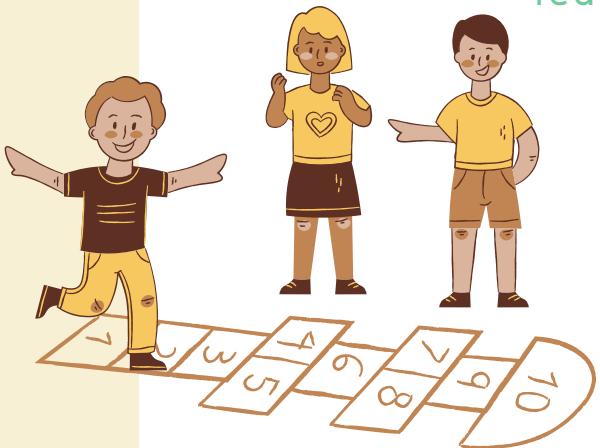


PLAY SKILLS

Play is defined as an activity that is spontaneous or organized that can provide pleasure and enjoyment. Playing is a major part of a child's life as playing occupies most of their time and allows them to explore and learn.

Play can help to facilitate growth and development and promote physical and mental health and a child's social and emotional well-being. While children are playing they can engage in new ways of solving problems and learn new skills.



DIFFERENT TYPES OF PLAY

Play can be unstructured/free play or it can be structured. Free play is when your child leads the play activities. This allows your child to develop their imagination and creativity. Examples of free play are allowing your child to decide how to play with a doll. Structured play includes rules and a plan that will guide your child through the play activity. Structured play can help teach your child skills such as maintaining attention, turn-taking, and learning that games have a start and end. Examples include card games and board games. It is important that your child engages in both unstructured/free play and structured play.



STAGES OF PLAY

There are 6 stages of play development that a child can go through. It is important to remember that every child will go through each of the stages at their own pace.

1. **Unoccupied Play:** this is the stage where a child is making many movements with their arms/hands and legs/feet. This stage is about your child learning and discovering how their own body moves.
2. **Solitary Play:** this is the stage where a child will play alone and are not yet interested in playing with others.
3. **Spectator/Onlooker Behaviour:** is the stage where a child begins to watch other children play but will not play with them.
4. **Parallel Play:** is the stage where a child will play alongside/near other children but will not play with them.
5. **Associate Play:** is the stage where a child will start to interact with other children while playing but they do not interact that much. A child may be doing an activity that is related to the children around them, such as when children play on the same playground equipment but they are all doing different things like swinging and climbing.
6. **Cooperative Play:** is the stage where a child will play with other children. A child will have interest in both the activity being played and the other children that are playing.



ACTIVITIES TO PREPARE YOUR CHILD FOR EACH STAGE OF PLAY

How to prepare your child for Solitary Play

- Toy Manipulation is a great way to teach your child how to imitate actions using toys.
- One-step toy manipulation is done by teaching your child to imitate only one action such as rolling a ball.
- Two-step toy manipulation is used once your child has developed one-step manipulation with their toys. Two-step manipulation is when you teach your child two-step sequences when playing with toys, such as rolling a ball and bouncing a ball.

How to prepare your child for Parallel Play

- A way to start teaching your child Parallel Play is to sit at a table or on the floor with your child and pick a toy/activity to teach your child such as colouring. Ensure that you have two sets of material, one for you and one for your child. Start to colour on the paper and see if your child engages in this activity. You can prompt your child to engage in colouring with you by giving them a verbal prompt or pointing to the colouring material.
- To engage your child in Parallel Play with other children you can pick toys/activities that both children like and set up an environment where they will be in close proximity, such as having both children play on the same carpet.

How to prepare your child for Associative Play

- A great way to start and engage your child in Associative Play is by encouraging them to take-turns or trade toys with other children. Practicing turn-taking games will allow your child to learn turn-taking behaviour and promote communication.

How to prepare your child for Cooperative Play

- A great way to encourage Cooperative Play is by setting up activities that give every child a distinct role and allows for the children to have to help each other. Some specific activities include:
 - Art: having the children create artwork together can help promote Cooperative Play.
 - Toys to share: having the children play with toys that they can share such as playing cards or musical instruments.

GENERAL ACTIVITIES/TIPS TO IMPROVE PLAY SKILLS

1. Experiment: allow your child to experiment and play with different toys and games to determine what your child enjoys to play with.
2. Engage: regularly engage your child in play activities.
3. Enjoyment: pick play activities that your child finds fun.
4. Model: demonstrate and model how to play with new toys or play with toys in different ways with your child.
5. Follow your child's lead: allow your child to lead play activities and copy what they are doing with the toy.
6. Different locations: allow your child to play in different settings, such as being outside, on the floor or at the table.
7. Face-to face: ensure that you are face-to-face with your child while engaging in play activities with them so your child has a better chance to imitate or copy you.
8. Board games: engage older children in board games regularly. This will help them learn to play these games with other children. Playing board games can also help them practice taking turns and learn that they may not win every game they play.



It is important to work with your Occupational Therapist to determine which activities work best to help your child develop their play skills to ensure they are having fun and enjoying play activities.