

The 6 Stages of Play

Play is an important skill developed by all children that leads to the acquisition of a variety of skills such as sharing, teamwork, problem-solving and decision making. Children, regardless of clinical diagnosis, may have difficulties progressing through these stages and may remain at one stage while their peers are advancing. These difficulties may be more evident in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or an intellectual disability.

Play skills can be divided into 6 stages:



UNOCCUPIED PLAY

- * child is making lots of movements and discovering their body (e.g., playing with their feet)



SOLITARY PLAY

- * functionally plays with toys
- * plays alone
- * does not seem to notice or have interest in other peers playing



ONLOOKER PLAY

- * starts to watch and observe how others play but does not try to join
- * does not attempt to interact with peers



PARALLEL PLAY

- * tolerates being near peers
- * will play near or beside peers
- * does not interact with peers but pays attention to them



ASSOCIATIVE PLAY

- * begins to interact with peers but limited
- * will ask questions and narrate their play
- * starts to show more interest in peers than toys
- * plays with the same toy together with a common goal



COOPERATIVE PLAY

- * plays cooperatively with others
- * interested in both the activity and other children
- * shares ideas and toys
- * establishes their own rules
- * takes turns

Refer to corresponding Kerry's Place titled, "Learning to Play and Playing to Learn"