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All About Pretend Play

In this section, you'll learn why pretend play is important for young children and how it builds on other aspects of early development, such as social and language skills. You'll find out about the development of pretend play in both typically developing children and children on the autism spectrum, and what skills your child needs in order to develop pretend play. Then, you will learn about the four Hanen stages of communication development for children with ASD and at which stage pretend play starts to develop. This information will help you determine whether your child is ready for you to build his pretend play.

Why Pretend Play Is Important

Pretend play is a critically important part of all children's development. When a child pretends to be a chef stirring soup or an astronaut going to the moon, he is gaining social and emotional skills, as well as language, problem-solving and thinking skills.

Pretend play and language skills

Pretend play builds children's **language skills**. When pretending, children use one object to stand for another, making that object a symbol. A block becomes a symbol for a car, a ball becomes an apple and a rocking motion represents riding a horse. Language also involves the use of symbols. The word "apple" represents a red, round fruit and the word "gone" represents something that was there, but is no longer. Therefore, both pretend play and language involve the same underlying ability to represent things symbolically, leading many



How Does Your Child Play?

Before you can start to help your child develop more advanced pretend play skills, you need to identify his stage of play.

Check the box beside the description that matches your child’s most advanced level of play (the type of play becomes more advanced as you go down the list).

How My Child Plays

<p>My child combines two or more “expected” play actions together. For example, he 1) places a car on top of a ramp; 2) pushes a lever to make the car go down the ramp; then 3) picks up the car and puts it back on the top of the ramp.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>My child pretends by using real-life objects or realistic miniature objects or toys in the way they were intended to be used. For example, he drinks from an empty cup or stirs a toy spoon in a toy pan. He usually does one action at a time.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>My child pretends by using real-life objects or realistic miniature objects or toys in the way they were intended to be used. He does more than one pretend play action at a time. For example, he stirs a toy spoon in a toy pan, then puts the spoon to the doll’s mouth as if to feed her. Sometimes he even does three actions at a time.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>My child pretends by using an object as if it were a different object. For example, he uses a block as a car or a box as a house.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>My child pretends as if he were using an object when there is none. For example, he holds his fist to his ear and pretends to talk on the phone, but there is no object in his hand.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>



If you said that your child...	Then your child is at the following stage of pretend play
combines two or more “expected” play actions together	Multi-action functional stage
pretends by using real-life objects or realistic miniature objects or toys in the way they were intended to be used (he may do one action or many actions with the toy)	Early pretend stage
pretends by using an object as if it were a different object or pretends as if he were using an object when there is none	Later pretend stage

Sample Pretend Play Plan (see pages 20-21 for a description of the stages)

My child is at the following stage of pretend play: Early Pretend

The next pretend play step for my child is to: Pretend using invisible objects (later pretend play)

My child enjoys playing with the following toys or objects: She likes pretending to brush her doll's hair, clean her teeth and wash her face with realistic objects

My child can achieve his/her next play step by learning to imitate the following pretend actions/s: Brush her doll's hair with an invisible brush

What I will do first...

When my child is playing with a toy/objects, I will:

- Get down on the floor so we are face to face
- Put the toy/s I plan to use beside me, along with some duplicates or similar toys
- **Observe** what s/he is doing with the toy/s
- **Wait** to see what else s/he will do or communicate; and
- **Listen** for any sounds or words

Then I will **Include** my child's interests by:

- **imitating** what my child is doing (using my own toy)
- **helping my child do what s/he is doing** by handing him/her the pieces of the game
- **commenting** on what I have done and **pointing** to it, making it sound exciting
- **Interpreting** what my child has communicated

If I can't get my child to attend to what I am doing, I will **Intrude**

Then, I will **R.O.C.K.** my child's play...

R

- I will **Repeat** the pretend actions/s I want my child to learn.

When s/he does the following actions with toys/objects: pretends to brush her doll's hair with a toy brush

I will **model** the following pretend action: I will pretend to brush my doll's hair with an invisible brush

I will **point** to the toy (even if invisible) and **comment** on what I have done by saying: I'm brushing her hair. She looks so pretty.

O

- I will **Offer** my child an **Opportunity** to copy my pretend action/s.
I will wait for at least 5-10 seconds

C

- I will **Cue** my child if s/he doesn't imitate the pretend actions I have modelled for him/her.

The first cue will be: I will say, "Here's the brush," (as I "hand" it to her).

"Brush your dolly's hair."

If that doesn't work, I will try the following cue:

I will give her some physical help. I will move her hand over the doll's hair as if she is brushing it

K

- **Keep** the play going *and* **Keep** it changing!

Once my child has imitated the pretend play step, I will keep the game going by:

Adding new invisible objects to the play, like an invisible toothbrush and face

cloth and using R.O.C.K. to help her learn these pretend actions, like I did with

brushing the doll's hair.

Once my child can easily imitate or do the pretend play action on his/her own, I will keep the game changing by: Using invisible objects in different pretend

activities such as feeding her dolls and other stuffed animals with an invisible spoon

and bowls or cooking a meal with an invisible spoon and pots on an invisible stove.