

## Learning to Play and Playing to Learn: Teaching Introductory Play Skills

Play is an important way in which children learn a variety of skills. Through play, children can learn to increase their motor, imitation, language, and social skills.

Sometimes children have difficulties with play, whether they have a clinical diagnosis or not. This may include difficulties playing with toys in the way they were intended, tolerating playing with others, and interacting with others during play.

The steps below can help to increase a child's play skills and prepare them for play with peers.

# 1.

### Follow their lead



- ★ Familiarize the child with having an adult in their space
- ★ Play with the same toy that the child is playing with
- ★ Imitate the child's actions
- ★ Make playing fun (e.g., use actions and noises)
- ★ Narrate what your child is doing while playing (e.g., "you are drinking the tea!")

# 2.

### Slowly begin to vary their play



- ★ Show alternative ways to play with the toy
- ★ Practice turn taking
- ★ Change the toys the child is playing with (e.g., play with the blue car instead of the red car)
- ★ Switch out toys so they remain exciting
- ★ Praise the child when they tolerate changes to their play

# 3.

### Teach a variety of different ways to play



- ★ Once the child tolerates you in their space and playing with their toys, model a variety of different ways to play
- ★ Provide praise for playing with toys in different ways (e.g., If the child always pushes a car across the floor, show them how to pretend to fill it up with gas or drive it down a car ramp. Say, "now you try." When they do, praise them)

# 4.

### Introducing peers



- ★ Slowly introduce other children into their play
- ★ Begin by supporting the child to play beside a peer, without necessarily interacting
- ★ Once they can independently play beside a peer, facilitate interactions through playing with the same toys (e.g., playing with a car ramp where each child has their own car)
- ★ Once the child can consistently do this, start initiating turn taking