

## Language and Play



### What is it?

Children play because they enjoy it! For this reason they are unaware of the many benefits it has to their motor, language and social skills. So, when children are playing with us, they are learning in a natural way.

Play is a powerful tool in helping children to learn in many different ways. Play helps children develop physically, mentally, emotionally and socially. It provides hands-on experience to develop an understanding about what things are like, what things can do, interactions between objects and people, and relationships and roles. Play provides problem-solving practise, develops social and interaction skills, extends motor skills, and develops concentration and listening. Play is one of the best ways for children to learn how to communicate and get along with others.

There are 3 types of play that children develop during their early years they are:

- **Exploratory play** - children begin to learn about what to do with different objects by mouthing, handling and observing others. From this children begin to understand the meaning or 'concept' of the object and begin to appreciate that objects can be used for different things.
- **Imaginative/symbolic play** - this is acting out real life situations with toys and objects, for example, putting dolly to bed, dressing teddy. It is important that children develop symbolic play as this is related to language development. This is because it teaches the child that one object or picture can represent another, just as a word represents an object.
- **Social play** – early play tends to be solitary. With time children learn to play side by side with others and learn to co-operate and allow others into their world and to share.

### **Play helps language to develop because:**

- It focuses children's attention
- It encourages turn taking
- It helps children to anticipate what comes next
- Instructions and words (vocabulary) are familiar
- Language can be simple
- It helps children to imitate actions and sounds
- Sequences (steps) and language can be repeated often
- It's naturally social and fun!



Children can practice their language in a familiar situation. This helps development of:

- Understanding new words (vocabulary)
- Saying new words
- Longer sentences
- Understanding & following instructions



### Important things to remember:

- Make the time to play so that you can both enjoy the experience.
- Provide a wide variety of play opportunities and materials.
- Always talk about what you're doing at the child's level. For example: "wash teddy", "brush teeth", "drive car", "fly big plane", "stir the dough", "put the sugar in the bowl", "find the red apple".
- Always try to use specific labels to help vocabulary develop (e.g. "up stairs", "wash toes", "little foot", "lid on pot". Try to avoid using lots of vague labels such as "in here", "that one", "there".
- Make comments about the child's actions: "oh...baby tired", "open the door".
- Avoid asking lots of questions all the time (e.g. "What's that?" "Who is it?" "Where does it go?").
- Modelling words and sentences over and over can be more helpful. However, asking a few questions now and then will help your child to learn to understand and answer them.
- Let the child lead the play. Comment on what they're doing and model words and sentences.
- Encourage play with other children.
- Give the child time to respond and talk.



- Play with the child rather than simply being an observer of your child's play. Join in their games and become involved. Make sure you do activities **with** the child rather than **for** your child.
- Encourage eye contact and taking turns when you play. This will help the child to copy you and learn new skills.
- Make it FUN and ENJOYABLE!