

# PLAY TIPS FOR PARENTS



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Do you find yourself wondering how to help your child:

- ▶ engage with others,
- ▶ develop relationships,
- ▶ lengthen his/her attention span,
- ▶ improve language skills,
- ▶ learn and grow in all areas?

These tips were created to provide a step-by-step process to help you do just that. We hope they will guide you in strengthening your relationship with your child and maximizing his/her potential.



## INTRODUCTION



## EYE LEVEL

Either play on the floor with the child or put them in a high chair with a large tray where the two of you can have eye contact, opportunities for engagement and you can read the child's cues. For example: Is he/she bored or excited? What does he/she like about the activity?

## 1 EYE LEVEL



## ESTABLISH TRUST

Follow the child's lead for a while to get a sense of what they enjoy doing. Join them in their play without imposing any demands (at first). Children need to have some time when they can have their own ideas and see that you support them. Show your child that you think the activity is fun. Weave yourself into the play so it becomes a shared experience.

## 2 ESTABLISH TRUST

## NARRATE

Describe everything that is going on with gusto, focusing on what the child is doing and what is happening with the toy.

Introduce and repeat vocabulary:

- ▶ **Nouns:** colors, shapes, animals, numbers, letters, etc.
- ▶ **Adjectives:** up, down, around, bumpy, soft, hard, fast, slow, high, low, loud, quiet, etc.
- ▶ **Verbs:** bang, shake, run, jump, sing, drop, squeeze, lift, etc.
- ▶ **Sound Effects:** zoom of a car, whack of a hammer, moo of a cow, wobble of a tower, etc.
- ▶ **Feelings:** frustrated, happy, excited, sad, surprised, etc.

Encourage the child and be animated.

Use simple but complete sentences.



## MODEL

To push the child to the next level of play, you may have to demonstrate some ideas for them. Show them and say out loud what you are going to do. If you make it fun and interesting, chances are they will try to copy your behavior and your language. Also, share your own feelings, so they can see what it looks like and what situations evoke those feelings.

# 3 NARRATE & MODEL

## HAVE FUN

**Be Silly.** Children love playfulness. Spice up your play by doing things in a funny way or acting goofy. Change your affect. For example, you might have a high voice and tiptoe around when you are a teeny mouse and have a deep voice and stomp around when you are an elephant. Add in a tickle here or there and keep your energy level high. Keep the child interested and guessing what you might do next.

**Use Music.** Make up a silly song or chant and you are very likely to capture a child's attention. Make up tunes about what you are doing and sing during transitions to new activities, such as clean up, hand washing, and time to go. Listen to, sing and play music together regularly. Music can be a great tool for interpersonal connection, allowing you and your child to enjoy an activity together and share communication more readily.

**Get Moving.** Be physical with your child. Incorporate movements into the play even if it is normally a stationary activity. This will keep them engaged longer and make the play more dynamic. Lift, spin, swing, snuggle, tickle and give rides. Run, jump, throw, catch, crawl, etc. along with your child. Be aware of your child's sensory needs and cater to them.



## 4 HAVE FUN



# CHALLENGE

Gradually add challenges to advance your child's play. Some examples are to:

- ▶ Stop them from doing something until they answer a question you know they can answer.
  - ▶ Ask them to label items.
  - ▶ Hide a part of the toy in an obvious spot and see if they will come find it.
  - ▶ Practice turn-taking.
  - ▶ Hoard the pieces of the toy and see if they will ask for the one they need next.
  - ▶ Ask them to take something to another peer or adult to include more people in the play and encourage them to notice others.
  - ▶ Do something incorrectly that you know the child will notice and see if they correct you.
  - ▶ Ask them more questions about the play: What are they doing?, What is their plan?, What you can have or do?, etc. See if they can answer you.
- At the beginning, you can help fill in the blanks or give them simple choices.

Be playful and creative and try to motivate them to be interactive.

See how they respond to the challenges you are implementing to determine whether to back off a little or increase the demands.



## PRETEND PLAY

Play pretend with the child as much as possible. You can support your child in developing dramatic play skills by becoming a character yourself, building on your child's interests and ideas, and asking questions (or giving choices) about the pretend scenario. If they have ideas, go along with them and make suggestions or ask questions to help develop and flesh out the storyline. If they do not have ideas, model some simple pretend scenarios, such as:

- ▶ **Basic conversation** between figures, animals, puppets or yourselves as characters, on the phone, etc.



- ▶ **Driving somewhere with vehicles**, including where you are going, what you will do, getting in and out of the car, getting gas, etc.
- ▶ **Eating something**, and be sure to pick things that the child likes to eat and pretend your figures are eating that.
- ▶ **Routines of the day** by acting out parts of the day like getting up, going to school, going to the park, eating, dressing, bathing, sleeping, etc.
- ▶ **Story play** by acting out a favorite story with props/stuffed animals. Start off using more props to help the child understand and visualize the scenario and gradually reduce the amount of props as the child is able to use their imagination.

As your child gets more advanced, you can make the play more detailed, such as trips to the grocery store, playing restaurant, superhero adventures, etc. Props and dress-up clothes can be helpful to get your child's imagination going. Your ultimate goal is to have dynamic reciprocal play with your child in which you both share ideas and interactions. The more you practice these skills with your child at home, not only will they have fun and learn, they will be better able to replicate this type of play with peers at school. Dramatic play expands a child's awareness of self in relation to others and the environment and builds cooperative skills.