

Six Stages of Play

The Development of Play

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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 or an intellectual disability.

Play skills can be divided into six stages:

1



Unoccupied Play

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

2



Solitary Play

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

3



Onlooker Play

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

4



Parallel Play

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

5



Associative Play

- ◆ begins limited peer interactions
- ◆ will ask questions and narrate play
- ◆ starts to show more interest in peers than toys
- ◆ plays with the same toy together with a common goal

6



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 resource titled, "Making Learning Fun: Teaching Introductory Play Skills"

For more information, contact Kerry's Place Autism Services:

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