



Speech and Language Therapy Department

# Developing Play Skills

## Why is Play important?

Play is not only enjoyable for a child but it is important in encouraging the skills necessary for language development. These include:

- Concentration
- Listening
- Development of concepts (shape, position, colour)
- Symbolic understanding (toys are symbols for objects in the same way that words are symbols)
- Social skills (such as taking turns)

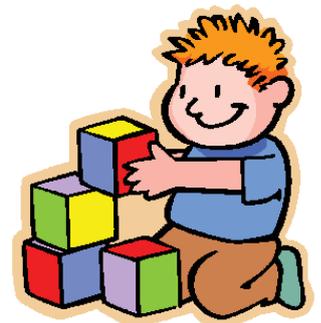


## Play Ideas

- First make a quiet time for 10-20 minutes. It's a good idea to turn the television off too if you are at home and try to keep other children out of the room if you can. Don't answer the phone during the 10 minutes this is a special time for you and your child to share.
- If your child has a dummy, take it out!
- Be where your child is & get down onto their level e.g. usually on the floor – face to face level.

## Let your child lead. Follow them around and let them choose the activity and focus.

- Observe your child's focus of attention and comment on what he is interested in (try not to ask questions 'what's that' but comment ... 'John is banging the brick').
- Wait to give your child time to say something.
- Listen carefully to your child's attempts to communicate.



## People Games

Games don't have to involve toys, just you and your child is more than enough to have fun and encourage natural communication. Social contact also makes children feel special. For example:

Peek-a-Boo  
Pat-a-Cake  
Row, Row, Row your Boat  
Simon Says  
Follow/Copy Me

## Games with Toys

Toys can be anything a child plays with. For example all children seem to enjoy playing with the box rather than the toys that came in it! This type of play helps children learn about the things around them. Assist your child in explore the objects fully and describe the features while they're exploring e.g. Building with blocks together 'up, up, up ... all fall down', 'posting' boxes.

## Pretend Play

Children with visual impairments may have difficulty observing and therefore might not imitate (e.g. mummy/daddy making dinner). It is very helpful to describe what you are doing when baking or involved in an everyday activity and let your child be a part of the process. You can then sit down with your child and help them to carry out these activities with dolly or teddy. By imagining, pretending and then doing through play children learn many essential skills. For example they learn about the power that language has e.g. by being mummy, daddy or teacher and that objects can represent other things e.g. a box can be a fast moving car and about emotions and social rules. Children also learn to take turns, share and problem solve.



## Ideas for Pretend Play:

### Large doll and teddy play

- Collect together 3 or 4 objects such as hat, cup, spoon, and brush.
- Sit with your child. Put the hat on your head and then take it off and put it on your child.
- Show your child how to use the other objects.
- When s/he is able to use the objects on himself easily, encourage him to relate them to you –put the hat on your head and so on. Then see if he can do the same actions with teddy, dolly and other soft toys.
- Use familiar situations such as:
  - Doll's tea party
  - Bathing animals, teddy etc
  - Pretend shopping



## Small world play

- So your child understands that the small world objects represent real life objects, play with the real objects first and then the small worlds e.g. drink from a real cup and then pass your child the toy cup
- Show the child how to use the miniature objects with dolls and teddies.
- With older children you can play matching games with the real sized and miniature objects.



## Play with pictures (if your child has vision)

- Cut out pictures or photographs or real life situations. Mount these on card and see if you child can match the objects to similar but not identical pictures. Gradually work up to asking your child to match objects to coloured pictures and later to clear line illustrations.



## Daily Activities

- Let the child join in with daily activities (washing, cooking, cleaning, gardening, shopping) and 'help you'.

- Talk about what you're doing and let your child experience it  
For example: "wash the blue shirt" (let them feel it when wet and dry)  
cut the apple" (let them feel the whole apple and then again once cut into sections), put the bread in the cupboard" etc.



## Remember:

- During play, talk to your child about what is happening:  
'You're brushing mum's hair'  
'Teddy's drinking juice'
- In this way your child hears language related to real life activities.
- Keep questions to a minimum. Comment on what your child is doing –give a commentary e.g. Sam's got a ... He's jumping. The boy's wearing a hat. Sam brushed the doll's hair etc.

