

Advice sheet

Play

There are many different types of play and all are important for developing language and learning:

- Exploratory Play: Through play with toys and objects babies discover that they can make things happen e.g. shaking a rattle makes a noise.
- Physical play, such as rough and tumble games, gives children experience of movement and space; this helps develop action words e.g. jump, skip, and position words e.g. up, down, in.
- Pretend & Symbolic Play: This is where children pretend to give a doll, teddy or person a drink from a cup, later they will use a different object as a cup – this is real symbolic play.
- Co-Operative Play: Learning to play together is essential for learning language and social communication.

Everyday Strategies

- Follow your child's lead see what your child is interested in playing with and play with that, rather than you choosing the toy.
- Don't ask lots of questions comment on what your child is doing rather than interrupting play with questions e.g. 'dolly's having a drink' NOT 'what is dolly doing?'
- Keep language simple match what you say to your child's language level, so if they are using one or two words (e.g. "teddy drinking"), you use two to three words ("yes - teddy drinking juice")
- Model without directing play alongside but don't force your child to do something different. If play is repetitive e.g. train up and down, get another train and do something different with it e.g. going over a bridge, through a tunnel, they are more likely to copy if they don't feel forced to change what they are happy doing.

Activities

- Exploratory play: Collect some safe items put them in boxes, under tea towels so that your child can play at discovering the object. Bang things together to make a noise.
- Physical play: Children love hide and seek games: a) Talk about where to look (in, on, under, up, down, next to), b) Play ball games (kicking, rolling, bouncing) and obstacle courses with household items (crawling, climbing, hopping).
- Pretend play: Play tea parties, large doll play, playing with playmobil, farm animals, all large and miniature toys can be used to develop pretend play. Giving toys drinks, food, putting teddies to bed, feeding animals, building an animal a house from lego or a shed for a train are all good ways of supporting development of pretend play.
- Co-operative play: Build a tower together, do a puzzle, play pretend games e.g. where one child is Waiter and other Cook.
- Imagination and role play: Fun games can be played with old boxes to pretend to be trains, boats, houses etc. Dress up to pretend to be different characters from stories. Songs, TV programmes. Role playing at shops, restaurants, hospitals, vets is a good way to develop these skills in your child and where you can join in.

