

Play and Language: Play and language are intertwined and can be examined in several different ways. Play uses and evolves language, social skills, and cognitive skills. Several studies suggest that typically and non-typically developing children acquire play in the same order (Westby, 1980). Research also suggests that children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) generally have deficits in play as well as socialization. This isn't to say that children with ASD don't play, but more that their play may not evolve like that of a typically developing child.

Symbolic Play - when a child uses an object to represent another, gives attributes to an object or person that doesn't have them, or refers to an absent object or person as if it was present.

(Lewis, 2003)

Symbolic Communication- when a child uses a word to represent an object or person that is not present.



Being screened or diagnosed with ASD involves a multi-disciplinary team and is heavily reliant on parent observations for a variety of tasks including checklists and scales. There are several types of activities that parents may describe as play, but in fact are not-

- Reading the ABC's or counting 1,2,3
- Self-stimulatory behaviors using toys (e.g., toys that light up or make noises to satisfy a sensory need).
- Repetitive movements with a toy
- Lining up or arranging toys methodically
- Memorizing sequences of facts is not considered play



10 symbolic play stages (Westby, 1980)

Approximate Age	Play	Language	What does this mean?
Stage 1 9-12 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Object permanence Means-end abilities Developing schemas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vocalizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Object permanence entails the ability to find a toy that is hidden under a scarf. Means-end ability is when the child physically moves to an object of desire. Developing schemas involves the child to bang, hit or gum most toys but does learn to use a few objects appropriately. Vocalizations will be used, but these generally are not real words.
Stage 2 13-17 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Locates parts of toys that operate the toy (switch, buttons, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protoimperatives 1 word Uses gestures and vocalizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If the child is unable to operate the toy, then he or she uses protoimperatives (requesting help) to have an adult operate the toy. This is important because it means that the child understands that an adult can be used to act on objects (Bates, 1976). Words begin to appear but they are unstable and dependent on the context, that is, one wouldn't necessarily recognize "mama" unless mom is in the room. Using gestures and vocalizations to perform various actions such as: request, command, call attention, greet, or label.
Stage 3 17-19 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Autosymbolic play Object permanence Begins to use tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> True verbal language Cannot refer to absent situations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Auto symbolic play means symbolic play with him or herself (e.g., eating play food). Object permanence evolves into a child finding a totally hidden toy (e.g., the toy is placed in a box and then emptied out under a scarf). Begins to use tools to gain objects True verbal language appears and children generally can't refer to absent situations at this time
Stage 4 19-22 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Symbolic play is now acted upon to others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Word combinations Possible possession Internalized action schemas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> symbolic play that moves to other people or objects, like brushing mom's hair and a doll's hair. Word combinations begin to appear and possession can show up as well (my, mine). Internalized action schemas include referencing objects and people that aren't present.
Stage 5 24 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sand and water play Block building Plays house and uses real life or realistic objects FORMING pretending, sharing information, and questioning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begins to talk about daily experiences Short sentences Present participles, plurals, and possessives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sand and water play consisting of dumping and filling. Block building that encompasses building up and knocking down the blocks. Short sentences are used to narrate or describe what the child is doing. Present participle (verb+ing), plurals, and possessives begin to appear. The child begins forming pretending, sharing information and questioning but these are not perfected.

<p>Stage 6 30 months</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Still uses realistic props • Parallel play • Associative play appears 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brings up less frequent experiences • Asking WH-questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parallel play is present when children may be playing next to each other but not necessarily interacting. • Associate play is present when children are playing the same game but not really interacting or working together. • Less frequent experiences like when the child got sick and went to the Dr. versus going to preschool every day. • Mainly why questions are asked.
<p>Stage 7 36 months</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sequence schemas • still using realistic props • associative play but not yet full cooperative play • uses compensatory play combinations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses past tense 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sequence schemas are when a child chooses to mix cake--> bake cake-->serve cake-->wash dishes, this isn't planned but evolves • Compensatory play strategies include a child choosing to re-enact past events but adds new outcome, probably one he/she would have liked better (bear is sick ,doctor comes to see the bear, bear hides from doctor).
<p>Stage 8 36-42 months</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sequence schemas involve into using less realistic props • Theory of mind begins developing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Metalinguistic abilities begin to show 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (row of chairs=a train), • Theory of mind is the child's ability to take on someone else's perspective in play (Gleitman, 1972) NOTE: studies have supported that individuals with ASD generally display deficits with theory of mind. • Metalinguistic abilities shown are the ability to think and comment about play.
<p>Stage 9 48 months</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 dimensional block structures begin • Pretend play happens with the 3 dimensional structures • Problem solve and hypothesize past events using "what if" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modals and conjunctions appear 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin grasping ideas in play like could, would, what if. • Modals= can, may, might, could, would, and will. Conjunctions= and, but, if, so, because. Note: These begin to appear but that doesn't mean the child knows exactly what these concepts mean, this won't happen until elementary school years.
<p>Stage 10 60 months</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can organize what he/she needs for future events • Can coordinate more than 1 event at a time • Realistic props aren't necessary • Full cooperative play 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NEED language for this stage • Uses concepts such as first, then, when, while, next, before, after. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizing includes people AND objects • Can play the role of mommy and tell other children what to do while playing house. • Full cooperative play means children are playing the same game, in the same space, with the same goal.

Ways to Teach Your Child Play

Research doesn't support just one play to "teach" play. Some methods that have been studied include: video modeling, scripting, Pivotal Response Training, social stories, discrete trial training, reciprocal imitation training and cooperative play strategies are some methods that have supportive studies.

Things to Remember:

- Model for children, they may not be displaying certain characteristics of play simply because they do not KNOW HOW.
- Try modeling or teaching with toys of interest to the child, boring toys aren't going to interest a child.
- Teach children to play with toys in different ways, don't always restrict the child to one way to play.
- Don't overwhelm a child by trying to introduce too many peers at a time, this typically will not obtain faster results but confuse and frustrate the child. Try introducing one buddy at a time, for short periods at first.



Resources

<http://peeearlyyears.com/>

<http://www.thelearninglane.com/resources.html>

<http://www.autismspot.com/blog/How-Teach-Your-Child-Symbolic-Play-Skills>

<http://www.mommyphd.com/2009/01/from-play-to-page.html>



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