

Ideas for Play at Home



*Games and activities for you to play
with your child at home*

Purpose of this Booklet

This booklet aims to provide parents of young children with ideas for playing at home. It also provides information on how play supports different areas of your child's development. The developmental areas focused on are:

- **Motor Skills**
- **Independence Skills**
- **Play and Social Interaction**
- **Language Skills**

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Why is play important?



Play allows children to learn about the world around them. Children need to have a variety of experiences to help them explore their world and practise skills that are important for learning, such as sharing and taking turns.

Research has shown that play stimulates language development and that children often use higher forms of language when playing. All forms of play, either with other children or adults, increases exposure to words or promotes new word learning.

Top Tips While You Play

- 👍 Set aside time for play every day.
- 👍 Play does not have to involve "toys".
- 👍 Follow your child's lead in what and where they want to go.
- 👍 Play like a child.
- 👍 Try not to take over the play or to 'do it the right way'.
- 👍 Try not to ask too many questions.
- 👍 Comment on what you or your child is doing.
- 👍 Have fun!

Ideas to Develop Skills Through Pretend Play



House



Motor Skills:

- Encourage large motor movements such as carrying heavy items, pulling and pushing.
- Pick up little items to clean the house or feed and dress a baby doll. This helps to develop fine motor skills.

Independence:

- Provide opportunity to practice routines such as dressing, meal times, bath time etc.
- Consider using a visual schedule to support these routines e.g. picture sequence of how to clean or how to dress baby.

Play and Social Interaction:

- Encourage turn taking.
- Allow children to try out different roles (e.g. some children can be encouraged to be the parent in a game and be "in charge").
- Provide opportunity to model relationships and social interactions.

Language:

- Comment on children's play, e.g., "The baby is sleeping. He's tucked up in bed. Night night".
- Model key words (e.g. furniture and rooms of the house) and concepts (e.g. position words or describing words).
- Remember to model action words (e.g. cook, sweep, clean).
- Model the script, e.g. "I'm the baby and I'm hungry. I want something to eat. Waaaaaa".

Shop



Motor Skills:

- Practise different grasps by picking up coins, paper money, different size items.
- Create "aisles" and obstacles for the children to manoeuvre their trolley around and develop motor planning skills.
- Consider organising heavy shopping bags for the children to carry, push and pull.

Independence:

- Provide opportunity to learn about money, recognising coins and basic counting.

Play and Social Interaction:

- Encourage children to take turns in different roles (shopkeeper, customer, etc.).
- Provide opportunity to practise waiting, turn taking and saying "please" and "thank you".

Language:

- Comment on children's play, e.g., "Your trolley is getting full. Let's help you push it."
- Model key words to help children develop their vocabulary skills (e.g. shopkeeper, trolley, groceries, toys or clothes, buy/sell, empty/full).
- Model correct grammar, e.g. Child: "I no have no money". Adult: "You don't have money".
- Model the script, e.g. "Let's go to the toy shop. I wonder what we could buy?"

Hairdressers



Motor Skills:

- Provide opportunity to develop different grasps e.g. holding scissors, brush and comb.

Independence:

- Allow children to role-play or practise having their haircut, washed, brushed or blow-dried. Children who have particular difficulty with these activities may benefit from role-playing with others.

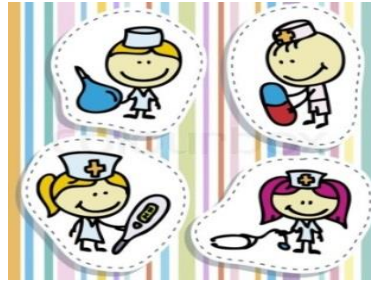
Play and Social Interaction:

- Practise using money.
- Encourage turn taking.
- Practise waiting and using "please" and "thank you".

Language:

- Comment on children's play, e.g., "You've got shampoo to wash your hair".
- Model key words and concepts (e.g. scissors, washing, cutting, shampoo, conditioner, curly, straight).
- Model correct grammar, e.g. Child: "I cutted the hair"; Adult: "You cut her hair".
- Model the script, e.g. "I'm the hairdresser, do you want a haircut?"

Hospital



Motor Skills:

- Encourage children to "write" notes and prescriptions to practise pre-writing skills. This also provides opportunity for older children to practise writing their name.
- Open/close different boxes and containers such as "first aid" box or "medicine" container to encourage different types of grasp and work on fine motor strength.

Independence:

- Role-play may benefit children who are anxious about going to the doctor.
- Provide opportunity to talk about health and well-being.

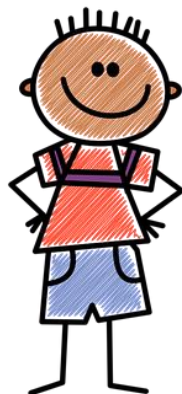
Play and Social Interaction:

- Encourage children to take turns in different roles (doctor, nurse, patient, etc.).
- Provide opportunity to talk about caring for others and model empathy.

Language:

- Comment on children's play, e.g., "The boy fell and hurt himself. I think he needs to go to the doctor".
- Model key words (e.g. doctor, nurse, plasters, medicine, injection, hospital, waiting room, temperature).
- Remember to talk about feelings at the doctor's surgery.
- Model the script, e.g., "I'm the doctor. This medicine will make you better".

Structured Indoor and Outdoor Activities



Ideas based on research on developmental stages of play and the importance of play for learning and development see below for more information:

- <https://www2.hse.ie/wellbeing/child-health/your-child-learning-through-play/>
- <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/series/the-development-of-play-skills-from-birth-to-3>
- http://www.ncca.biz/Aistear/pdfs/Guidelines_ENG/Play_ENG.pdf



Simon Says



How to play: One person is 'Simon' and the others are players. Simon tells the players what to do but they must only follow the commands that begin with the words 'Simon Says'. Children, parents or puppets could also take turns being 'Simon' and giving the instructions.

Example commands:

- Jump up and down
- Stand on one foot
- Run to the slide
- Wave at your friend
- Stamp your feet
- Clap your hands
- Touch your toes
- Shake your body
- Hands on your head
- Touch your nose
- Freeze like a statue
- March on the spot
- Do a twirl

When children can follow instructions with one action, you can then try to add a second action e.g. 'Clap your hands **and then touch your nose.'*

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Traffic Light Game



How to play: Ask the children to start at one end of the yard/garden/room.

- On the command '**GREEN**' the children run as **fast** as they can around the yard/room.
- On the command '**AMBER**' the children **slow** down to a trot/jog.
- On the command '**RED**' the children **stop**.

Give commands randomly to keep children paying attention!

How to change the game:

- ✓ Use visual colour cards instead of verbal commands.
- ✓ Use other word/pictures to represent speed of movement e.g. 'snail', 'hare'.
- ✓ DVD Player Game: Children find a space and change their movements according to instructions relating to the functions of a DVD player. For example:

Fast forward = run forward

Rewind = walk backwards

Play = walk forwards

Eject = jump up

Pause = stop

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What Time is It Mr. Wolf?



How to play: One child is the 'wolf' and the rest are the 'sheep'. The wolf stands at one end of the yard/garden/room with his/her back to the sheep.

- The sheep call out 'What time is it Mr. Wolf?'
- Mr. Wolf turns to face them and shouts a time (e.g. 2 o'clock).
- The sheep then take the same number of steps as the time (e.g. 2 steps).
- Mr. Wolf turns his back again for the sheep to call out 'What time is it Mr. Wolf?'
- When the sheep get close to the wolf, he shouts out 'dinner time' and chases them back to the start line (their den!).
- If a sheep is caught, they become Mr. Wolf.

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Animal Walks



How to play: Have your child discuss how different animals move:

- Bunny hops - crouch down and spring up.
- Kangaroo - jump two feet together.
- Snake - on tummy and commando crawl.
- Bear - crawl on all-fours.
- Be different types of dinosaurs.
- Adopt positions/movements on the leader's command.

Tips:

- ✓ Increase the distance over which your child has to move.
- ✓ Increase the length of time the children have to maintain each position.
- ✓ Link different types of animal walks.
- ✓ Have animal Olympics or an animal parade

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Obstacle Course

How to play: Make an obstacle course using outdoor/indoor play equipment.

Use movements such as walking, jumping, climbing, crawling, throwing and balancing.



Examples:

- Climb up the slide
- Jump over a mat
- Walk down the stairs
- Throw beanbag into a bucket
- Tip toe along a line
- Scooter under the climbing frame

Additional Ideas:

- ✓ Adapt for indoors using tent, tunnel, chairs and tables to crawl under.
- ✓ Carry an item throughout the obstacle course.
- ✓ Collect 'treasure' like beanbags throughout the obstacle course.
- ✓ Try circuits by having an area to do a specific movement until changeover time e.g. jump on the spot, stand on one leg.
- ✓ Use a theme like being a spy, ninja, in the forest, under the sea.
- ✓ Use a backwards countdown to signal the start of each turn 5,4,3,2,1.
- ✓ Encourage the children to talk about what he/she did to develop their sentences using past tense verbs. Taking photos of the children completing the obstacle course could support this.

Fruit Salad Game

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How to play: The children sit in a circle and are given a picture of a 'fruit'. The leader calls out a fruit and these two children have to swap places e.g. If the leader says 'bananas', the two children with the bananas switch seats.

If you say "Fruit Salad" everyone has to swap.

To make this activity harder, if needed:

- ✓ Increase the number of the 'fruits' called e.g.
 - Say 2 different fruits and those children have to swap places (e.g. "bananas and oranges").
 - Say 3 different fruits and those children have to swap places (e.g. "bananas, oranges apples"), etc.
 - You can make this game harder by taking away the pictures and seeing if the children can remember their fruit. Alternatively, swap the pictures around after a few turns so that they now have to listen for a different item.

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Before you throw it away, think of how you could play...



Household items we sometimes throw away can provide great opportunities for play and can be used to encourage your child's language development. Try saving up some cardboard boxes, kitchen roll tubes and other containers to use with your child for different games and activities.

Ideas:

- ✓ Use an old shoebox or cereal box and make a post box, allowing your child to colour it and design it. Find some pictures from a lotto game or a newspaper/magazine and have fun posting them together. Name the items you're posting and add some describing words e.g. 'we're posting a picture of a dog, it's a **big, friendly** dog'
- ✓ A cardboard tube gives us a chance to play some games which encourage taking turns e.g. take turns sliding small toys in to the tube.
- ✓ Use boxes, containers and tubes to make houses, boats or space ships with your child. Pretend your child's teddy is unwell and needs to lie down in his house, or your child's doll is very brave and wants to travel to the Moon! These type of games encourage your child to use their imagination and you can encourage them to start to tell stories as they play.

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Kitchen Play



Some items you have in your kitchen, such as your pots and pans, can be used to encourage play and interaction with your child.

Ideas

- ✓ Make music with your child by turning your pots upside down and using a wooden spoon. Talk about the sounds you are making e.g. 'banging', 'loud', 'quiet' and 'quick'.
- ✓ Playing pretend with kitchen items gives us a chance to introduce new action words like 'bake', 'cook', 'stir' and other describing words like 'boiling' or 'full'.
- ✓ Play hide and seek with your child's toys and the pots e.g. hide toys inside or underneath some pots. You can use this game to encourage your child's understanding of prepositions such as 'in', 'on' or 'under' e.g. teddy is **in** the pot, dolly is **under** the lid. Take turns, so that your child hears good models of language and also has an opportunity to speak.

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