

**POSITIVE PLAY  
WITH  
PRESCHOOLERS**

**REC2CONNECT  
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# WHY DO TODDLERS NEED TO PLAY?

- Learn a variety of social norms, verbal and non-verbal communication
- Work out realistic situations through play
- Builds relationships
- Promotes connection
- Early learning of academic skills(counting, letters, rhyming, etc)
- Develop motor planning skills
- Increase physical strength
- Increase independence and self confidence
- Crucial for social, emotional, physical and cognitive growth
- Children should be playing 5-6 hours a day

# DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES OF PLAY

- Most children do not focus on goal oriented tasks at young ages
- They enjoy exploring, learning from experiences, and problem solving
- Solitary play: Birth-2 years playing alone with objects, cause/effect toys, drawers, like to explore
- Spectator/onlooker Behavior: 2 years observe others, begin to imitate play,
- Parallel play: 2 and up playing next to peers but not with them
- Associate Play: 3-4 years play together but not focused on same goal
- Cooperative play: 4 and up organized play and teamwork begins

# DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

- 2 years old: sorting, matching, counting, puzzles, blocks, zipping, drawing straight line, jumping, ride tricycle, navigating stairs, easily frustrated, rapid mood changes, sings songs, uses pronouns, parallel play
- 3 years old: understanding of opposites, starting to express feelings using words, threading, scissors, pouring, stand on 1 foot, walk on tiptoes, climb stairs reciprocally, test limits become more aware of others, develop conversation skills, pretend play, acquires grammar skills, can identify most items, interest in playing with others
- 4 years old : stop and start running with ease, climbing on playground equipment, letter identification, answer and ask WH questions, quick mood swings, cooperative play with peers, difficulty waiting turn, pretend play, develop friendships

# ACTIVITIES TO DEVELOP GROSS MOTOR SKILLS

- 2 years old: Sit on floor and play catch by rolling ball to each other, take of cushions on couch and climb and jump on, stack Tupperware or large blocks to make a tower then knock it down(or have them run into it/kick it), climb through tunnels, place items through an empty paper towel roll(tape them to the wall and place Tupperware at bottom to catch them), place hula hoops on the ground for kids to step in and out(can place items to sort by color, shape or size in as well), push chairs in a line
- 3 years old: Bowling with plastic bottles, dance, run, jump with streamers or scarfs, place painters tape on floor and walk on like a balance beam(can transfer items back and forth)set up chairs in 2 rows and drape blanket over to go under using different animal moves(bear walk, crab walk, bird walk), keep the balloon off the ground, follow the leader using different gross motor skills, use resistance bands and sit across from each other and sing row, row, row your boat while pulling back and forth
- 4 years old: hammer golf tees into foam blocks, set up obstacle course with variety of jumping, climbing, crawling rolling, red light green light, crumple up paper and throw into basket(can hold basket to work on catching), hit balloon with bat, kick plastic bag to a goal, lay on scooter and pull with rope(can also have them pull selves to you with hand over hand), wheelbarrow walking, mother may I,

# ACTIVITIES TO DEVELOP SOCIAL SKILLS

- 2 years old: Hide item and have child guess where it is located, pretend to take a trip to a different room in house have them pack items in bag or suitcase to bring, puppet show, talking into a microphone, tune in to other children's behavior, I'm a little teapot, Itsy Bitsy spider, Head shoulders knees and toes, incorporate descriptive words and or sign language into activities, make a house out of a box and pretend, make a sharing bin
- 3 years old: Chase and tag, parachute games, blanket ride with friends, crawl under tunnel of friends legs, where are you(have friend hide behind curtain and everyone asks "child's name, where are you", child pops out and says hello, place colored paper on floor and take turns jumping from one color to next identifying as you go, scarf toss catch, blow a feather to a partner to catch, walk in line as a train
- 4 years old: place shoes in a pile one at a time and jump over(other friends cheer them on), sit in circle and roll ball to friends saying their name, hold hands and play red light green light, building a tower with friend, hold hula hoop with friend while another child throws ball through, tug of war with a blanket, trace friends body on large piece of paper then color, pretend play with emotions

# ACTIVITIES TO DEVELOP EMOTIONAL SKILLS

- 2 years old: If you're happy and you know it, encourage child to comfort other children if in distress, photo album of family, books about emotions, make faces out of play dough, play with baby dolls
- 3 years old: Felt people or puppets to act out different emotions, make faces of different emotions in a mirror, practice soft, medium and loud voices, make faces on rocks and then put together, fill balloon with sand and draw a face on it with different emotion(id emotion and can squeeze for sensory input)
- 4 years old: make a family tree, hide and go seek(need to make eye contact when you find them), memory with emotion cards, guess how I'm feeling, make a book with pictures of positive interactions, If/Then emotions game, board games and discuss feelings(chutes and ladders, hi ho cheery-o, candy land)

# ADDRESSING SENSORY NEEDS

- Challenges can arise in play if child's sensory needs are not being met
- Everyone processes sensory input differently
- Sight, taste, smell, touch, hearing are the most well known senses
- Proprioceptive input-sense of body in space
- Vestibular input- sense of movement and balance
- Some individuals may have challenges interpreting the information that is collected through the sense
- Under stimulated or over stimulated
- Adjust environment and activities according to needs



# SENSORY ADAPTATIONS

- Monitor noise level in environment
- Follow a routine that is predictable
- Use minimal language to convey instructions
- Offer choices and frequent breaks
- Assess lighting(may be too bright or not bright enough)
- Incorporate or limit tactile input
- Add or limit gross motor stations or heavy input
- Incorporate calming activities
- Organize play area

# ANALYZING BEHAVIORS

- Determine what the behavior is that you are seeing as problematic to play with peers
- Observe child's reaction before, during and after target behavior
- Observe frequency of behavior
- Observe any environmental factors that may occur at same time as behavior(noise level, amount of participants, lighting, time of day)
- Take note of consistent circumstances behavior occurs during(transitions, peer interaction, removal of preferred item, during down time, introduction of undesired item, lack of communication skills, overwhelmed by emotions)

# CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS IN PLAY

- Children use play to work out new social situations which can cause challenges
- All behavior is communication, we can assist in channeling it into positive interactions
- Practice is key in gaining appropriate skills in positive play interactions
- Challenges are going to occur at this age frequently
- Common challenging areas that arise during play: sharing, waiting, turn taking, winning, losing, communication, emotional control, aggressive behavior, empathy, personal space
- Make learning through play fun, even when navigating through challenging behaviors (when appropriate)
- Children learn through connection, laughter, and meaningful interactions

# SHARING

- Sharing does not come naturally to young children, we need to create positive attitudes and an environment where they can practice this skill
- Have realistic expectations, especially if asking child to share their favorite toy
- Behavior: Child becomes frustrated when it is time to share a toy with another child –or-  
Child takes toy from another child
- Strategies for successful interaction:
  1. Prepare child to share by giving a countdown or setting a timer for when it is time to give toy to another child
  2. Create a share box with a variety of toys that 2 children can share for practice of skills. Place box in between them and provide clear expectations of how to share:
    - ask can I have that?
    - wait for child's response
    - share/exchange items
  3. Promote communication from both children to ask for item and wait. If child takes toy, have them give it back and ask appropriately
  4. Practice sharing items at home(give child 4 items and ask them to share one with mommy, daddy, and brother)
  5. Discuss sharing if going to play date and your child is bringing toys with them
  6. Practice games that require turn taking skills(board games, card games, build with legos)

# COMMUNICATION

- Often children are more well versed in interacting with adults, they are safe and predictable
- Children at this age are very interested in their world and interests and need prompting to engage, attend to and interact with peers
- Behavior: Difficulty expressing verbal, non-verbal or perseverative interests preventing interaction with peers
- Strategies for successful interaction:
  1. Begin with level of communication of child(pics, sign language, verbal communication)
  2. Practice saying or waving “Hi” to family, friends, etc can discuss or make a picture of people saying hi
  3. Try to allow enough processing time to communicate without interjecting
  4. Use old phones or microphone and provide to all kids to communicate and practice skills
  5. Place item in containers that may be on to tight, promoting them to ask each other for help or problem solve as a group how to open
  6. Sing songs and omit words, encourage children to fill in blanks together
  7. Build puzzles as a group and encourage asking questions
  8. Use perseverative interests as a stepping stone for communication with others, encourage asking or showing interest in peers likes/dislikes

# COMMUNICATION BOARDS

## VARIETY OF TEMPLATES GEARED TOWARDS CHILD'S NEED

- PECS boards
- Visual schedules
- First/Then boards
- Resources available online to create
- <http://practicalaac.org/practical/core-samples/>
- Can use google image search

# DIFFICULTY EXPRESSING EMOTIONS

- Understanding emotions at a preschool level can be challenging for child and parents
- Important to be supportive and try to diffuse situation, validate emotions, and guide to appropriate response
- Behavior: When child becomes frustrated, sad, or angry, it is challenging to control emotions, resulting in a tantrum
- Strategies for successful interaction:
  1. When noticing child is becoming frustrated, help child identify feelings and problem solve together a solution
  2. Can use a variety of colored scales to identify feelings and problem solve reactions
  3. Tune in to other children during positive and challenging emotional regulation as a teaching tool
  4. Provide calming items as needed (weighted materials, fidgets, music, scarfs, hugs, deep breathing, yoga, counting, etc)
  5. Try a reset activity that you know they like to distract from problematic situation (Red light/green light, Simon says, Freeze dance, hopscotch)
  6. Practice calming skills during times when they are not frustrated

# EXAMPLE EMOTIONAL SCALES

**IDENTIFY EMOTIONS**

**IDENTIFY AND PROBLEM  
SOLVE**



# AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR

- When frustrated, acting out is the easiest way to express they need help
- Preschoolers are managing big emotions and lack communication and coping skills to manage
- Important to stop the aggressive behavior and analyze why it occurred to help foster positive communication
- Stay consistent and let them know that hitting, biting, etc is not ok but we will work together to find a better way to deal with feelings
- Behavior: biting, hitting, or acting out towards peers
- Strategies for successful interaction:
  1. Help identify feelings to correspond with outburst and connect with child(I see that you are angry, I know you don't want to leave, This is hard, I see that you wanted that toy)
  2. Try to intervene if you notice tensions rising before aggression begins
  3. Practice social situations and frustrations with dolls, cars, Barbies at home to play out appropriate behavior
  4. Work on ways to repair relationship if child is aggressive, make I'm sorry card, give a band aid, fix broken toy
  5. Create social story for how to deal with situations where you notice aggression occurs

# **VISUAL SUPPORTS TO HELP CALM**

**[HTTPS://CONNECTABILITY.CA/  
CATEGORY/KIDS/](https://connectability.ca/category/kids/)**

**[HTTPS://WWW.PINTEREST.COM  
/PIN/140737557077011858/](https://www.pinterest.com/pin/140737557077011858/)**

# ISOLATED PLAY

- The transition to playing with others occurs around 3, and can be a trial and error experience
- The more practice they have, the more comfortable they become
- Often if child is used to mostly adult interaction, they are receiving the attention they want and do not seek out attention from peers
- Behavior: Group of children are playing together or near each other and child is playing alone off to the side
- Strategies for successful interaction:
  1. Encourage playing near other children, slowly moving closer and closer
  2. Provide positive reinforcement when interacting with others
  3. Have child hand out items to others
  4. Use child's interests to create an activity(if they love trains, try to have children form a train together and sing "chug a chug a chug a chug a choo choo and go on a scavenger hunt)
  5. Tune child in to other children's play and interests to find similarities between or offer a suggestion for how they can join their play(Bobby is the shopper, Grace is the check out person, maybe you can be the bagger)
  6. Have all children play on parachute together while singing, ride on a blanket together, push others on scooter

# STRATEGIES

- Keep in mind the developmental level of your child and their abilities
- Make learning fun
- Create songs, claps, chants for times when you know are challenging for your child
- Create social story to assist in challenging behavior and learning appropriate responses
- Practice, Practice, Practice
- Create a visual schedule
- Set child up for success
- Respond with calm, comforting assistance
- Provide positive reinforcement for desired response
- Frequent reminders of rules
- Redirect to a different topic, back on task, to different toy, etc

# CONCLUSION

- Preschool is tough, emotions are big and experience is limited
- Set child up for success when you notice that certain behaviors are becoming more frequent
- Work with other teachers and caregivers to be on same page
- Play should be fun, but can also present a variety of social situations that are difficult to navigate
- Find ways to provide stability, calm, and learning through play
- Create routines and structure that child can count on in challenging situations

# REFERENCE WEBSITES

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