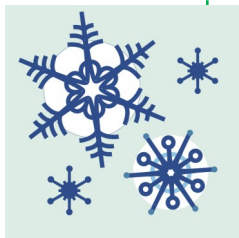




## The Importance of Play

Play is a natural and universal act for children and it is an inherent part of children's lives that allows for fun and relaxation while serving to support development and learning. Through play with others, children learn to negotiate, solve problems, and communicate ( D. Johnson & S. Demanchick, *Play: Key to Learning*, NASP Communique, June 2009). Play is a universal phenomenon and children from virtually all walks of life play. It is the most valued social activity in children's peer culture and it is the realm in which children create social and imaginary worlds apart from adults. (P. Wolfberg, *Peer Play and the Autism Spectrum*, 2003).



**"We don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing."**

~ George Bernard Shaw

January

### Play Is:

- Pleasurable and fun
- Requires active engagement
- Spontaneous
- Focused on the process rather than an end goal
- Flexible and changing
- Voluntary and occurs without external demands

Adapted from *Peer Play & the Autism Spectrum* (P. Wolfberg, 2003)

### Developmental Play Patterns

It is commonly accepted that play follows a generally consistent developmental sequence and that various play forms emerge and peak at different points across the age span, many of them continuing in some fashion throughout life (Wolfberg, 2003). It is important to remember that play emerges in overlapping layers and not as a discrete set of skills independent of other developmental attainments, nor does it develop in a linear path.

#### Types of Play

##### Manipulation Play

Manipulation play is also referred to as exploratory or sensorimotor play and is typically evident in early life when babies discover pleasure in sensory experiences with objects, self, and others. Guided by sensory information, this type of play helps babies assimilate information about the physical properties of objects. Examples of toys that encourage

manipulation play include:

- Balls, bubbles, wind-up toys, and spinning toys

##### Functional Play

The ability to spontaneously engage in functional play typically emerges by the end of the first year. In this type of play, children display the appropriate use of an object or conventional association of two or more objects. Objects and props with logically related properties are relied upon in this type of play. Functional play ranges from simple to more complex, elaborate forms.

Examples of toys that encourage functional play include:

- Building blocks, Legos, train w/tracks, and vehicles

##### Symbolic-Pretend Play

Spontaneous symbolic

pretend play is also known as make-believe and imaginary play. This type of play typically emerges between two and three years of age. Typically, between the ages of three and four, children begin to rely less on life-like props during make-believe play and increasingly use language to plan and narrate scripts where they transform themselves into single and multiple roles. Many children pretend-play through middle childhood and some will play even longer.

Examples of toys that encourage pretend-play include:

- Dolls, stuffed animals, play kitchen, play food, household accessories, make-up, dress-up clothes, dollhouse, zoo/farm animals, action figures, and art supplies

Adapted from *Peer Play & the Autism Spectrum* (P. Wolfberg, 2003)

### Strategies to Enhance the Value of Play

**Take time to observe your child play.** This allows you to learn about your child's motor, language, and cognitive development.

**Let your child play without you.** Allow your child to choose activities that are fun and pleasurable; this enhances autonomy and self-direction.

**Give room to play.**

**Create opportunities for free play.** Set aside as much time as possible for your child to engage in any type of free play.

**Go battery/electricity free for a day.** Suggest play days where these toys are not used. Volunteer to join your child so that the whole family can be involved and be more creative.

**Play with your child.** If you really want to know your kids, you should play with them. Your child needs your time and play between parents and children is essential to developing children's feelings of attachment, security, and connectedness.

**Let your child lead.** Always play as a partner, let your child be the leader in play. Play is not a time to instruct your child. Reflect your child's feelings and reinforce efforts.

Adapted from *Play: Key to Learning* (TD. Johnson & Stephen Demanchick) (NASP Communique, June 2009)