

## Joining your child's play

### Importance of play

Play is an important part of our ability to learn and valuable in teaching skills and flexible thinking. Our children's needs can vary, and play can look different depending on the child and their developmental stage.



It's ok that play if your child's play themes look different to another child of the same chronological age. We know that we all develop at different rates and have strengths in other areas. It's a tall ask but try not to compare children because this will only apply more pressure and anxiety. Focusing on your child's strengths is an opportunity to develop skills further and celebrate the progress.

### Communication

Communication is so much more than just talking. If we think about all the ways we communicate with one another, often more is interpreted by our unspoken language.



We also communicate by using:

- Body language and body positioning
- Facial expressions
- Direction of eye gaze
- Eye contact
- Turn taking in behaviours
- Physical contact

## Interests and motivators

Understanding your child's interests can be the key to joining their play. We have said play can look different for all children, whether that be lining up toys, spinning wheels on cars or throwing toys.



It doesn't always look the way we want but it is important to recognise this is part of the learning process. Sometimes play can look repetitive and you may want your child to do something different or move on from this stage, but repetitive behaviours are comparable to a safety net for some children. Simply put it's what the child knows, it's predictable and most of all it's fun for them. Sometimes repetitive play can be part of fulfilling a sensory need and therefore they are

motivated to repeat it. Take note of your child's interest/motivators, how do they play and what do they do.

### Offer to share the moment

It may sometimes feel that your child is in a world of their own so try sitting near to your child, often 'side on' is better and not too formal or pressurising. Start by copying some of your child's actions with the same or similar toys and have natural pauses to take notice of what s/he is doing. You could also try copying some of their vocalisations. By doing this you are reaffirming their efforts to communicate.



Ensure you are low in your body positioning and that your child can see you in their peripheral vision. Try not to tower over them and most importantly let them lead the play. You may feel a bit silly at first but try to get past this because with a little persevering you may start to notice your little one taking an interest in you or what you are doing. You will need to let go of any overwhelming notions to control the game and try not to be concerned with the outcome of the activity. It's the process that matters and the fact they have shared

the experience with you.

### Interaction

The aim is that you can have some shared moments of engagement. This may look like a glimpse of eye contact or eye gaze in your direction. Your child may stop and look at what you are doing. These moments may be brief, but they are positive!



When we build up these moments over time it helps to develop trust, familiarity and a positive relationship thus creating an invitation to communicate.

As you make progress you may notice some turn taking in actions, longer eye contact and shared smiles but don't worry if you don't, it takes time and we have a lot of that right now.

The most important part is that you have fun being with your little one interacting on a level they

understand.

Alongside this for many of our parents with Pre-Verbal children that are finding it difficult to interact, you may be aware of 'Intensive Interaction'. A fabulous insight into a positive intervention style we promote for lots of the children we support. You will also be able to search this on the internet and find out lots of information and watch some beautiful and insightful videos.

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**Brighter Futures for Children**