

Parent Learn to Play program

Parent handouts

Pilot version 1

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Foundation and Intermediate Program

**The full version of the Parent Manual is being prepared for
publication for August, 2013**

Learn to Play Parent Program Foundation Program

Introduction to program

Learn to Play with Parents (LPP) is a programme to develop the spontaneous initiation of pretend play skills of children. Research tells us that pretend play is important for children in developing problem solving, flexible thinking, and logical sequences in their thoughts. When learn how to play, they begin to understand the play of their peers and pretend play is important for their emotional well-being. Many children cannot play; this programme helps parents learn active ways to help their children increase their spontaneous, pretend play, with the direct assistance of a play/occupational therapist. This approach can be used for children with developmental delay, learning problems, Autism Spectrum Disorders, Down's syndrome, and neurological conditions.

As a parent you are extremely important to your child. You are influential in the skills you can facilitate in your child's development as well as providing a safe, predictable and secure environment. We now know that through a parent's care, love, and emotional bonding a child's brain develops and that play gives the 'fertiliser' for that growth.

Six skills will be covered throughout the program. The skills that you need to engage your child in play is essential to the program and integrated into the individual sessions. Below is a list of the 6 play skills covered and the abilities you will develop in order to engage your child in play with you.

A more detailed hand out sheet on skills to learn in facilitating play will be given each session a new skill is introduced along with a specific Learn to Play activity for the coming week. You will be encouraged to try the new skills using a specific play activity each week.

Homework: Each week you will asked to have a 10-15 minute play session with your child at home. Decide where home sessions will occur (eg private and quiet, without interruptions). It will be useful to record home sessions: video is ideal, but not always possible, so make some notes about how the session went and bring these to the next session.

6 Skills

- 'Attuning' to your child: child leads the way, attuned to feelings, limiting child's behaviour
- Recognising play sequences of action
- Recognising object substitution
- Recognising decentration
- Recognising play scripts
- Joining the child in role play

Parent skills

- Play knowledge
- Getting the child's attention
- Modelling
- Physically positioning child (if needed)
- Talking about the play
- Emotionally engaging in play
- Importance of repetition
- Importance of variety in play activities

Foundation Program: Learn to Play Program

Week 1 and 2

Attuning to your child

Week 1 session. Therapist demonstrating with parent joining in

1. Child leading the way
2. Reflecting what the child is doing and/or saying
3. Limiting behaviour if child hurts adult or self or materials

Activities:

Blowing bubbles
Playing with materials
Follow the Leader

Homework

Try a 'Follow the Leader' at least once at home during the week.

Week 2

The parent can repeat the activities demonstrated by the therapist, or can add a new idea for their child. The activity should be free flowing, unstructured, and fun.

What to do

In each activity, the parent watches the child and responds to the child, says what the child is doing and can repeat what the child says. When the child begins an action the parent joins the child in the action. For example, if the child uses the materials in a peek-a-boo action, the parent joins the child by saying 'boo' and then hiding the child or his/herself.

In detail, the following is the essence of attuning to your child:

Skill 1: Children leading the way. The parent fully attends to their children during play sessions and to participate in play sessions, either through actions or words, at their children's request. This also includes helping children to know what to expect in play sessions. That is, you explain what will happen – you give them the whole story. For example, today we will be blowing bubbles, then playing with the material, then playing follow the leader and then we finish. For children with autism, it is very important to give the child the whole story of what is going to happen.

Skill 2: Focussing on children's feelings and actions. This skill is essential to the success of child-centered play sessions. Parents will be helped to track their children's conversations and actions in a non-intrusive way across the Learn to Play Parenting program, and to recognise and make empathic responses to their children's feelings. In this way children feel both valued and understood at a deeper emotional level, which in turn increases parents' and children's attachments to one another.

Skill 3: Limiting children's behaviour. Parents learn to assert their own authority effectively by learning how to set limits behaviourally, how to select the important limits to adhere to in play sessions. For the sessions the essential limits are: not hurting the parent or the child not hurting themselves, not breaking the toys.

In more detail the three skills are explained below.

Skill 1 Children Leading the Way

Structuring

This is the easiest skill to learn. Parents already will have seen this skill in practice during the demos. Specific skills are:

- The immediate and most obvious rationale is that the opening and closing statements are intended to help children understand the nature of the play sessions. It is also here that parents give the child the 'story' of what will be played. Children can play best when they feel relaxed. This is one way to quickly help them relax, so that they know what to expect.
- The opening and closing statements are repeated at the beginning and end of each play session, in order for children (and their parents) to emphasise that these play times are 'special' and out of ordinary time. This is especially important when play sessions are carried out at home—children need a clear message that the special play times are not the same as everyday family life.

The parent says the child's name and being clear about what they say, so that it is easily understood. For both the beginning and ending statements, it is helpful to stand up to end, but not to stand at the 5 minute warning.

The beginning and ending messages for the play sessions.

For start: *'This is your special play time. This is when we play together. We will play with these toys here. If there's something you can't do, I'll tell you.'*

For end: *"We have 5 minutes left to play. We have 1 minute left to play. Our time is up for today. We are leaving now."* (e.g. to be adapted to the age and understanding of each child)

It is important that parents' verbal and non-verbal behaviours match and are very clear (e.g. facial expression, tone of voice, body movements, etc).

Skill 2: Focussing on Children's Feelings and Actions

Focussing on the child's feelings and actions is important because it shows the child empathic understanding and helps parents to see things from their child's perspective. When important people (ie, you, the parent), know what their child is feeling, the child feels safe and secure.

- Feelings will not usually disappear if they are not acknowledged;
- Not acknowledging feelings 'can short-circuit' coping processes, not allowing children to come up with self-statements that help them cope, leading to feelings of irritability and discontent. Research shows that continued non-coping can lead to a variety of problems (e g psychosomatic problems, escalation of anger and aggression, etc). Therefore acknowledging feelings tends to facilitate rather than interfere with what parents expect of their children.
- Acknowledging the feelings children feel in situations like the above does not mean that their feelings will change the outcome. Parents still need to be in charge.

Tracking

The most accessible skill involved in focussing on what your children are doing and feeling is 'tracking'. This skill can also be understood as 'restating the content of what the child is doing'. Parents learn how to track children's actions as they play.

Sometimes it takes a while to know when to comment verbally and when to focus on your child without saying anything. In general, parents are encouraged to say what they think are the most important things their children are doing. For example, "You caught the big bubble!" This is part of the larger goal of making sure that your child knows that you are interested in what they are doing. It also helps children themselves to learn about what they are feeling and thinking. Throughout the sessions, we will also work on practicing what feelings are underneath what they are tracking (e g a child throwing something around may be angry.)

Reflecting Feelings or 'Showing Understanding'

Showing understanding is the same as reflecting feelings. It is a special way of responding to children so that they realise their feelings are recognised. Parents may resist acknowledging negative feelings because they think it will increase acting out behaviour and that they will disappear if not acknowledged. Acknowledging feelings doesn't mean agreeing with them necessarily.

Reasons for parents to 'show understanding':

- Child can recognise feelings they are not yet aware of in themselves and gives them a 'feelings' language.
- Builds sense of trust in parent and encourages communication
- Builds child's confidence in themselves—they are important

Three steps for showing understanding:

1. Listening to the child and watching their faces and their actions.
2. Identifying the child's feelings

3. Composing a sentence or a few words that shows the feeling is accepted and understood.

Skill 3: Limiting Children's Behaviour

There are fewer rules in play sessions than in 'ordinary life' at home and at school for several reasons. First, children feel more relaxed and able to play imaginatively if they do not have to concentrate on rules. Second, when rules are given by parents, they are both realistic and essential, and they are enforced. Children feel secure because they have an appropriate level of adult authority over their actions when they are unable to regulate themselves enough.

Areas of limit setting during play sessions include:

- * Behaviour that is harmful or dangerous to the child and/or parent
 - Behaviour that disrupts the session's routine or process (e.g. continually leaving playroom; wanting to play after time is up)
- * Destruction of room or play materials
- * Taking toys from playroom
- * Socially unacceptable behaviour

During limit setting parents should strive to be reasonable, rational, consistent, unconditionally accepting, comfortable and firm.

Steps in Limit Setting

First of all determine whether this limit is necessary or could be handled with another skill.

Step 1 State the limit in positive terms, and be brief. Give the limit in a clear, firm voice. (e.g. 'The paint goes on the table.')

Step 2 Reflect the feeling the child has when the parent sets the limit. (e.g. 'You don't like that.')

Step 3 (optional): Suggest alternatives, where needed by child. (e.g. 'The paint can go on the paper.')

Step 4 Remind the child, depending on age and understanding, several times before giving a consequence. Give the consequence. (e.g. 'The paint will go away for today.')

Step 5 Remind child that s/he can do most other things in their play session

Foundation Program: Learn to Play Program Week 3 and 4

Recognising Play Action Sequences

What are play action sequences?

A play action is when a child picks up a toy and places, for example, puts a doll in a bed, or an animal in a truck. Play actions are the focus of this week and next week.

When children play well, they can sequence their play actions in a logical manner.

When children do this several behaviours can be observed:

1. The more logical play action sequences in their play, the longer the child can play.
2. When children have logical play action sequences in their play, their play looks organised.
3. When children have logical play action sequences in their play, they most often are telling a story as they play.

Play actions that are logical and sequential reflect logical sequential thought, understanding of narrative (story), and the child's ability to think of something to play. All these skills are important for school because being able to tell a story is related to story comprehension, narrative understanding, and writing stories in the classroom. It is also related to increased language utterances and more vocabulary. As children are able to logically sequence more play actions with different toys, this means they are telling more and different stories.

How do I do this?

When concentrating on play action sequences, it means that the parent needs to engage their child. That is, get their child's attention on the toys, show them how to use the toys in the sequence (ie, you play). To do this, you may need to physically bring your child to the toys, or call their name several times, or simply just show them the toys. The effort to engage your child in play will vary between each child. As your child learns how to play, the time to engage in play will decrease. Once the child is engaged, you play with the toys and show the child how to use the toys and while you do this you demonstrate the play action sequence. This is also called modelling. You may need to repeat the play actions several times. You keep repeating the play actions until the child loses interest.

It is also very important that you talk about what you are doing (eg, the doll is having a drink). There also needs to be a variety of play activities so the child does not just learn to copy you without any meaning for the child his/herself. So, for example, you might be concentrating on 2 play sequences but you do this with several activities (eg, stirring the spoon in the cup and drinking the 'tea'; putting the animals in the truck and pushing

the truck; going to the 'shop' and buying 1 piece of fruit.) You use your voice, face, and body to mimic the emotions of the characters in the play and you have fun.

Week 3

In this session, I will demonstrate what a play action is and then what a play action sequence is. From this week, each child will be receiving their own individual program, but all parents will be focussing on play action sequences. There is a separate sheet for your child.

In this session, I will then play out play scenarios, keeping the play action sequences on the 'right' level for your child.

Homework

Between week 3 and week 4, I will give you one activity to carry out. This activity will be based on the Learn to Play program. You will either receive an activity from the book, or a modified activity (depending on your child's play needs).

Week 4

The parent (you) will carry out play action sequences with your child, focussing on the level that meets your child's needs. The play activities for the session can be worked with [therapist] or you may prefer to organise your own activities.

Foundation Program: Learn to Play Program Week 5 and 6

Object Substitution

What is object substitution?

Object substitution is when a child pretends an object is something else, for example, when they use a box for a bed, or a block for a mobile phone, or a stick for a spoon. Object substitution is the use of symbols in play. It begins when a child uses a physically similar object for the intended object. For example, a box is a similar shape to a bed. As the child develops, the object used in substitution becomes more abstract, and doesn't need to look anything like what it is representing. An example of this is using a shoe for a telephone. Children can also learn to use several objects to create a new object, for example, a tea-towel and two tins to make a 'shed'.

Object substitution ability is linked to language, narrative language, problem solving and non-literal thinking.

What do we do to encourage object substitution?

We start modelling – showing the children – how to objects as something else. We use the objects as though it is a normal, everyday occurrence to use objects as something else. We will use our voice, facial expression, and body to put into context the object we are using. For example, when using a block as a phone, we hold it to our ear, talk into it, use our face, be surprised, and then offer the child the block, to talk on the 'phone'.

Week 5

[therapist] will model use of objects as something else. This will be done within a sequence of play actions and so we begin to build up play skills from the week before.

In this session, I will then play out object substitution, keeping the play action sequences and object substitution on the 'right' level for your child.

Homework

Between week 5 and week 6, I will give you one activity to carry out. This activity will be based on the Learn to Play program. You will either receive an activity from the book, or a modified activity (depending on your child's play needs).

Week 6

You will carry out object substitution within sequences with your child, focussing on the level that meets your child's needs. The play activities for the session can be worked with [therapist] or you may prefer to organise your own activities.

Foundation Program: Learn to Play Program Week 7 and 8

Decentration

What is Decentration?

Decentration is using the doll 'as if' the doll is alive. It occurs when children play with a doll (or similar object) and give that doll emotions and/or characteristics. It is an important play skill because it indicates that the child understands that other people (adults and children) can think different things to them. An example of Decentration is the child feeding a doll but the doll isn't hungry. The child is trying to convince the doll to eat but the doll refuses. This is an example of decentration because the child is treating the doll as if the doll is thinking independently from the child. Other examples of decentration are: when the doll goes on a holiday and the child doesn't play with the doll for several days (because the doll is 'away'); when the teddy sneezes from the pepper but the child isn't effected; and moving out of the way of the TV so the doll can watch TV.

Decentration indicates that the child is beginning to understand the perspective of others, that others can have a different viewpoint. This play skill is important for children with autism because through play, the child can begin to understand that others can think different things to them. As the child's play skills become more complex in this skill, the child can have long negotiations with the doll/teddy/or car.

What do we do to encourage decentration?

We start modelling – showing the children – the doll doing things differently to what we expect the doll to do. We talk for doll, move the doll, have a short conversation with the doll and play with the doll as if the doll were alive and interacting with us. We have incorporated some aspects of this play skill in some of the play scenes already but this week and next week, we will concentrate on this ability. While I have used the 'doll', I am aware that there are Australian boys who don't necessarily play with dolls. Boys might use a soft toy, an action figure, or even a truck that talks. Boys do use decentration in their play but it may not necessarily be with a doll.

Week 7

[therapist] will model the doll acting out its own ideas. This will be done within a sequence of play actions and so we begin to build up play skills established earlier in the program. It will also be done with some objects so that we integrate object substitution into the play. We are building play skills by adding a new skill to the ones we have already covered.

In this session, I will then use the doll (or truck, or soft toy or car) as if it can talk and think. I will also keep the play action sequences and object substitution on the 'right' level for your child.

Homework

Between week 7 and week 8, I will give you one activity to carry out. This activity will be based on the Learn to Play program. You will either receive an activity from the book, or a modified activity (depending on your child's play needs).

Week 8

In this week, you will use the doll (or car, truck or soft toy) as a character who acts out a scene. Do this within the play sequence and object substitution level that is right for your child. The play activities for the session can be worked out with [therapist] or you may prefer to organise your own activities.

Foundation Program: Learn to Play Program

Week 9 and 10

Scripts

The next two weeks we will concentrate on scripts. Scripts are the stories in the play. We have had short stories all through the play program so far but these two weeks we will be concentrating on the story. The story involves taking note of the number of sequences, any object substitutions, the doll's character and emotions. So, today and next week we combine all these elements into a story.

Stories have a beginning, a middle and an end. In the middle of a story there is usually a problem. We will be putting a problem in the middle of the story. When children play, and particularly from 3 years, children put in problems in their play purposefully because it makes the play more challenging and more interesting for them. By four years of age, the problems get quite complicated. Today we will begin with stories that have smaller problems. The middle of the stories will be extended, depending on how the children engage with the play story.

Children start playing using play scripts about themselves, then in the home and then out of the home and then extending to stories they have heard (either in books or TV) and eventually, they make up their own stories. At each stage, children 'add' to the stories that they already know, so a five year old can play out stories about themselves, stories about home, and stories that they have heard.

Scripts bring together several play skills. Play scripts also mean that we are working on story comprehension skills and other literacy skills that the children will need when they go to school. By playing out stories, children gain a greater understanding of the story, the characters and the sense of how a story is structured – with a beginning, a middle and an end.

Week 9

We will play out 2 -3 stories in the session. I tell the child the story before we begin and then we will play it out. I will begin the play and then follow the child's reaction, while at the same time making sure that all elements of the story are played out.

Homework

This week I will give you a Learn to Play Activity for the week.

Week 10

We can decide whether you want to continue the story from this week, or create a similar or new story for next week.

Foundation Program: Learn to Play Program
Weeks 11 and 12
Role Play

The next two weeks we will be considering role play. Role play occurs when a child pretends they are someone else and they act like that person. Role play 'officially' occurs from 4 years of age, however, I think it really begins when children begin to imitate others.

It begins when children copy giving a drink to their doll because they have seen their parent give a drink to them. It begins when a child does one action to pretend to someone else, for example, when a child does a dance and pretends to be a friend because that friend dances.

Role play is important because it gives children a deeper understanding of how that character acts, what that character is likely to say, and the emotions that that character is likely to show. For example, the shopkeeper helps the customer in the shop, takes the customer's money, and the shopkeeper gives the customer the item that the customer paid for. The doctor bandages up a broken leg, listens to the teddy's heart with a stethoscope (or similar object), gives out medicine and writes prescriptions. Pretending to be a mum or a dad is also important because children observe you very closely. You may already have heard yourself when the children are playing events that they previously experienced and you were part of the event. I remember hearing myself in my girls play when my girls told their dolls what I just told my girls the day before.

Week 11

We will play out 2 -3 roles in the session. I will explain to the child who the person is and what they do and what they might say. I will then guide the child through the role play, keeping in mind the number of sequences, the story, any object substitutions and what the doll can do.

Homework

This week, I will give you a character to act out in a role play.

Week 12

We can decide what roles you would like to play out.

Intermediate program

Parent Learn to Play Program

Karen Stagnitti, 2009

Learn to Play Parent Program

Intermediate Program

Introduction to Intermediate Program

Learn to Play with Parents (LPP) is a programme to develop the spontaneous initiation of pretend play skills of children. Research tells us that pretend play is important for children in developing problem solving, flexible thinking, and logical sequences in their thoughts. It helps children develop friendships and social skills and is important for their emotional well-being. Many children cannot play; this programme helps parents learn active ways to help their children increase their spontaneous, pretend play, with the direct assistance of a play/occupational therapist. This approach can be used for children with developmental delay, learning problems, Autism Spectrum Disorders, Down's Syndrome, and neurological conditions.

As a parent you are extremely important to your child. You are influential in the skills you can facilitate in your child's development as well as providing a safe, predictable and secure environment. We now know that through a parent's care, love, and emotional bonding a child's brain develops and that play gives the 'fertiliser' for that growth.

The six skills that were covered in the Foundation Program will be the basis of the program. It is important to use these as a foundation as they are, I believe, the essential skills to pretend in play. On the basis of your child's play ability, the program will be individualised for you and your child. The Intermediate program will build on the parent skills of how to use language to extend the play. Throughout the sessions, the following skills will be introduced.

A more detailed hand out sheet on skills to learn in facilitating play will be given each session a new skill is introduced along with a specific Learn to Play activity for the coming week. You will be encouraged to try the new skills using a specific play activity each week.

Homework:

Each week you will be asked to have a 10-15 minute play session with your child at home. Decide where home sessions will occur (eg private and quiet, without interruptions). It will be useful to record home sessions: video is ideal, but not always possible, so make some notes about how the session went and bring these to the next session.

The Intermediate Program

The same structure will be used as in the Foundation program. That is, each skill will be presented in pairs of weeks. The first week I will demonstrate the skill and the next week, you take the session. There are 6 skills again to cover the Intermediate program but this program takes your skills to the next level of the process of how you facilitate pretend play with your child. As you all attune well to your child, attuning to your child will be part of each session but will not be a separate week as in the Foundation program.

The 5 play skills covered in the Foundation Program will be fundamental in planning the individual play activities for each week. These are:

- Recognising play sequences of action
- Recognising object substitution
- Recognising decentration
- Recognising play scripts
- Joining the child in role play

Weeks 1 and 2

Describing the play objects and what to do within the play script

These two weeks are a revision and to also observe how the children have continued to develop since we last met.

The Intermediate program is building on the skills of the Foundation program as it now concentrates on what you say to enhance your child's play ability.

This week and next week concentrate what describing to the child what they are doing and describing the use of the toys or objects. While your child's play skills may be above this, they will take the play to a level where they are comfortable. Describing what your child is doing will be reinforcing to them about what they are doing and often it is interpreted as interest from you in their activities.

Examples of describing objects and toys and the child's actions are:

The dolly is lying down on the bed.

You are putting the teddy in the truck and pushing the truck.

The teddy is having a drink.

The king doll is riding his horse.

The doll family are all in the house. The doll family are lying on their beds

Upsi-daisy is kicking the ball.

The cows are eating the grass.

Weeks 2 and 3

Wrapping a narrative around the play

- **Attributing properties to objects**

What is wrapping the narrative and attributing properties to object?

In the Foundation program the first play skill was sequencing actions logically in play. This often results in a story or narrative. Children act out stories in their play. For the next 6 weeks we will be thinking more about the language that we – as parents – use when extending our child’s play skills. The language we are concentrating on will enhance the quality of the play narrative (story) as well as the child’s language.

In pretend play there are 3 key cognitive abilities that identify the play as pretend play. These are:

- Attributing properties to objects
- Object substitution
- Referring to absent objects.

We will cover each of these in the next 6 weeks. (Object substitution is the same as last year but this year we will concentrate on what you say.)

This week it is attributing properties to objects. When we attribute a property we are giving the object the quality of being ‘alive’. Examples of attributing properties are: the doll is ‘hurt’, ‘sick’, ‘tired’, ‘hungry’ etc or the truck has ‘run out of petrol’, has a ‘flat’ tyre, is ‘tired’, or goes to ‘sleep’. We can also attribute properties to enhance an objects features. For example, the space ship is ‘fast’, the grass is ‘slippery’.

How do I do this?

Set up a scene where you need to have either a doll, teddy, or a character of some kind (for example, a car might be ‘alive’). Thinking back to the scripts (stories) that are the right level for your child, think of a story and then either:

- Start playing adding in the features of the objects (attributing properties)
- Or make a list of the possible property attributes that would fit that story and then start

Week 3

I will demonstrate and point out property attributions that I am making.

Homework

Homework is to play one story with your child. Make a list of property attributions that you think would fit that scenario. Play out the scenario and see how many property attributions you included in the play.

Week 4

You decide what scenarios you would like to play out or work in with me.

Weeks 4 and 5

Wrapping a narrative around the play

- **Referring to absent objects**

What is wrapping the narrative and referring to absent objects?

Referring to absent objects is one of the key cognitive skills of pretend play. This means that the child pretends something is there when it is not, for example, pretending to have a drink when there is nothing in the cup or pretending to pay for something at the 'shop' when there is no money in their hand.

To be able to refer to an absent object the child can indicate by an action or by words. To be able to do this the child needs to be able to have the concept, visualise and then carry out the action or words for the absent object.

This week and next week we will be incorporating absent objects into the play.

Week 3

I will demonstrate absent objects

Homework

Practice using absent objects at home. To do this you will use more actions and language to build up the play scene and describe the object that is 'absent'.

Week 4

We will work together on absent objects in play.

Week 7 and 8

Wrapping a narrative around the play: Object Substitution

What is object substitution?

Object substitution is when a child pretends an object is something else, for example, when they use a box for a bed, or a block for a mobile phone, or a stick for a spoon. Object substitution is the use of symbols in play. It begins when a child uses a physically similar object for the intended object. For example, a box is a similar shape to a bed. As the child develops, the object used in substitution becomes more abstract, and doesn't need to look anything like what it is representing. An example of this is using a shoe for a telephone. Children can also learn to use several objects to create a new object, for example, a tea-towel and two tins to make a 'shed'.

Object substitution ability is linked to language, narrative language, problem solving and non-literal thinking. Object substitution is one of the key cognitive skills in pretend play, along with reference to absent objects and attributing properties to objects.

What do we do to encourage object substitution?

We start modelling – showing the children – how to objects as something else. We use the objects as though it is a normal, everyday occurrence to use objects as something else. We will use our voice, facial expression, and body to put into context the object we are using. For example, when using a block as a phone, we hold it to our ear, talk into it, use our face, be surprised, and then offer the child the block, to talk on the 'phone'.

Week 7

[therapist] will model use of objects as something else. This will done within a sequence of play actions and with attributing properties to objects and reference to absent objects.

In this session, I will then play out object substitution, keeping the play action sequences and object substitution on the 'right' level for your child.

Homework

Between week 7 and week 8, I will give you one activity to carry out. This activity will be based on the Learn to Play program. You will either receive an activity from the book, or a modified activity (depending on your child's play needs).

Week 8

You will carry out object substitution, focussing on the level that meets your child's needs. The play activities for the session can be worked out with you or you may prefer to organise your own activities.

Week 9 and 10

Creating problems in the play

What is creating problems in the play?

When children play – particularly when they reach the age of the older 3 year old – they begin to add problems to their play. By this I mean that they add events in the play scenario that makes the play more challenging for them, such as, the truck runs out of petrol, the doll becomes hungry and can't find any food, the keys are lost to the car so the dolls don't know how they are going to drive and so on. Children will play to the level that is challenging to them and this challenge makes the play interesting to them and engages them in the problem solving of the play - so they play for longer. By creating problems in the narrative, or play story (or play scene) you are challenging your child to problem solve what to do, how to act, what the dolls might do to solve the problem. To do this they need language, hypothetical reasoning, and negotiation, thinking of alternative endings, lateral thinking and problem solving. They need to be flexible and adaptable and learn how to cope with the 'unpredictability' of play. As your child's play becomes more complex, the problems created in the play will become more complex.

What do we do to encourage problems in the play?

We engage in the play story and then are constantly thinking about what can I do to create a problem. Start with small problems such as (for example) your doll may be sleeping and won't wake up or your teddy may be so hungry he can't do what the child want to do or maybe your truck has a flat tyre! Add problems to the play and if your child has trouble working out what to do, then gently suggest how you could overcome the problem. For example, maybe we need to tickle teddy to see if he'll wake up, or maybe we need to find some food so teddy can eat before we do anything else.

More complex problems are: teddy breaking his leg and needing to go to hospital, a storm coming and crashing down the house, the dolls being lost and can't find their way home, being lost in a foreign country. As you create problems, give time for your child to think of what to do because they will have to change their train of thought to accommodate this new situation. See if the child has a solution first and if it seems like it is too hard, then come in and suggest some solutions to what could happen. It is play - -- you never know what might happen!

Week 9

[therapist] will model creating problems in the play story.

Homework

Between week 9 and week 10, listen to what your child is playing and if there is opportunity join in and add in a problem.

Week 10

We will work out a play scene and potential problems that will happen in the play story.

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Week 11 and 12

What will happen next?

Predicting what is going to happen

When children can sequence their play actions in a logical way they are beginning to develop a story. It is also an indication that they are thinking logically and sequentially, while also coping with problems in the story and seeking solutions. Being able to think about what is going to happen next in the story is predictive thinking. It is working out what solutions there are to finish the story, what solutions there are to a problem and deciding on an option to take the story forward. In story telling – as in play – there are usually several options as to ‘What will happen next?’ so it also gives the child experience in thinking through alternatives.

Being able to add one new action to a sequence is the start of predictive thinking then extending this ability to think about more of the story in ‘what will happen next?’ For example, the truck has run out of petrol, ‘What will happen next?’ can be the next action in the sequence (the beginning of the ability) or the rest of the story (extending and predicting a whole sequence).

How do we build this capacity?

In the play, there will be times now when we stop and think “What will happen next?” and encourage the child to think about what will be in the future (in the play – as in the next steps). This ability can be quite difficult and is particularly difficult for children on the spectrum of autism as we are building the capacity to not be so literal and to think through what will happen (something they can’t see).

This week

We will be working on a story and stopping every now and then and asking the child ‘What will happen next?’ This will be either the next action or a sequence of actions – depending on the child.

Homework

Within daily life, in the daily routine, ask your child “What will we do next?” In this way we are encouraging generalising of the ability to think ‘forward’.

Next Week

We will push the skill further to think of a sequence of actions.