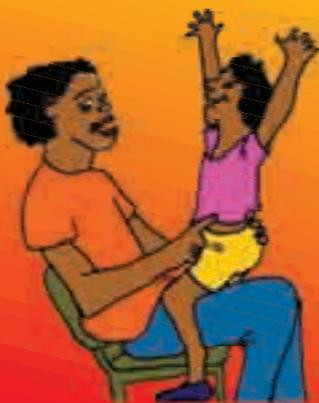




GETTING STARTED!!!

Using VISUAL SYSTEMS to
promote PLAY

By
Dolly Bhargava



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The images used in this resource reflect the ethnic diversity and disabilities in Western Australia. The images are from, and copyright of the picture software program Softpics with Fantasticpics (www.innovativeprogramming.net.au)

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Topic 1 - Introduction

Welcome to the second resource in the 'GETTING STARTED' series - 'GETTING STARTED!!! Using Visual Systems to Promote Play'. This practical resource booklet has been written for parents and discusses a range of strategies that can be used at home to develop your child's play skills. Accompanying the booklet is a DVD which demonstrates the use of the discussed strategies with children with disabilities. This resource is both informative and user-friendly and its organisation allows you to 'dip' in and out of sections according to your needs.

When a child is playing they are not just filling in time, they are engaging in a purposeful activity. Play is essential for optimal development and learning in children. Play is often described as a vehicle that enables children to learn about themselves, explore their surroundings, develop physical, social-communication, cognitive and emotional skills. Play becomes a platform from which children learn about other people and how to interact with them. Therefore, it is important to teach your child to learn how to play better, because play can nurture and stimulate your child's development.

If you have tried to play with your child, you may have found it difficult. Children with disabilities, for various reasons, often do not know how to play. The child needs play skills to be explicitly taught. Children learn many important things at home and in the family. You are your child's first and ongoing teacher!!! You know your child best and spend the most time with your child doing real life activities. A variety of opportunities for play occur throughout the day, and this resource focuses on helping you to make the most of those moments.

It is important to remember that your child is a unique individual so please adapt or modify the suggestions to suit your individual circumstances. The essence of play is fun, so use toys, objects and activities that are interesting, engaging and motivating to your child. The more fun and relaxed approach you take the more learning that will take place.

NOTE: "He or she," "him or her" is distracting so to keep the booklet readable I will use 'she' to refer to the child. No disrespect is meant to either gender.

Dolly Bhargava
Disability Specialist Speech Pathologist

Topic 2 – What is play?

Play is a **generic term** applied to a wide range of children's activities and behaviours. Play can be **structured or unstructured**. Adults often **direct** structured play and there are rules etc. In unstructured play the child **chooses** the activity and makes the rules. Children can play on their **own** or with **others**.

Play activities are:

- **satisfying** to the child,
- **creative** for the child and
- **freely chosen** by the child.

Play takes **different forms** for different children....



Play may be **boisterous and energetic**



light-hearted



quiet and contemplative

or



very serious.

Through play children **explore** social, material and imaginary worlds and their relationships with them, elaborating all the while a flexible range of responses to the challenges they encounter. By playing, children learn and develop as **individuals** and as **members** of the community.

Definition adapted from the Hampshire County Council and the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership and Children's Play Council (1998) 'New Charter for Children's Play', Children's Society and The Excellence of Play Edited by Janet R. Moyles, Open University Press, 1995.

Topic 3 – What are the benefits of play?

Research shows that play **supports learning and development** across the physical, communication, social, emotional, affective, intellectual and educational domains.

1 In the **physical domain**, play is particularly vital for encouraging physical movement, co-ordination and strength. Physical play activities will assist to develop your child's:

- *Gross motor skills* (e.g. jumping, riding, carrying, climbing, lifting, throwing)



- *Fine motor skills* (e.g. cutting, constructing, pasting, turning, twisting, squeezing, buttoning, pouring, painting)



- *Strength and endurance* (e.g. playing sports, constructing, pulling a wagon, light weight ball play, hanging on a rope, push up)



- *Hand eye co-ordination skills* (e.g. handwriting, catching a ball, colouring in)



2 In the **communication domain**, play acts as a foundation for developing the child's understanding and ability to express themselves through verbal and/or non verbal methods. Play can be used as the platform to develop your child's verbal and non verbal communication to:

- *Express their needs and wants* (e.g. asking for a toy, making a choice)
- *Understand other people's messages* (e.g. giving people their toy)
- *Understand concepts* (e.g. up/down, over/under, high/low)



3 In the **emotional domain**, play is a medium through which children learn to recognise, express and manage their emotions. For example, through play children have opportunities to:

- *Experience feelings* (e.g. fun, excitement, annoyance, relaxation)



- *Express their feelings* (e.g. telling another child that they are like them)

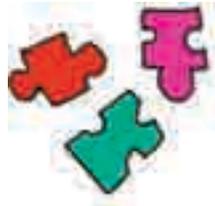


- *Manage feelings* such as anger (e.g. releasing energy by jumping on trampoline)



4. In the **intellectual domain**, play enables children to acquire skills that are related to thinking. These skills enable the child to explore, deepen, extend and improve their understanding of their environment and experiences. For example, play can foster the development of:

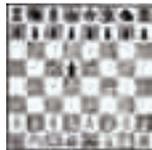
- *Increases in attention span*
(e.g. puzzles)



- *Creativity and imagination* (e.g. kitchen, oven, table, dolls, plates, cups, knives, forks etc.)



- *Problem-solving skills*
(e.g. chess)



- *Cause and effect*
(e.g. put bigger blocks
at the bottom for support)



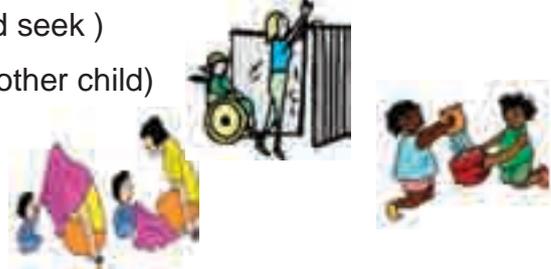
- 4 **In the affective domain**, play can serve as the platform to build the child's willingness to learn, ability to persist, motivation to seek and use new knowledge. For example, play can build the child's:

- *Self-esteem* (e.g. proud of what we did)
- *Self-confidence* (e.g. keep trying to build a complex building)
- *Self-motivation* (e.g. doing it together)
- *Developing independence*



5 In the **social domain**, play can enhance the ways the child relates to others (social skills). For example, play experiences can mirror real life social situations. This can help the child learn a variety of social skills that are the glue that holds social interactions and relationships together such as:

- *Co-operation skills* (e.g. playing hide and seek)
- *Friendship skills* (e.g. water play with another child)
- *Conversational skills* (e.g. peek a boo)



- *Understand how to behave* in different situations (e.g. playing doctors and nurses)



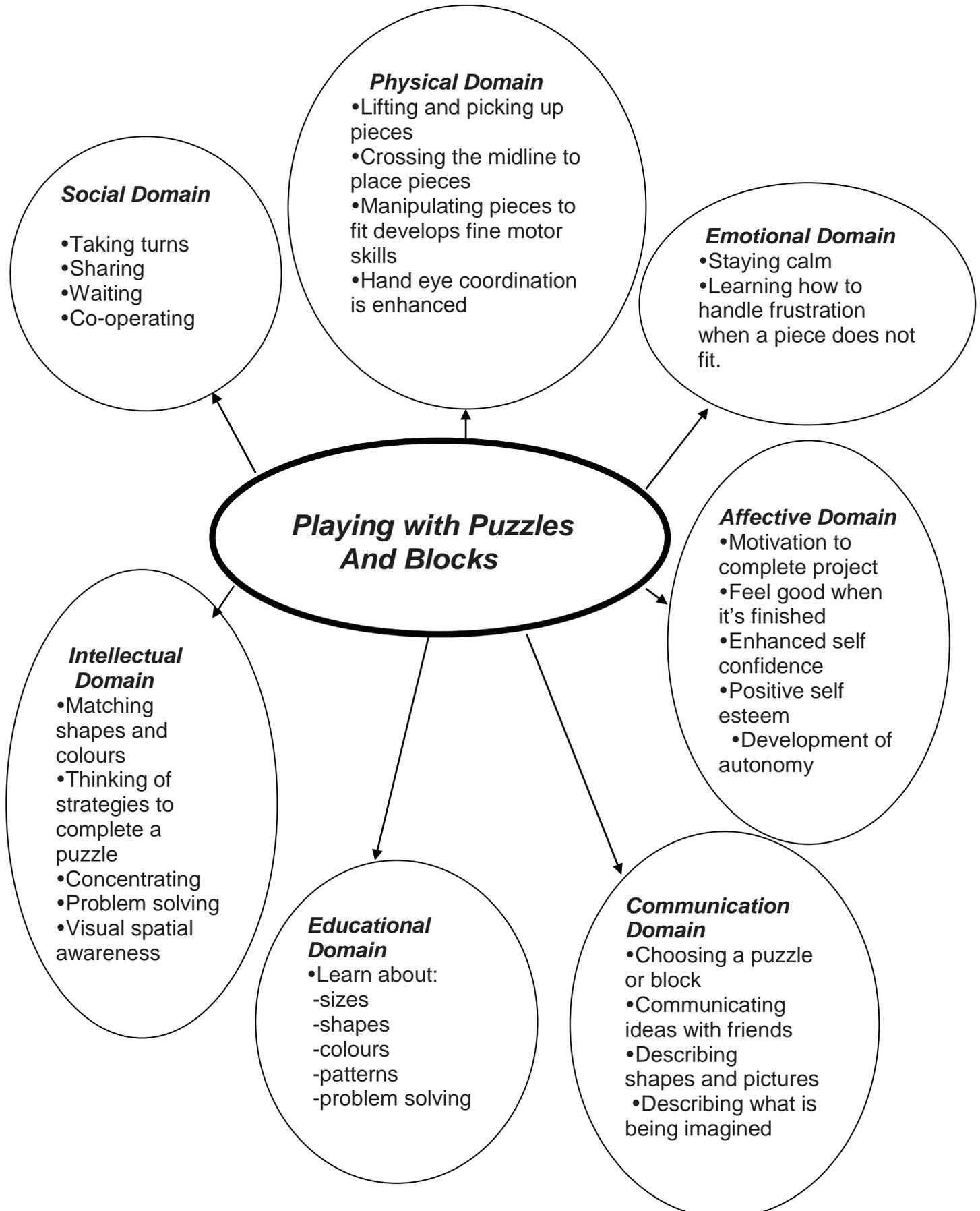
7 In the **educational domain**, play provides a fun and enjoyable context to learn emergent literacy skills. For example, play can facilitate children's learning of:

- *Numeracy skills* (e.g. Counting and stacking cups e.g. 1, 2, 3,4)
- *Reading skills* (e.g. learning that letters, numbers, signs, words, symbols have a purpose)
- *Writing skills* (e.g. scribbling, painting, drawing)
- *How stories work* (e.g. plot, characters, structure, purpose)



Examples of learning that occurs in games

Playing with **puzzles** or **building blocks** can be viewed as simple games. Closer examination however reveals that they help the child develop a variety of skills.



Topic 4 – Why is play so difficult for children with disabilities?

Having a disability can **affect**:

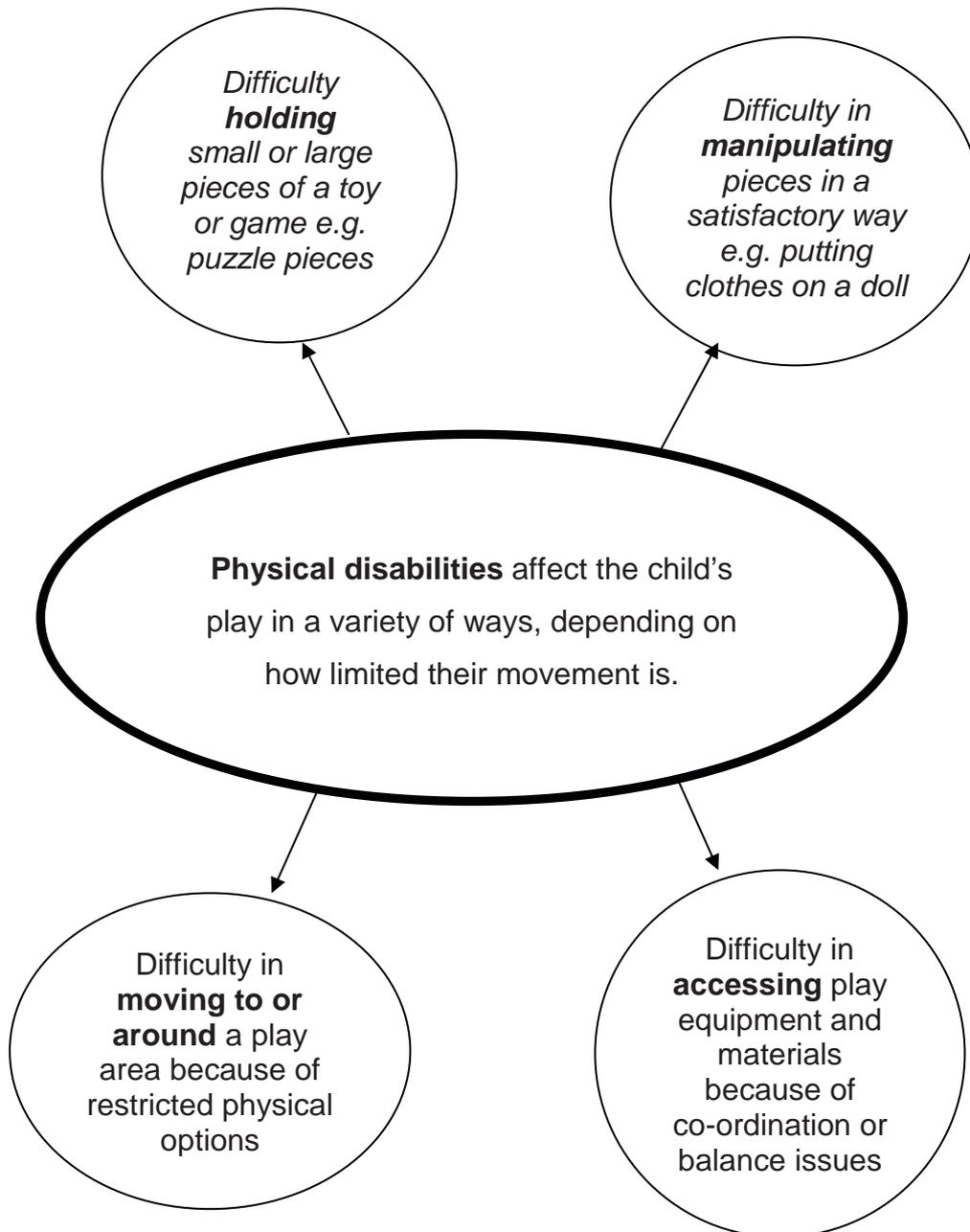
- **how** a child plays,
- the kinds of play the child **participates** in and
- the **learning** that the child takes from the play activity

Depending on the **type** of disability a child has one or more areas of **development** may be affected. It is important to be aware of **individual differences** in the development and use of play skills as each child will have **unique** play abilities.

Hence, **careful observation** of children's interactions with objects and with people will provide a better picture of how a child's disability affects her play. Following is a summary of some of the reasons why playing is so difficult for children with disabilities. This section discusses some of the difficulties that can arise in the **acquisition** of play skills when a child has one or more of the following disabilities:

1. Physical Disability
2. Communication Disability
3. Intellectual Disability
4. Sensory Integration Disability
5. Sensory Disability
6. Emotional, Behavioural and Social Difficulty

1. **Physical Disability:** A physical disability is any condition that permanently prevents normal body movement and/or control. There are many different types of physical disabilities. Some of the main ones include Muscular Dystrophy, Acquired brain and spinal injuries, Spina Bifida and Cerebral Palsy.





John uses the prone wedge to help her read a book



John uses the wheelchair to get around the play area



John climbs on the climbing frame to develop his strength

Physiotherapists and **occupational therapists** are specialists who can help children with physical disabilities. A physiotherapist and occupational therapist can give advice on a variety of strategies that can help to maximize the child's participation in the play activity by improving their position, access and independence. They can also advise on **equipment** options that are appropriate for their age, size and capabilities so that they can access activities and enjoy play as much as possible.



A switch is attached to John's robot. Every time he touches the switch, the robot talks and moves.



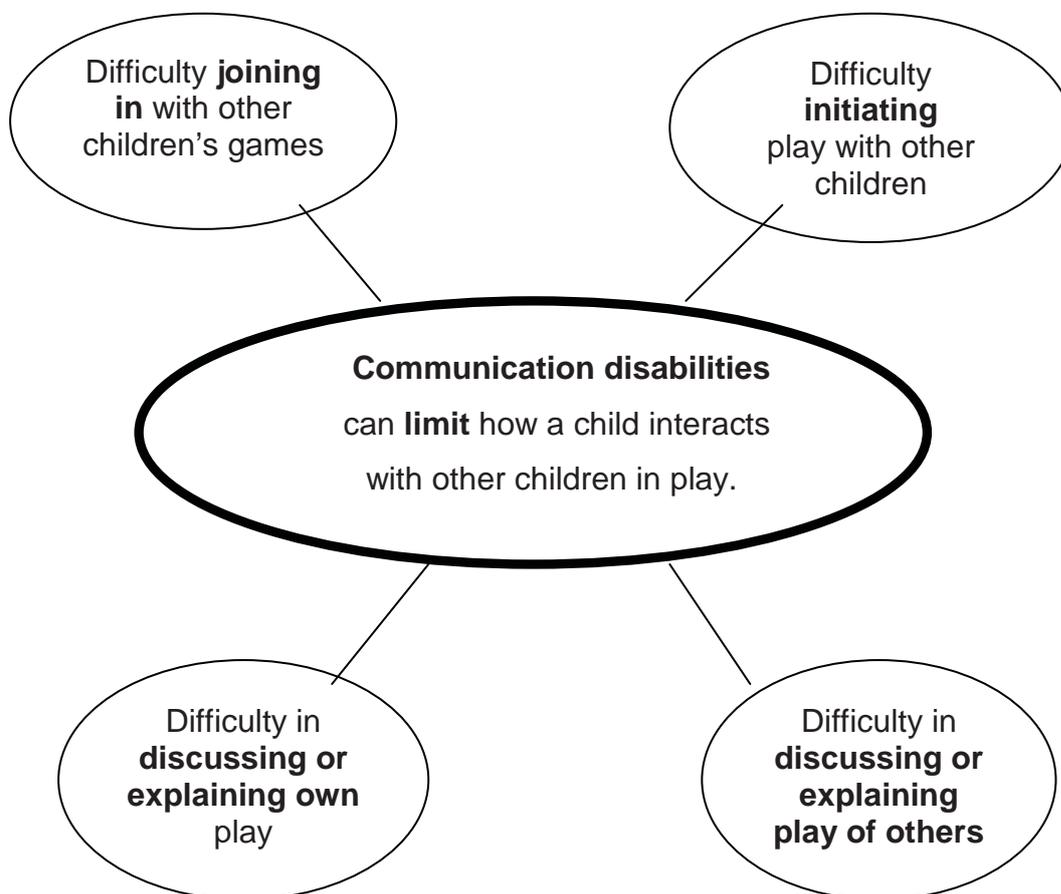
The corner seat enables Jenny to sit up and play with her toys.



The walker allows John to move around the play area and access toys.

2. **Communication Disability:** A communication disability **encompasses** a wide variety of problems in language, speech and hearing. Many communication disabilities result from conditions such as Intellectual disability, Cerebral palsy, Down's syndrome, Autism. Below are **some examples** of difficulties experienced by children with a communication disability and how it impacts on their play skills:

- **Knowledge and use of the structure of language** e.g. statements, questions, instructions, comments etc
- **Comprehension** i.e. understanding of what is said to them
- **Understanding and using a range of vocabulary**
- **Clarity** of speech



During play sessions the child may have trouble being understood by other children and adults. This can limit her ability to:

- **Express desire** for certain play materials and equipment
- **Express dislike** of a play activity
- **Connect** with the other children and adults

Knowledge and use of the structure of language

Ask Robert if he wants a motivating or non motivating toy.

Wait for his response.

If he chooses the non motivating toy give it to him and wait for his response.

If he expresses that you got it wrong, help him learn how to choose the right one.



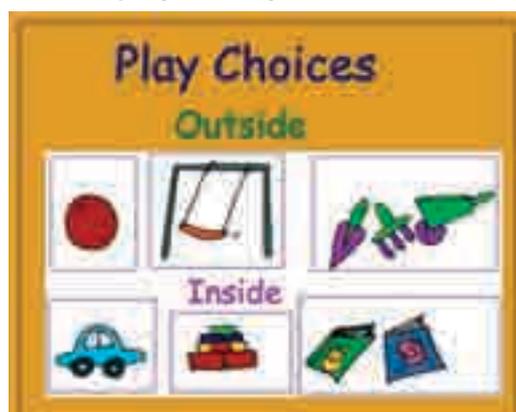
Comprehension

Music can be used to enhance the understanding of language as songs often involve actions, creating a link between words and physical actions for the child. An excellent example is for Liam to hear the song “Heads and shoulders, knees and toes” and do the actions with his dad.



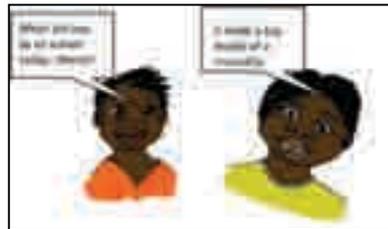
Understanding and using a range of vocabulary

When Jeff is asked what he wants to play with outside he always asks for the same thing ‘car’. He hasn’t yet categorized all the options under the heading of outside play activities. A choice system such as the one shown below helps him realize his options and ask for a different play activity.

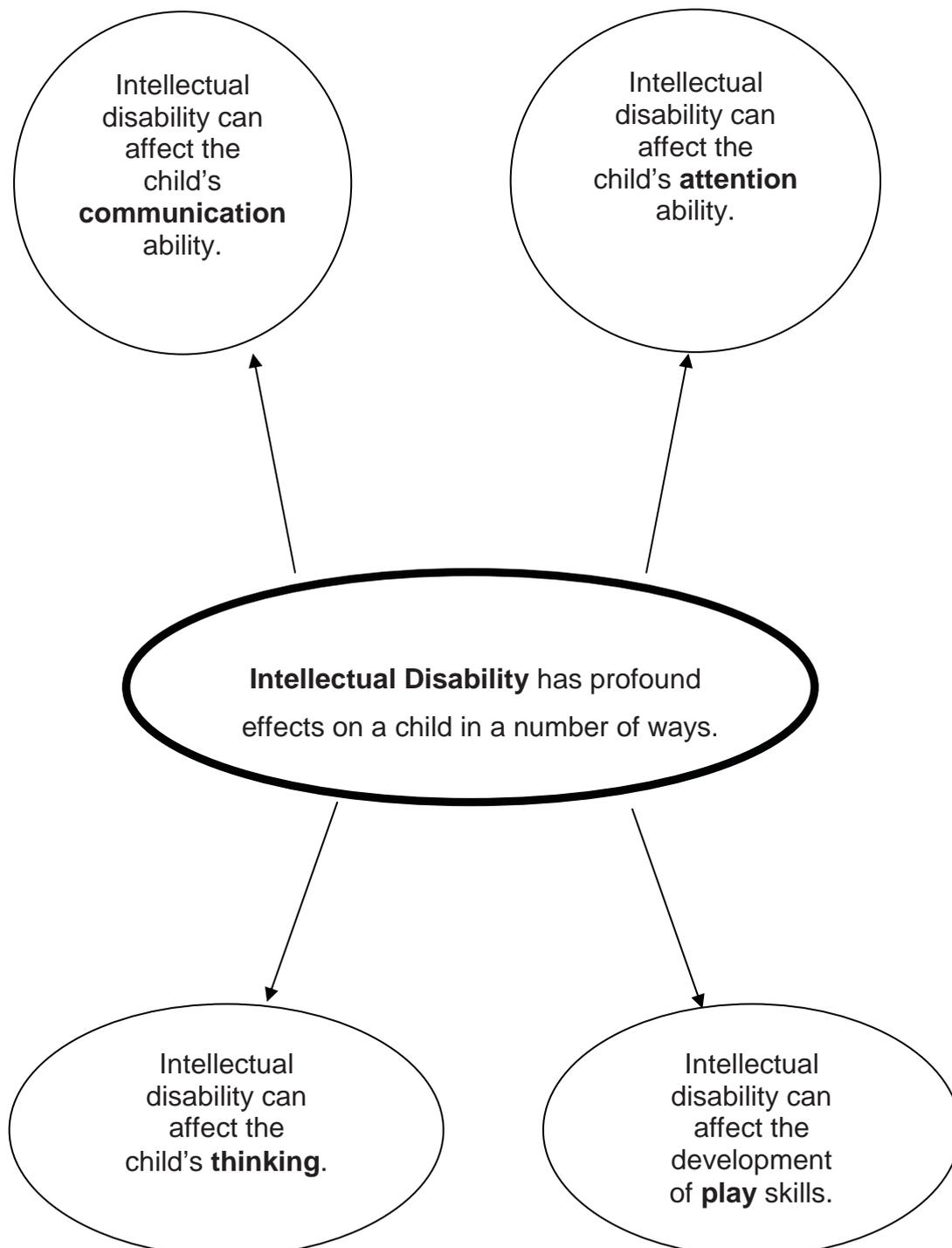


Clarity of speech

Create opportunities for Sheila to engage in conversations about what she did at school each day. Every day she tells her mum, dad and brother what she did at school. Repeated speech practice helps her to improve articulation and clarity.



- 3. Intellectual Disability:** Intellectual disability is the result of a **multiplicity** of causal factors such as faulty chromosomes or genes, exposure to toxins etc. However, many of the causes are unknown and unidentified. It has important effects on a child's development and ability to independently participate in activities of daily living. Different children will have **different support needs**. Below are **some examples** of difficulties experienced by children with an intellectual disability and how it impacts on their play skills:



Memory and Learning: *Rusty needs the play activity to be broken down into steps. He needs to practise them several times in order to understand, remember, experience and learn how to engage in the activity.*



Attention: *Ros is a young girl who has trouble maintaining her attention on a task. She gets distracted easily and quickly moves between play activities without finishing them.*



She needs to have only one activity in front of her at a time, and a bare environment so that she doesn't become distracted.



Thinking and Communication Skills: *Jesse has difficulty engaging in pretend play because it requires abstract thinking, e.g. pretending to be a bus driver, set up some chairs to be a bus, and act the roles; steer the bus, press the horn, ring the bell and drive the bus.*

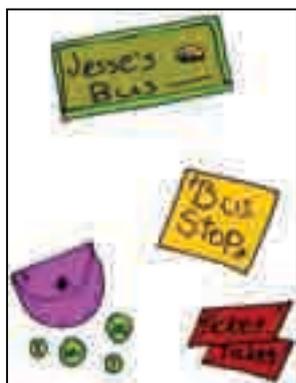
She needs to do role play where the play is demonstrated and modelled for her.



She can then be encouraged to copy the modelled play. She can be the driver.



Pay the driver, walk down the aisle, find a seat.



Development of Play Skills: Children with an intellectual disability are unique, as all children develop at different rates.

Jon is 5 years old with a mild intellectual disability and uses his senses to become familiar with his toy dog and its physical features. He explores its visual, auditory and tactile qualities.



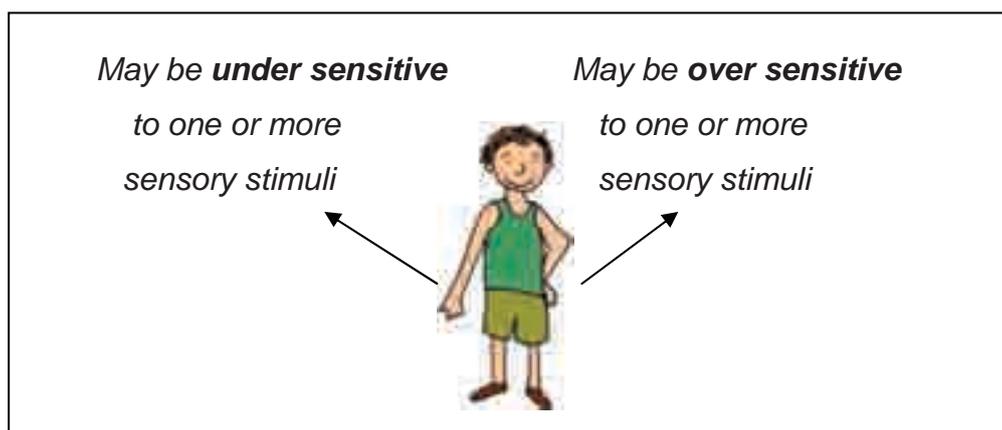
Shauna is a 5 year old girl with a mild intellectual disability. She lets the toy guide her to discover ways to use it and its pieces; for example, where to touch, turn or twist it, where to put things in or take them out.



Leonie is also 5 years old with a mild intellectual disability. She uses imagination and creativity to discover a number of ways to interact with her toy bear.



- 4. Sensory Integration Disability:** Children with a sensory integration disability have difficulties with understanding and responding to sensory stimuli. **Sensory stimuli** includes: touch, taste, smell, sound, sight, movement and body position. **Sensory integration** is a process of analysing, organising and connecting the sensory stimuli received by the child, to make sense of the world around them and produce a meaningful response to the stimuli. It takes place in the **central nervous system**, which consists of the spinal cord and the brain. When a child has a sensory integration disability they have inefficient processing of the sensory stimuli. This means that the central nervous system cannot analyse, organise and connect – or integrate the sensory stimuli. Hence, the sensory integration disability impacts on how a child **perceives** and **reacts** to sensory stimuli. Below are **some examples** of difficulties experienced by children with a sensory integration disability and how it impacts on their play skills:



EXAMPLES

Under sensitivity

to touch

Ben doesn't feel the heat when wearing warm clothes on a hot day.



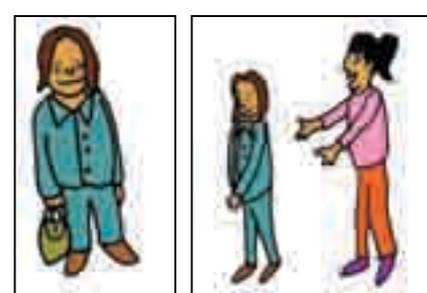
Drew isn't aware of the mess on his skin and clothes



Over sensitivity

to touch

Mia dislikes getting messy or being touched



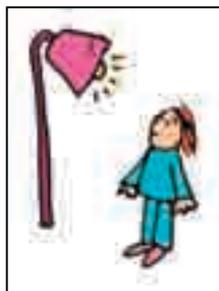
Under sensitivity to visual

Callum has an excessive interest in patterns



Over sensitivity to visual

Michele is obsessed with bright lights



Renee prefers darkened rooms



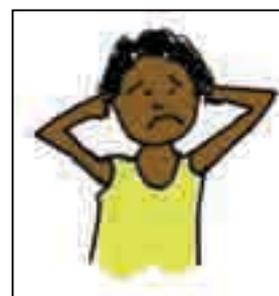
Under sensitivity to sound

Jason is fascinated with loud banging



Over sensitivity to sound

Penny is distressed by loud noises



Under sensitivity to taste

Simon often tastes/licks toys before playing with them



Over sensitivity to smell

Harriet dislikes the smell of some of her toys and will not play with them



Under sensitivity to movement and body position

Lucas avoids physical activities

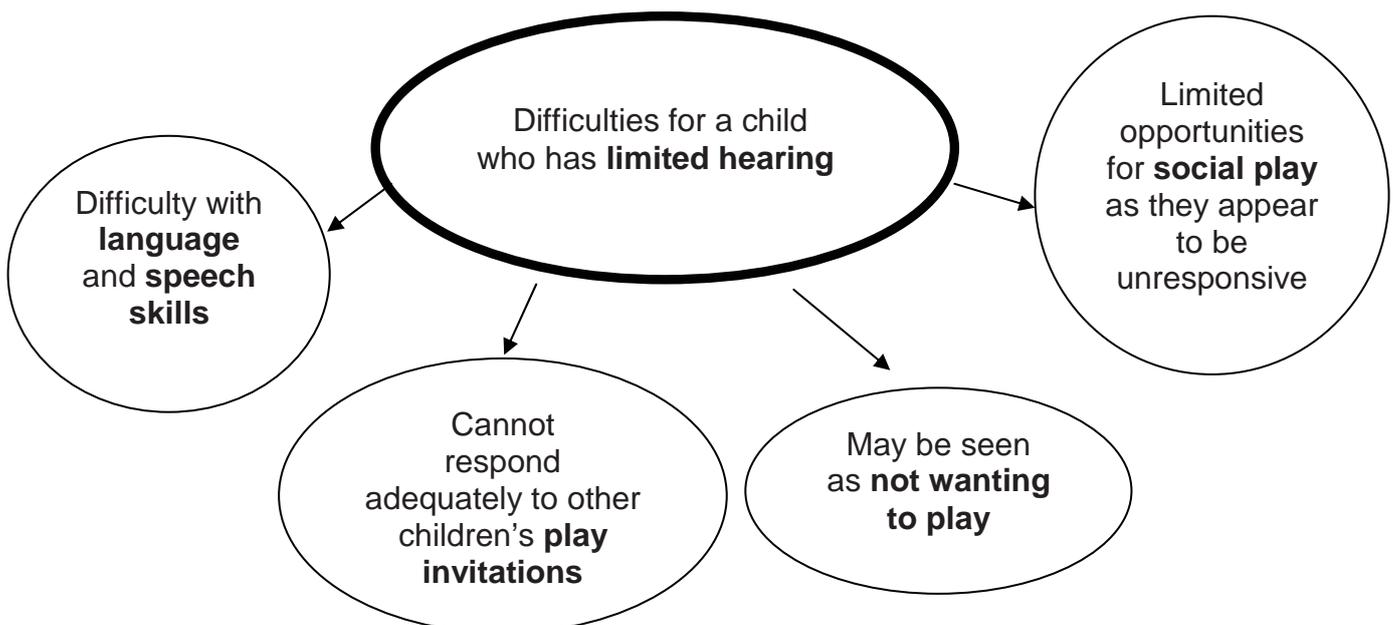
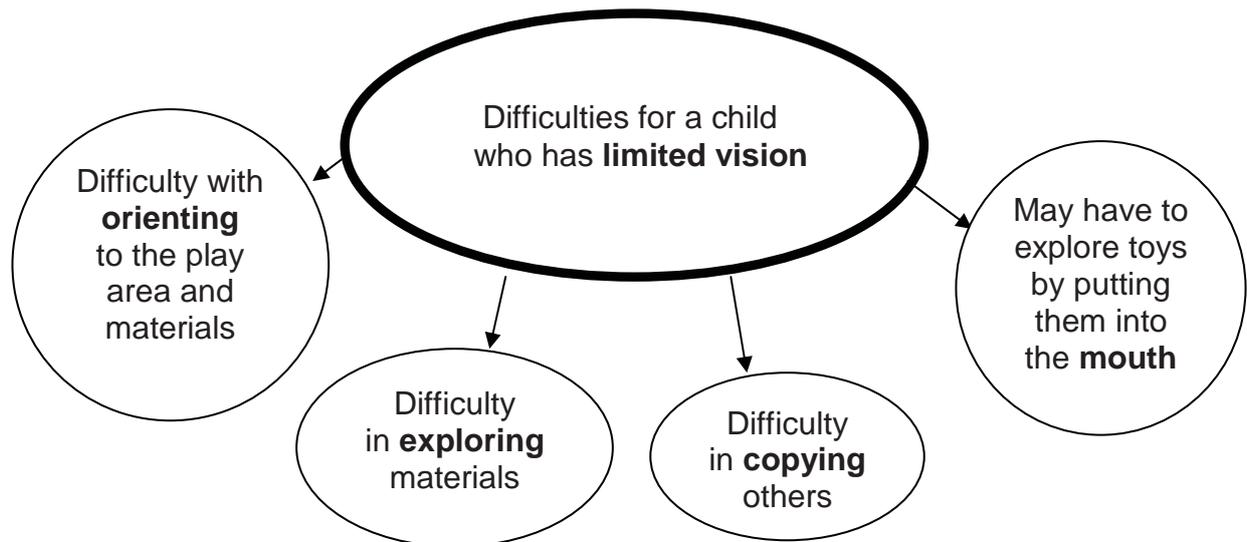


Oversensitivity to movement and body position

Lionel actively seeks physical activities and engages in risky behaviours



5. **Sensory Disability:** Children with sensory disabilities have a **vision** or a **hearing** impairment. This results in difficulties with how they **receive** and **express** a message. Below are **some examples** of difficulties experienced by children with a sensory disability and how it impacts on their play skills:



EXAMPLES

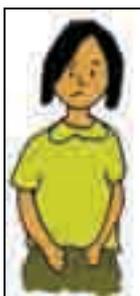
Keisha is a three year old girl with a severe vision impairment. She is unable to see other children at a distance.



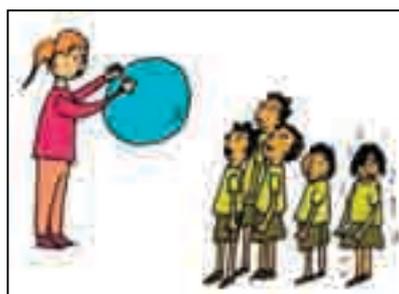
She is dependent on others to let her know who is present and guide her to join in the play.



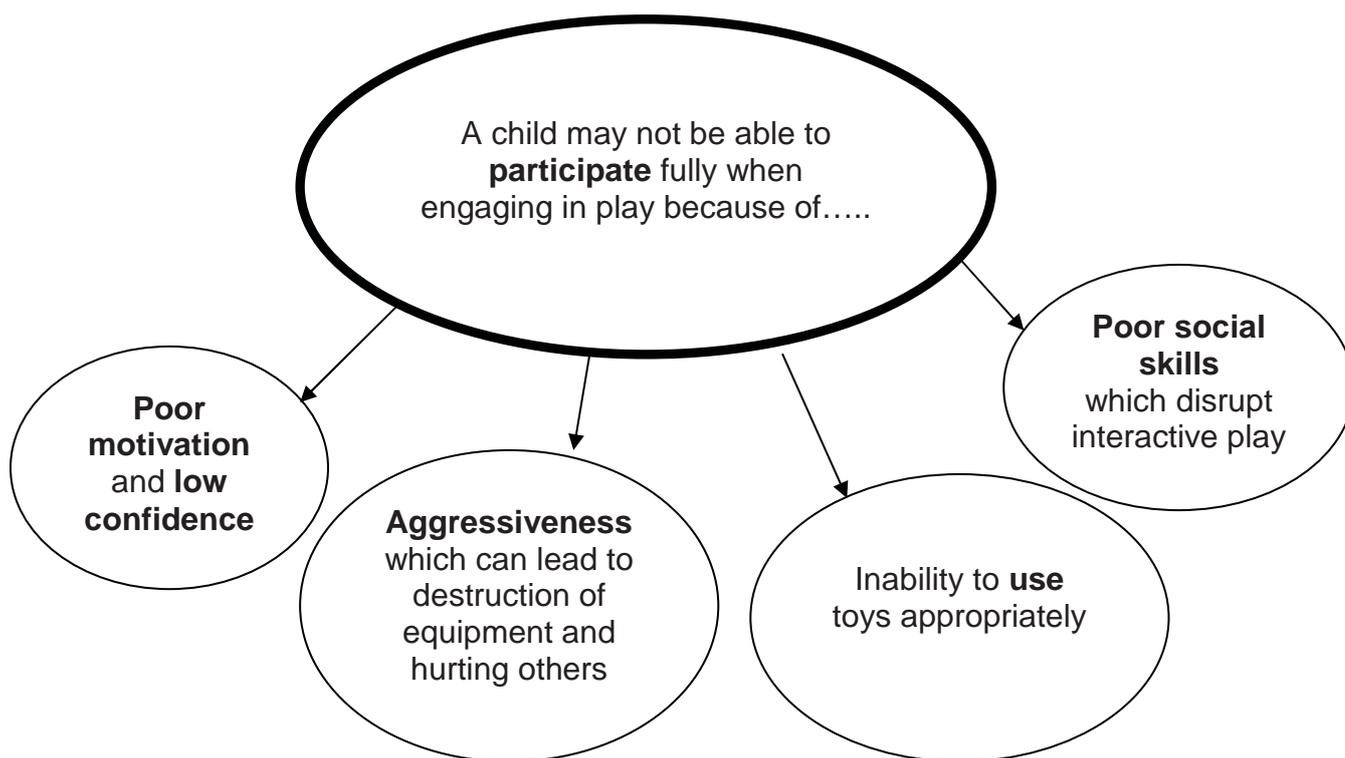
Lucy is a five year old who has a hearing impairment.



She can't hear explanations and so is extremely fearful of new things.



- 6. Emotional, Behavioural and Social Disability:** Behaviour Disorders are conditions that are more than just disruptive behaviour. They are related to mental health problems that affect how the child copes with life stressors which lead to disruptive behaviour, emotional and social problems. Below are **some examples** of difficulties experienced by children with an emotional, behavioural and social disability and how it impacts on their play skills:



EXAMPLES

Little confidence

Aileen is a three year old girl with cerebral palsy and finds it difficult to reach and grasp things with her hands unless they have large handles or knobs to grasp. She found playing with small puzzles very frustrating as she was unable to take the pieces out. This affected her confidence and resulted in her refusing to play with puzzles. To increase her self confidence her mum found wooden puzzles that had extra-large knobs. This made it easier for her to get the pieces in and out independently.



Not motivated

Vygot is a four year old with Down Syndrome who finds it difficult to follow through with challenging activities and attempt new activities independently. To motivate him his mother attempts to offer him a choice of new vs. old and easy vs. challenging play opportunities. She provides him with extra support when he is engaging in new and challenging play activities.



Being aggressive

Shaun is a five year old boy with Lesch - Nyhan disease. He becomes aggressive following positive play interactions with others, if the child or adult person gets too close physically. Shaun will pinch or hit the other child or adult.



Being reluctant to share

Jason is a four year old with an intellectual disability. He has difficulties with sharing his toys and making joint decisions with others.

**Being unwilling to take turns**

Shauna is a five year old girl with Rett's syndrome who loves to have a lot of space and to play with toys by herself. When other children want to take turns in playing with her toys she will bite her hand in frustration.



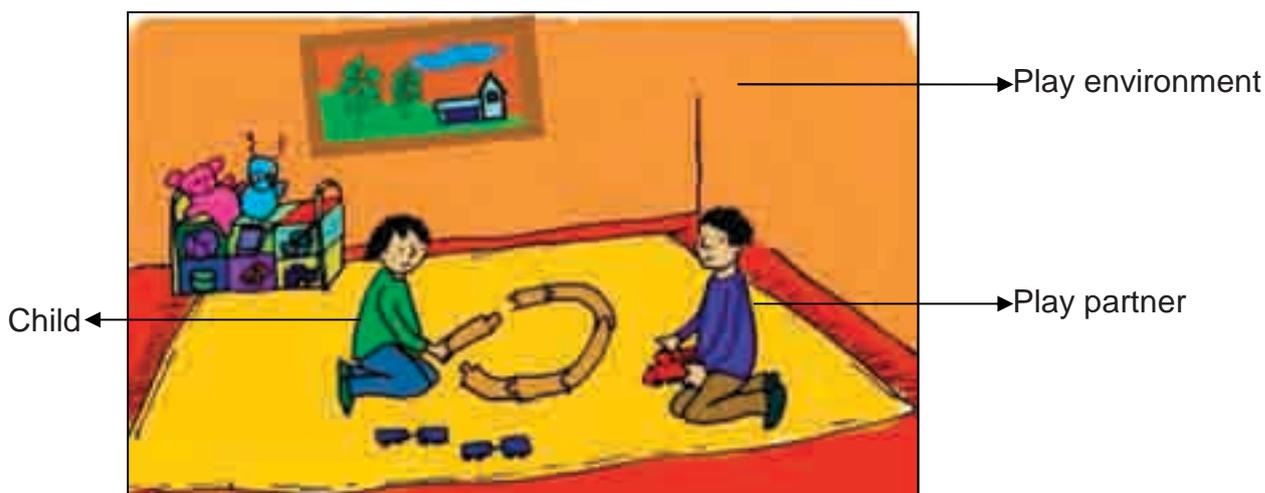
Inability to give and read non verbal signals

Nula is a five year old with Autism and has difficulties with expressing and understanding non verbal communication. Nula appears to be aloof, displaying almost complete indifference to other children who are playing with her because of this lack of understanding. Hence, she doesn't pick up when they are bored or frustrated or excited.



Topic 5 – Play Space Model

The play space model focuses on the inter-relationship between the **child**, the **play environment** and the **play partner**. The **connection** between how the child feels in the play environment and with the play partner is crucial. A child must feel **safe and secure**, so that play may proceed and learning may occur. The play space model outlines various techniques and skills that can be implemented to help the child learn through play.

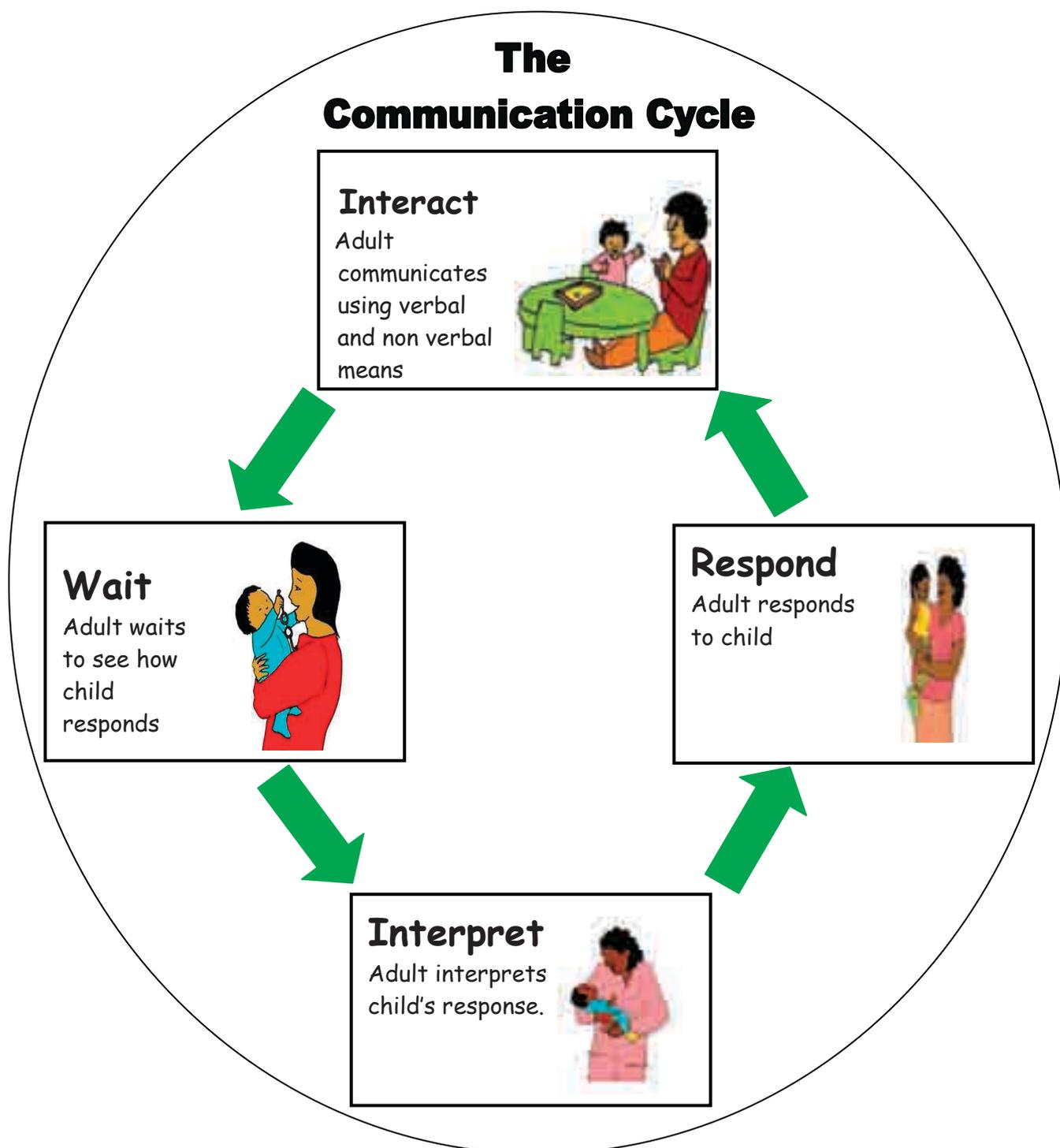


On the following pages techniques and skills that can be incorporated into the three components of the play space model are described:

1. **Play partner**
2. **Play environment**
3. **Play strategies for the child**

1. PLAY SPACE MODEL → PLAY PARTNER

Children's play can be enhanced by **sensitive and aware** play partners. A play partner can help the child develop their potential by firstly being available for play. Secondly, the play partner must take an **active responsibility** to become skilled in interacting and communicating appropriately. The **communication cycle** below demonstrates the importance of watching, waiting, responding and listening to the child during the play interaction.



Interacting during play

Every play interaction is made up of three phases:

- a) **First phase** greeting the child, informing them of the upcoming play activity
- b) **Middle phase** participating in the play activity
- c) **End phase** finishing the play activity

Effective communication and interaction is necessary in each of these three phases.

Following are strategies that play partners need to incorporate into their interactions when engaging in play activities with children.

a) **First phase**

- Firstly get the **child's attention** before speaking: tap the child's hand, say their name, and get down to the child's eye level.



- Stay still when talking to your child to decrease **distractions**.
- Decrease **background noise**, especially for children with hearing loss.
Turn off music, TV, noisy appliances, close windows and doors.



- Use **visual cues** such as gestures, signs, showing objects, photos, computer line drawings as well as speech to let your child know its playtime.

- **Watch, listen and respond**

Watch your child



Wait for your child to show interest



Listen and respond with appropriate interaction



b) **Middle phase**



What should I do?

HELP YOUR CHILD TO INTERACT

- **Follow your child's lead.**

Once your child chooses a toy, wait to see how they play with it. By waiting, you allow your child to lead the play. If your child plays for a while and then picks up a new toy, follow your child's lead even if you have to stop playing and move on to the next toy.

- **Stay face to face with your child**

Place yourself in your child's line of sight, so they can easily make eye contact with you and see what you are doing. Eye contact is a very important sign of social engagement, and should always be encouraged. If you are behind your child, they can't see what you are doing, and may not be aware that you are part of the interaction.

- ***Join in your child's play***

Help your child with their play by becoming a needed part of it. Play with toys that the child needs help to use. If your child is building a tower, give them the blocks or take turns putting a block on the tower. If your child is driving a car, put a person in the car, or set up a road on the floor. If your child likes rough and tumble play you can play chasing, tickling, tumbling, climbing, and spinning. If your child likes to run sand through her fingers, join her by pouring sand on her hands with a cup. You can play water games and help by filling the containers for the child to pour the water from. You should take only a *short time for your turn in any game*. Children find it hard to wait for their turn. If you take too long the child will lose interest and consequently lose the opportunity to learn how to take turns.

HELP YOUR CHILD TO THINK AND PLAN

- ***Help your child to plan***

You can create opportunities for example, when your child is on a swing, stand in front of her and push her a few times. Then wait to see whether she indicates that she wants more.

- ***Help your child to think***

During play with toys that have similar parts (e.g. blocks, marbles, puzzles etc,) give your child one piece at a time and wait for her to indicate that he wants more. Once your child is familiar with all of the parts of an activity, give your child only part of the object or materials she has requested and wait to see whether she asks for what's missing. For example, when your child is playing with a train set, have all the trains out of her sight at first.

- ***Imitate and model behaviours***

Imitate what the child does with the toys so that she can learn to see connections between the things that people do. This will help her to learn to imitate what he sees. If she is doing something that is inappropriate at all, you can then model the correct behaviour for her, and help her to imitate it. If you want her to learn something new, she can learn more readily if she knows how to imitate your actions.

- ***Do something in a silly or obviously wrong way***

This will help the child to think more about what is going on. For example, when you are playing with a doll house, put the food in the bed instead of putting the baby in the bed.

- ***Use a variety of non verbal cues***

In conjunction with use **speech** use **non verbal cues** to add meaning to the message. This includes **body language** (i.e. facial expressions, proximity, body stance, movement of body, reaching, touching, pointing, eye contact, eye gaze, and gestures) and **key word signing** (for example, Makaton).



- ***Be repetitive***

Be repetitive – use the same language over and over. You can use the same phrase repetitively. *Down it goes, down it goes.* Or you can repeat specific important words – *the car is rolling, roll, roll, rolling fast'*

- ***Limit questions or instructions***

Let the child lead the way with verbal interaction, as this helps her to think and express her ideas for herself.

- ***Speak slowly***

Slow down your rate of speech. The slower you speak, the more easily your child can pick out the important words and their meaning.

- ***Use short words and short sentences***

Children often have a hard time recognising the important words in sentences. It is best to have not too many words. Give the important words a bit more emphasis.

- ***Label your child's actions***

Use verbs and nouns to label the toys and actions. This helps the child to learn the names of the toys and actions, and assists in the development of her expressive language skills. For example, when she picks up a car, you say "car". When he rolls it along, you can say "driving", or "driving the car". As the child develops language skills, you could add more words, such as "driving the car on the road".

- **Talk about what you are doing**

When commenting keep the words and sentences short, use plenty of repetition, and encourage your child to imitate and repeat what you say. For example, while you are pushing a car, say "push car", "I'm pushing the car" or "I'm pushing the car fast"

- ***Expand on your child's language.***

You can expand on your child's own language by modelling new words or more appropriate grammar. By adding more words, you revise and complete your child's speech without directly correcting it. For example, repeat what the child has said, and add a bit more:

Child: 'Train'

Parent: 'Push train'

Child: 'Push train'

Parent: 'Push the train fast'

Child: 'Push train fast'

- ***Keep to the subject***

Only talk about what is happening in the play set up. Use statements to say what is happening. Ask very simple questions, and not too many.

Remember that as the child plays, she is learning to think and communicate. She needs your input to be clear and simple and that is related to her playing activities and toys. A clear and simple model from the play partner will give her an excellent opportunity to develop language skills, both internally by thinking, and externally by speaking and imitating you.

c) End phase

Watch the child carefully to recognise **any signals** indicating that they would like to finish the play activity.

Ask them if they would like to finish the activity and wait for their answer.

- If there is *no response*, ask again.
- If they *still don't respond*, end the activity and
- *observe* their response to confirm.

Tell the child that the play time is now over and finished. *For example, "Time to finish playing" or "Time to pack up"*.

You can use a **sign or gesture** to indicate 'finished'.

Develop a finishing routine to help signal to the child that the play activity is coming to an end.



A SPECIAL NOTE

The greatest **gift** you can give your child is healthy self esteem. Children who feel valuable and who believe in themselves have **positive self esteem**. One of the ways you can help your child feel valuable is by **spending quality time** with him or her and playing games. Children gain their self esteem from the **messages** they receive and through their interactions with the world. Filling your interactions with **positive statements** and providing a **positive environment** is a big step towards building your child's self-esteem. **PRAISE AND ENCOURAGEMENT** are essential vitamins for a child but there is a fundamental difference between them. **Praise** focuses on the end result whereas **encouragement** focuses on the process of what a child does i.e. the effort, participation, improvement or displays of confidence the child exhibits during the learning process. Hence, use a combination of praise and encouragement to provide timely guidance, ongoing reassurance, so that the child feels secure, valued and the confidence to explore and build on their play abilities.

<p>Effort: <i>Tom keeps persisting at riding the scooter</i></p> 	<p>Participation: <i>Jenny helps her mum pack away.</i></p> 	<p>Improvement: <i>Liam is improving his ability to push the truck.</i></p> 	<p>Displays of confidence- <i>Sheila can ride the bike for periods without her dad holding on to her bike.</i></p> 
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2 PLAY SPACE MODEL → PLAY ENVIRONMENT

The following are key factors to consider when setting up the play environment to foster learning and development:

Safety

The play environment should be designed in a way that will keep the child safe but that is not overly restrictive. It is imperative that you examine the area closely and remove anything that could be a danger for the child. *In particular, look carefully for small items such as buttons or tiny toy parts.* Things like this can cause a child to choke.



Set up a specific place

Choose a room or space in your home to use when you play with your child. You could mark the play space by a large mat, quilt or throw rug to enable the child to detect the area easily. The size of the area should ensure that your child is close to you while having enough room to move around.

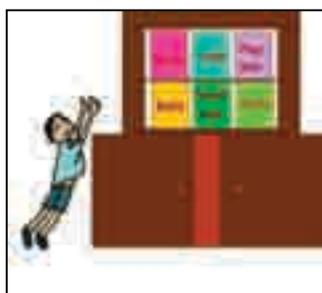
Storing toys

Toys and objects in the play environment should be kept in predictable positions, labelled and should be easy to access. This can expand the child's understanding of the environment.



Where to keep the toys

Keep the toys stored in boxes and/or cupboards that the child can actually reach. The child can learn to get the toys out themselves for play. This will promote the child's involvement in making decisions as to what they want to play with. The child may need some guidance and assistance from the play partner. If there is a toy or activity that you particularly wish your child to play with, put it right at their eye level, at the front. Toys that you wish to leave out at any time can be kept at the back, or be put in another room before the play session. It would be helpful to have the toy boxes in a lockable cupboard so that you can lock them away when necessary. If they are at child height, they could be pulled out when it is not really the right time.



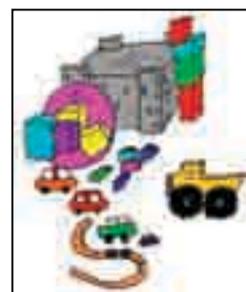
It may not be easy for children with physical disabilities to engage in spontaneous play (e.g. locate a toy → move to it → pick it up → play with it), so you will need to give your child any assistance they may need to help them enjoy playing. To ensure that the child doesn't miss out on the opportunities to play with a variety of toys and make choices you will need to bring the toys to them. Make sure that the child can play with the toys in a variety of positions such as side-lying or on a wheelchair tray.

Selecting the right level of stimulation

The play environment should not be *under stimulating* as that can create boredom.



Too much stimulation from the play environment creates uncertainty and chaos



The play environment needs to provide just the right amount of stimulation. Children in overly stimulating environments may have trouble focusing on one particular activity or easily become upset.

Storage and labelling

To help children find and put away materials themselves, materials should be stored in consistent places in the room, on low shelves or on the floor, and in containers that a child can see into and handle. Similar items are stored together. Shelves and containers have labels that make sense to children; for example, the labels might contain words, drawings, tracings of the object, photos, or an example of the actual object.



Limit Distractions

- Make sure that *you* are the most interesting thing in the play environment.
- Limit sounds, smells, sights and other sensations in the space. These can compete for your child's attention.
- Reduce the distractions by turning off the TV and other noisemakers.
- Dim the lights, avoid clutter, and put away other distracting things.
- Make sure to have only a few toys available at a time. If your child tends to become overly distracted with toys or sounds in the room, remove them before you play with your child. The more things there are in the space the more distractions there are for your child. Extra toys can be stored in a toys box, closet, shelves or bins.
- Help your child attend to you by taking out one toy at a time and putting the toy away when your child has finished playing with it.

Rotate toys

Many children are interested in a toy for a few weeks and then become tired of it. Too many toys can also be distracting for the child. Instead of buying toys all the time, rotate the toys on a regular basis. Separate your child's toys into several groups. Have only one group of toys available at a time. Once your child loses interest in that group of toys, put them away and bring out the next group. Children tend to remain most engaged when toys are rotated every 2-3 weeks.

Rotating toys

•Separate all the toys into groups



•Use 1 group for 2 – 3 weeks



•Bring out the next group

Encourage different types of play

- *Exploratory play* — string, glue, play dough water
- *Constructive play* (making things) — blocks, tubes, boxes, fabric pieces
- *Dramatic play* — dress-up clothes, suitcases, pots and pans, dolls
- *Games* — materials like cards, paper, counters, and dice that children can use to make-up their own simple games

Play outside whenever possible

It is extremely beneficial for a child's physical and psychological health to play as much as possible outdoors. Children need to have time away from artificial lights and electronic gadgets. They need fresh air and sunlight and the plants and animals to be a constantly recurring feature of their daily lives.



Positioning of the child

Children with disabilities often have difficulty changing and maintaining different positions when they play. The positions that a child can use greatly impact the level and quality of play.

By being supported in a sitting position, the child can more readily engage with toys. You can discuss with a physiotherapist or an occupational therapist about supports that are available to help the child play in different positions.

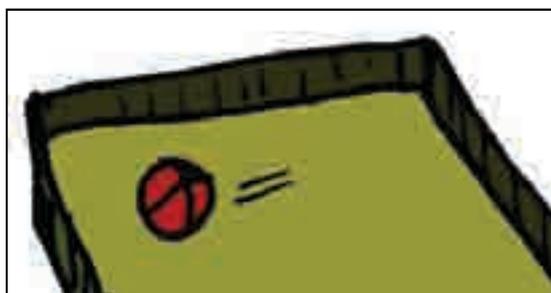
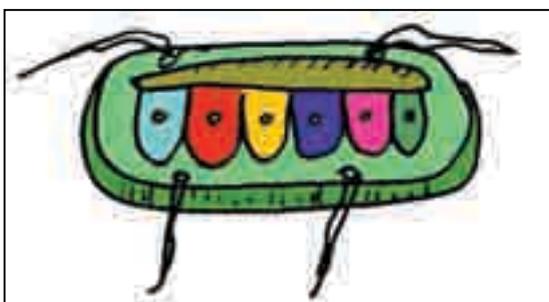
It is important that the child has the necessary physical supports so that they can focus on playful interactions and not spend their energy on maintaining a suitable position. Work out the most comfortable position for the child. It may be that additional supports are necessary to help the child stay comfortably in a particular position.

If the child has more than one position option of play, it may be possible to choose a support that will allow the child to be mobile in the play environment.



Positioning of the toys

When setting up the play environment ensure that the child can reach the toy. If necessary, stabilise the toy so that it stays in a certain position. You could add non-slip material or Velcro to the bottom of the toy. Make sure that the toy stays within the reach of the child, perhaps confining the toy so it stays in reach in a box or container.



3 PLAY SPACE MODEL → PLAY STRATEGIES FOR THE CHILD

To help your child **MOVE** forward in developing their play skills we need to consider the following:

- **My emerging play types and stages**
- **Opportunity for participation during play**
- **Visual systems used during play**
- **Materials used during play**

PLAY SPACE MODEL → PLAY STRATEGIES FOR THE CHILD → **MOVE** → *My emerging play types and stages*

All children with and without disabilities develop at **different rates**. Hence, in this booklet we emphasise the 'play stages' and 'play types' and **not ages**.

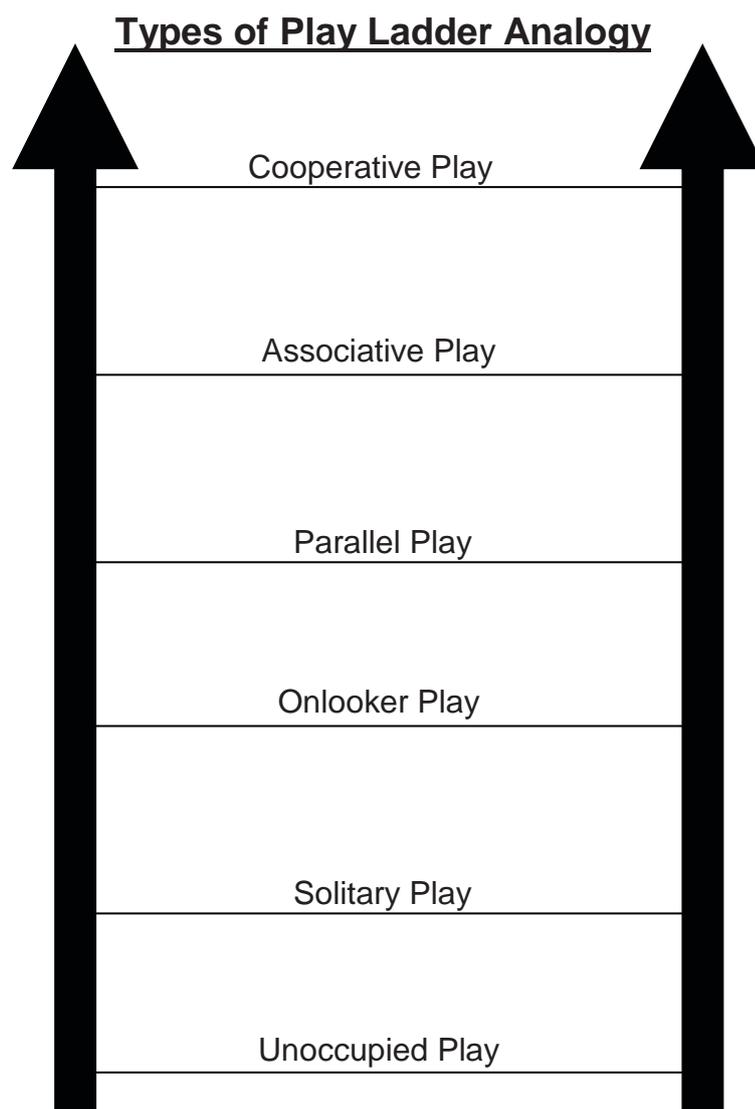
Play Types - How children become aware of others and relate to other people is called **social development**. As a child grows older, she develops the skills to **relate** with other children and adults. There are **definable types** to be observed in this development. Children with disabilities **need explicit guidance** to learn how to play and interact appropriately with others.

Play Stages - Each aspect of play passes through a **series of stages**. The **mastery** of the skills in each stage moves the child's development forward into the next stage. The **length of time** it takes for a child to move from one stage to another is dependent on the child. It is important to be **aware** of the emerging play stages so that you will know what to expect to see in your child's development and progress. It is **not possible to force** a child into the next stage of development in play. You can help your child to **practise** and become secure in their abilities, and when they seem to be growing bored and disinterested, then you can carefully introduce suitable toys and experiences to lead them into the next emerging play stage.

The emerging types of play and stages of play, for learning and for the growth of social skills, are set out in the following pages.

My emerging play type

For many children with disabilities **acquisition** of the different types of play skills may be earlier or later or it may develop in a different sequence. To understand the different types of play skills the analogy of a '**types of play ladder**' will be used. Each **rung (step)** on the play ladder represents a different type of play. The child starts climbing the play ladder at the bottom rung and then climbs to the next rung ...then to the next ... at their own pace. The play skills learnt at each rung are **built upon and extended** upon as the child moves to the next rung. Please note: The 'types of play ladder' analogy is not meant to indicate that children move sequentially through the rungs on the play ladder, but rather to provide a **framework** to help you determine what is the 'first step' and/or what is the 'next step' when supporting the child to develop play skills. For example, if a child seems to be engaged in solitary play, then the play partner might want to facilitate or model parallel play.



Unoccupied Play



Child appears to be uninvolved in any play:

- moves around randomly
- makes random movements with no clear purpose

Solitary Play



Child shows no interest in play with /alongside others near her:

- plays by herself
- plays with different toys to the other children
- totally focused on her own play
- no interest in joining or interfering with the play of others

Onlooker Play



Child may sit or stand near others:

- observes their play
- might ask questions or talk to the children
- doesn't join in the play

Parallel Play



Child begins to play her own game near to other children:

- plays with similar or identical toys used by other children nearby
- shows interest in what others are doing
- leaves or joins the group as she pleases

Associative Play



Children play together without any organisation or rules:

- toys may be borrowed and lent
- child may sit side by side with another child and do the same thing as the other child
- children play within a group but do not play according to the rules of the activity or game.

Co-operative Play

Child's play involves ongoing interaction with other children in the activity or game:

- sharing of toys and ideas for games
- children discuss what they would like to do in their game
- the rules are discussed and agreed on
- children work together to deal with problems
- there is a sense of what is fair and acceptable behaviour from the group



TIPS FOR ENCOURAGING OTHER TYPES OF PLAY

You need to first observe and work out your child's current type of play. You can then help your child develop, extend and progress their play type by employing the following steps to facilitate learning:

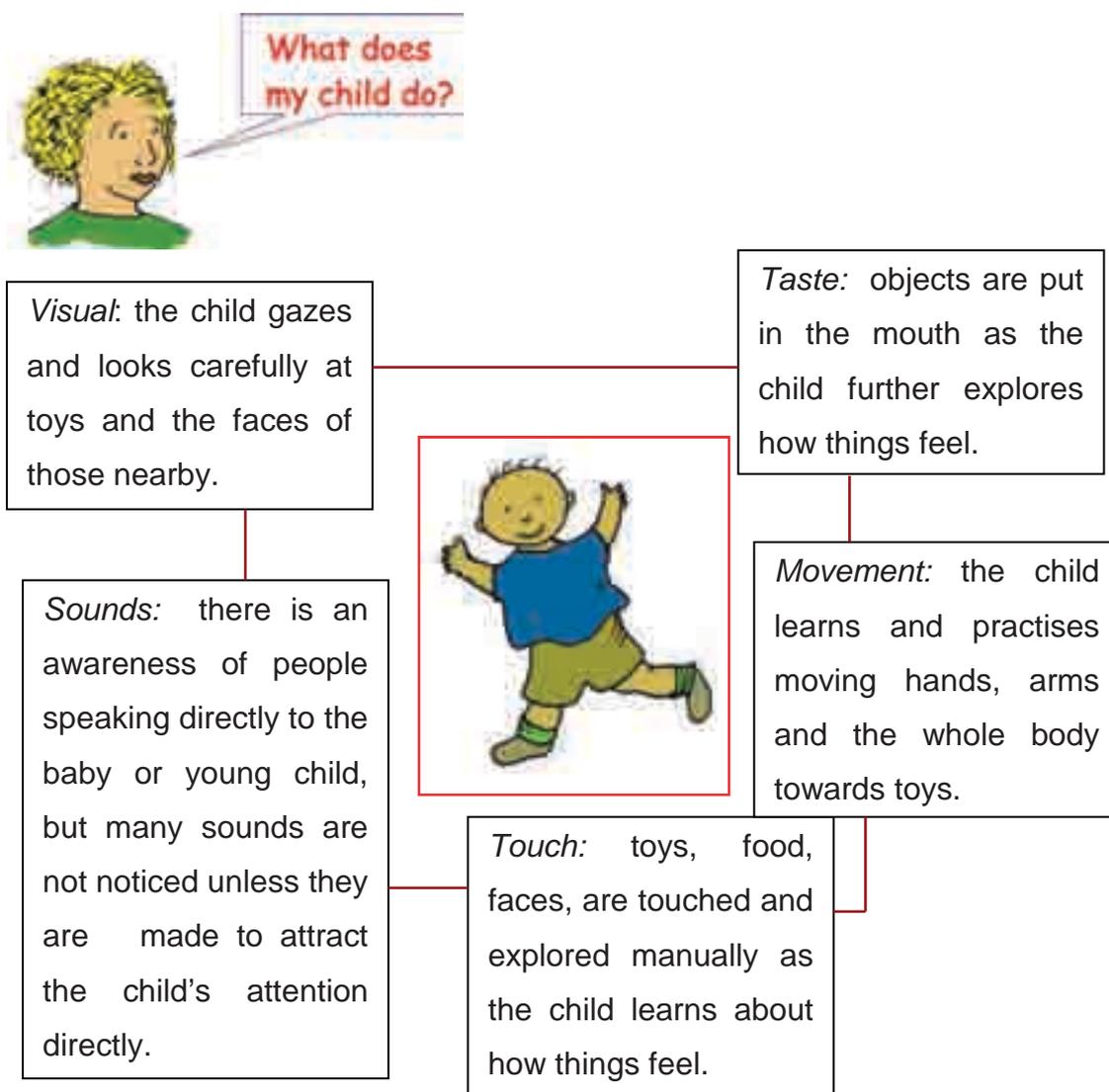
Step 1: Provide modeling – As you model the ‘type of play’ give verbal descriptions of the steps involved in the play, the actions and reactions. You can also give a brief explanation of the importance of the skill.

Step 2: Provide guided practice – Provide the child with opportunities to practice or rehearse the ‘type of play’ in structured games and play activities. You can coach the child through the steps using the strategies outlined in the ‘**Play partner → Interacting during play**’ section. For the more complex types of play have a theme. Themes can be taken from daily life situations such as a birthday party for dolls, pretending to go shopping at the grocery store or going on the train. Play themes can be taken from your child’s favourite story books. Use simple props to help build your child’s imagination and creativity.

Provide the child with multiple opportunities to practice the skill in small, structured groups with same-age peers if appropriate in a comfortable, fun, and supportive environment. Initially you may have the child practising these skills with a play partner and then proceed to practising with peers.

Please contact your local **speech pathologist** (speech therapist). The speech pathologist can perform specific assessments in order to find out which areas of play appear to be difficult for your child. Based on the assessment the speech pathologist can provide information and strategies to help your child develop play skills.

My emerging play stage → Stage 1 → Exploring with the senses



NOTE: When young children investigate objects by putting them in their mouth, this is known as “mouthing”. It is one way in which the child finds out about the qualities of an object. The child will put anything into his mouth before he has developed sufficiently to be able to discard this particular response. The young child is not able to decide whether or not it is actually safe to put any particular item in his mouth. Anything he picks up will be checked out by the mouth, and so it is absolutely essential that there are **NO SMALL ITEMS LEFT ON THE FLOOR OR IN ACCESSIBLE PLACES** as choking is a very real danger. It is essential to be constantly checking and to be aware of where things are on the floor and tables, bookcases and so on.



You need to think carefully about what your child likes to play with, and also what the child needs to experience in order to further their learning and development. You also need to interact with your child, and observe their reactions to the toys so that your child is not over stimulated, bored or upset. Remember what appeals to one child could upset another. It is always essential to tune in to the child's thoughts and feelings, and give them what is best for their happiness as well as his development.

Visual

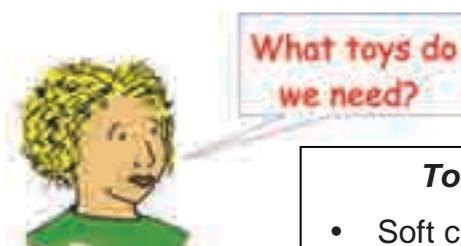
- give opportunities for the child to look at colourful objects
- move the toys around where he can see them moving

Touch

- have a variety of toys that look, sound and feel different
- hold or put toys where the child needs to reach out or move to get them

Sound

- listen to the child's sounds and imitate them, help her to hear your voice
- talk to her about what she is doing , talk to her about what you are doing
- make sounds , sing songs, clap hands, whisper, be noisy, be soft
- seek to attract your child's attention and participation in making sounds.



Visual

- Brightly/dull coloured toys
- Mobiles and hanging soft toys
- Shiny, metallic things and mirrors.

Touch

- Soft cuddly toys
- Toys that vibrate
- Variety of different textured toys e.g. rough, smooth, slippery
- Crinkly materials: cellophane, bubble wrap
- Wet washers, water in the sink or bath or outside in a suitable container

Sound

- Toys with an inbuilt sound
- Toys that make a loud noise
- Toy instruments e.g. drum, xylophone
- Spoons, saucepan lids
- Toys that play music
- Sing-along CDs



Visual Activities

- *Play with balloons:* watch the balloon grow and pop, watch and chase it around the room as the air rushes out
- *Blow Bubbles:* watch the bubbles float in the air, try to catch them.
- *Play Peek a Boo:* hiding games behind curtains and furniture
- *Play with the baby in the mirror:* make funny faces, try different hats and glasses, sing action songs and watch the actions
- *Look at Books:* big pictures are best, pop ups and fold outs are good

Touch Activities

- *Play in sand:* lots of toys to put sand in, buckets, spades, cups, boxes, trucks, make roads, dig holes, build castles, stick flowers in a sand garden
- *Play with rice, pasta, seeds:* filling and pouring games, sorting, measuring
- *Play dough:* make shapes with fingers, with cut out shapes, roll on the table, make model animals, squeeze and pull, bang it flat, make a ball
- *Play with water:* pouring, washing toys, washing up, playing with soap bubbles, boats, water wheel, balls, toys in the bath

Sound Activities

- *Clap and bang loudly:* toy drum, action songs, foot stamping
- *Yell out:* across the room, across the yard
- *Play whispering games:* dolly is asleep, sing softly, listen carefully
- *Sing:* anywhere, anytime, join in the actions



My emerging play stage → Stage 2 → *Exploring Function*



The child investigates a toy to see how it works, and what it does



Firstly the child experiments by banging toys together, tipping out the contents of containers, and knocking blocks down

The child comes to understand what a toy actually is supposed to do and learns then how to use the toy as it is meant to be used

This develops an understanding of cause and effect, that a particular action produces a certain result.



You need to provide plenty of opportunities in the general course of daily life for your child to practice doing things that show cause and effect. In this way your child can learn that their actions have an effect on what they can achieve. Your child can also begin to learn and understand how things work.

- Show your child how one action causes a certain predictable result:
 - if your child tips out all the blocks, the box becomes empty
 - if your child hits different bars on the xylophone, different notes are heard
 - if your child presses a certain button on a toy, it will play a song
- As much as possible, let your child discover these results for themselves. The toy can be explained and demonstrated initially, and then they should be allowed to explore it for themselves.
- Help your child to learn about what is in the various rooms of the house:
 - tipping out a drawer of clothes, or pulling over a pile of magazines
 - the obvious activity to follow this is to put everything back where it should be, and you can play counting and naming games relating to what you are doing whilst doing that.
 - banging saucepan lids to make a noise, and showing your child how to put them away when she has finished
- Talk to your child, explaining what is going on
- Let your child do as much for themselves, because this is how a child learns

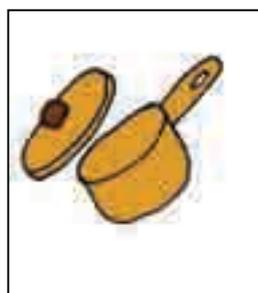
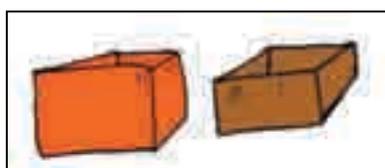




Look for toys that require a simple action from the child. Examples include push button toys, skittles, blocks, beginner hammering sets, spinning tops, musical instruments, shapes into shape containers and simple shape puzzles.



Also use things around the house such as kitchen stacking bowls, saucepans, drawers containing clothing which can be taken out and put back in. Cardboard boxes are always useful for putting toys in and then tipping them out. Children like to put themselves in a box too, and tip it over so that they fall out.





- Build block towers and knock them down
- Bang and stamp to make a noise
- Bang on musical instruments
- Put toys into a box and then tip them out
- Fill a buckets and cups with sand or water and then tip it out
- Empty my drawers and then put the clothes back in
- Take my clothes off and put them on
- Turn pages of a story book
- Lift up flaps to see the picture underneath
- Play with noisy toys
- Push buttons to make a toy work



My emerging play stage → Stage 3 → Combining, Sorting and Building



The child starts to combine things that naturally go together, such as bucket and spade, cup and water.

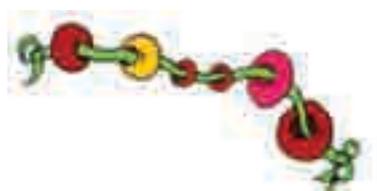
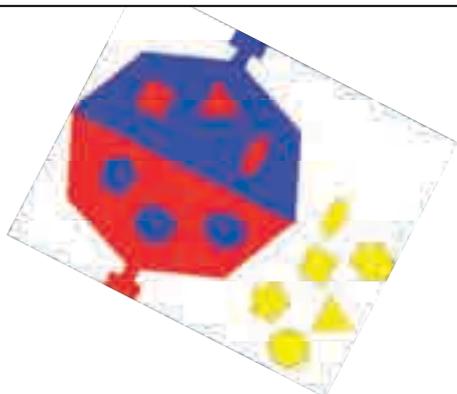
The child begins to think about what she wants to do, which means that she begins to plan and use her imagination to reach a desired goal.

The child discovers more complicated ways of putting things together and can handle and manipulate objects in a number of different ways.



The child's play is more organized and purposeful as she tries to achieve what she has thought about.

The child learns to recognize shapes and handling shaped puzzle pieces. The child can begin to string large beads. The child can make towers, and can work out how to make a lego tower remain stable with the right manipulation of the pieces.



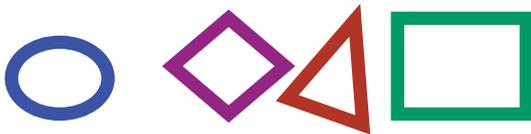


- Talk to your child about what she is doing.
- You may need to demonstrate a few times, slowly and deliberately so that your child can see what to do.
- Never take over and complete tasks for your child. Just help your child along so that she feels she has been successful.
- Give plenty of encouragement.
- Avoid negative comments. If things go wrong, just have another go, or put the toys away for the time being.
- Help your child to build a bigger tower or find materials of various colours.
- Take turns to build, fill, empty, etc.
- Provide plenty of opportunities to practise those things that your child finds difficult.
- You need to be aware of what is achievable and make sure that the toys and your expectations are suited to your child's capabilities.
- Be patient and wait while your child works out how to manipulate pieces and where to put them.





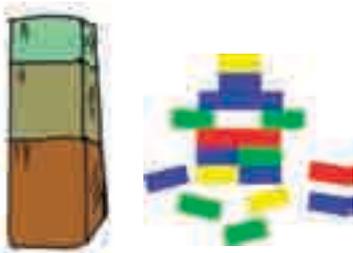
Shape toys and puzzles based on geometric shapes: square, circle, triangle etc.



Simple picture puzzles

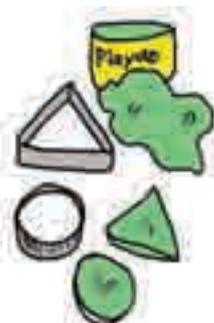


Blocks and boxes of all sizes for stacking, building towers, getting in, etc



Commence with simple toys, to begin with and then move on to more complex toys.

Playdough and shape cutters

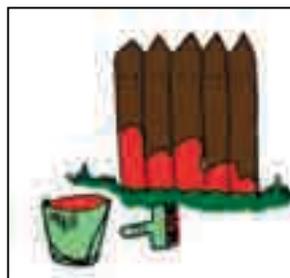


Water toys to fill and empty, bubble blowing kit, small boats, water wheels

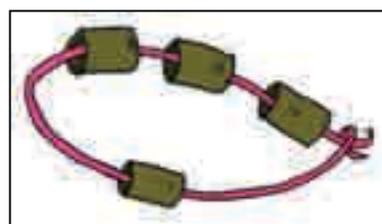




- Play with water....paint the fence, paint the path, play in the bath with my toys, practise washing up, wash my dolls, play with bubbles.



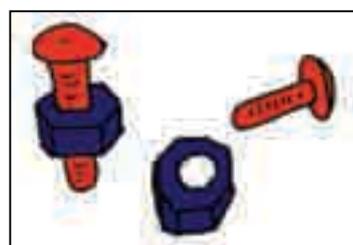
- Make threaded necklaces with big beads; thread pasta pieces, toilet rolls, big beads; thread onto plastic string, shoelaces, string.



- Put sand or flour , rice or seeds into buckets and bowls.



- Play with plastic nuts and bolts. Learn to screw a nut and bolt together.



- Play with blocks, puzzles and boxes.

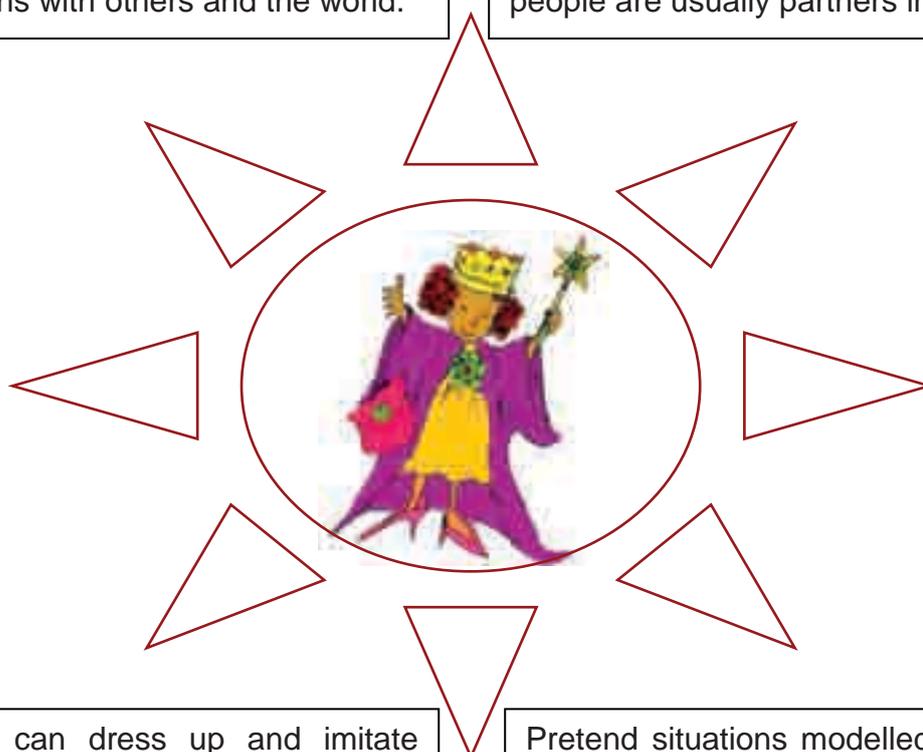


My emerging play stage → Stage 4 → Imitating and Pretending



The development of imitation and imaginative pretend play contributes to a child's awareness of herself and of others. It helps the child make connections with others and the world.

The child plays pretend games where she is pretending to do what she normally does, such as go to sleep, eat something, do her hair and share pretend food. Teddies, dolls and real people are usually partners in this type of play.



Children can dress up and imitate someone else, either a real person, or a character on TV. They like to utilize adult clothing and accessories.

Pretend situations modelled on real life are acted out. A child can set out a blanket and make a picnic, or take some kitchen bowls and spoons to do some cooking. A child can imitate and pretend to be a driver in a car, a lawn mower man, a postman.



To encourage a child to connect with their world and the people in it you should think about the following points and keep them in mind as you help your child.

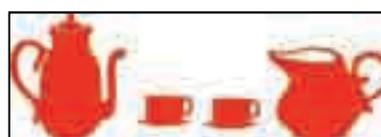
- **Talk to your child** - Ask questions about what they are doing, who they are and why are they doing things a certain way.
- **Show your child what to do** - Act out ideas that your child can copy. Imitate songs and actions on TV and help your child to do the actions too.
- **Provide suitable toys and dressing up clothes** - Toys that are small versions of household equipment, such as kitchen utensils, cups and plates. You can also provide things such as small vacuum cleaners, lawn mowers and garden equipment.
- **Join in with the pretending** - Children really enjoy sharing their pretend cups of tea and biscuits. If your child is dressed as Spider Man, call your child, “Spider Man”, or “Your Majesty” for a queen.





- **Toys used to imitate adult activities:**

- lawn mower, wheelbarrow
- gardening implements
- vacuum cleaner, stove, kitchen gadgets
- kitchen equipment: bowls, plastic cutlery, cups, plates, food
- broom, mop, telephone
- empty food containers: boxes, packets etc.



- **Moving toys:**

- ride on bikes and scooters
- toy cars and trucks
- prams and strollers



- **Dress up outfits:**

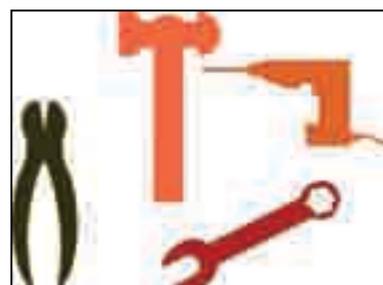
- doctor and nurse uniforms
- various caps and hats
- scarves, sunglasses, handbags, shoes
- sparkly tops, stripey tops, brightly coloured jewellery
- coats, feather boa, furry slippers

- **Soft toys**

- dolls, teddies various toy animals

- **Special sets**

- doctor set
- carpenter set
- tea set
- doll's house





- Be the driver with my cars and trucks
- Play with my cars on the floor.
- Ride my bike, which is my car/bus/train.
- I like to make car noises as I go along.



Brrrrooom
Brrrrooom...



- Play pretend shops.
- Play pretend doctors or pretend teachers.



- Have a tea party with my teddies and Mummy too.
- Take my dolls and teddies for walks in their pram.
- Put my teddies and dolls to bed for their nap.



OTHER AREAS OF PLAY

There are **three** other extremely important areas where play is absolutely essential to your child's well being. You need to think carefully about what your child can do in each of these three areas, and also of what you can do to help your child develop skills and competence in each. It is through these activities that both children and adults can grow and express themselves. This is important because it brings better contentment, satisfaction and happiness into life. Help your child to do what he can, and seek expert advice when needed so that she can grow towards her potential and live a happy life.

CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

Encourage these activities to give your child means of creative expression.

- drawing, painting
- craft activities
- singing
- dancing
- drama, pretending



MUSIC

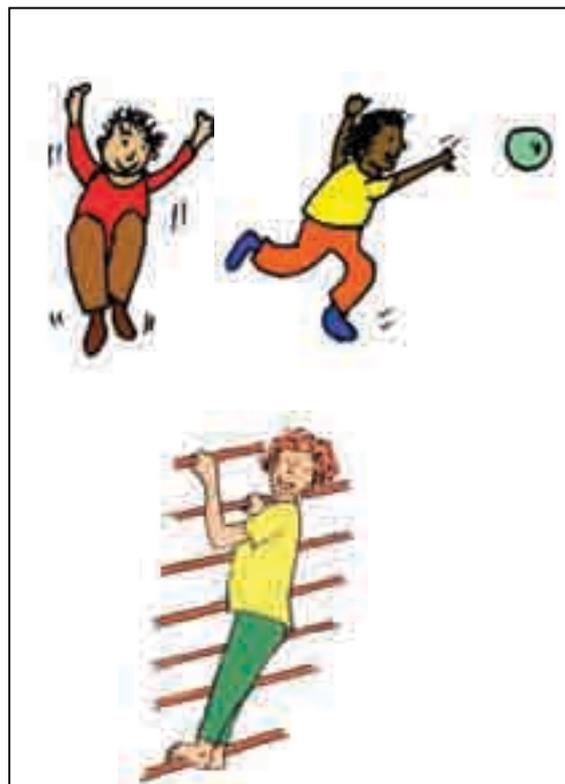
Music facilitates the development of communication, sensori-motor, cognitive, emotional and social skills. For example,

- Repetition reinforces learning (e.g. internalise the sounds and patterns of learning)
- Rhythmic beats help coordination
- Patterns guide in anticipating what comes next
- Helps the child make the connection between the words of the songs - movement and its meaning
- Music enhances attending skills
- Music has a calming and relaxing effect



PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES

Children love to move. They need to run, jump, climb, slide, chase, swing, roll, throw, move and experiment with their bodies. These activities give their bodies an opportunity for healthy development. They also provide opportunities for children to spend time out of doors, and this is very important for their well being. Those children whose movements are restricted can be encouraged and assisted to enjoy outdoor activities that give them pleasure and practice in the movements of which they are capable.



READING

It is important that you read a variety of books with your child. When choosing a book to read you need to consider the following features:

- Match your child's reading ability, age and interests;
- Be appealing to your child (e.g. have sensory features – tactually, visually, auditory; olfactory etc.)
- It needs to be well illustrated
- It needs to contain print big enough so that it can be seen easily
- Be predictable
- Be written using appropriate language
- Consist of repeated patterns such as repetitive words, phrases, sentences
- Consist of appealing pictures to support the written information
- Contain rhythm and rhyme
- Be attractive, fun and interesting



PLAY SPACE MODEL → PLAY STRATEGIES FOR THE CHILD → MOVE → *Opportunity for participation during play*

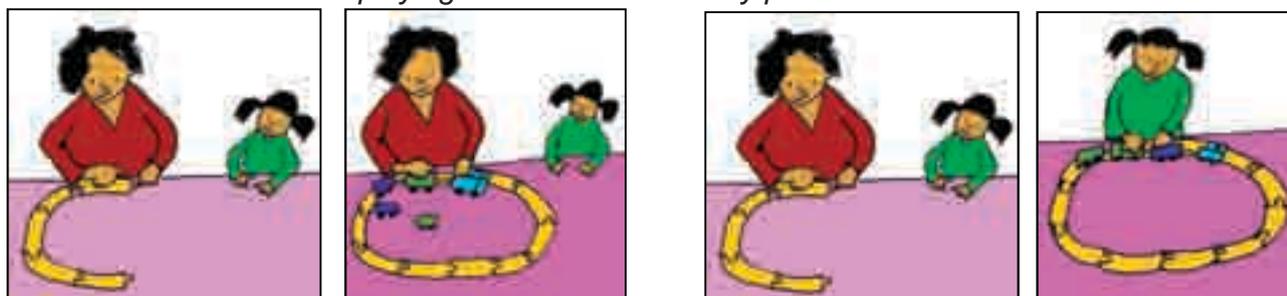
Participation is defined as the nature and extent of a child's involvement in activities. Children's emerging play types and stages can be enhanced by sensitive and aware play partners who help the child develop their potential by promoting the child's participation in the play activity, not by doing everything for them. Participation in an activity can be categorised into three levels:

1. **Observer participation** - The child **does not actively participate** in the activity but observes the play activity.
2. **Partial participation** - The child **participates in one or more steps** in the play activity but does not necessarily do all the steps.
3. **Complete participation** - The child **participates in the entire play activity** with or without support.

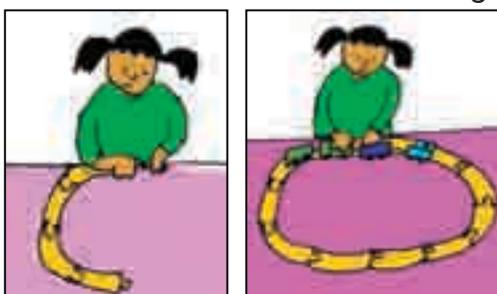
Depending on the play activity the child can engage as an observer or partial or complete participant. You can help the child move through the levels, by **gradually** increasing the child's level of participation i.e. the length of time spent playing or number of steps the child carries out in the play activity.

Playing with a train set

Level 1 – Jenny observes mum setting the train tracks and playing with the train. Level 2– Mum sets up the train track, then Jenny puts the train on the track and drives it.



Level 3 - Jenny sets up the track, assembles the train and drives it along the track



A SPECIAL NOTE

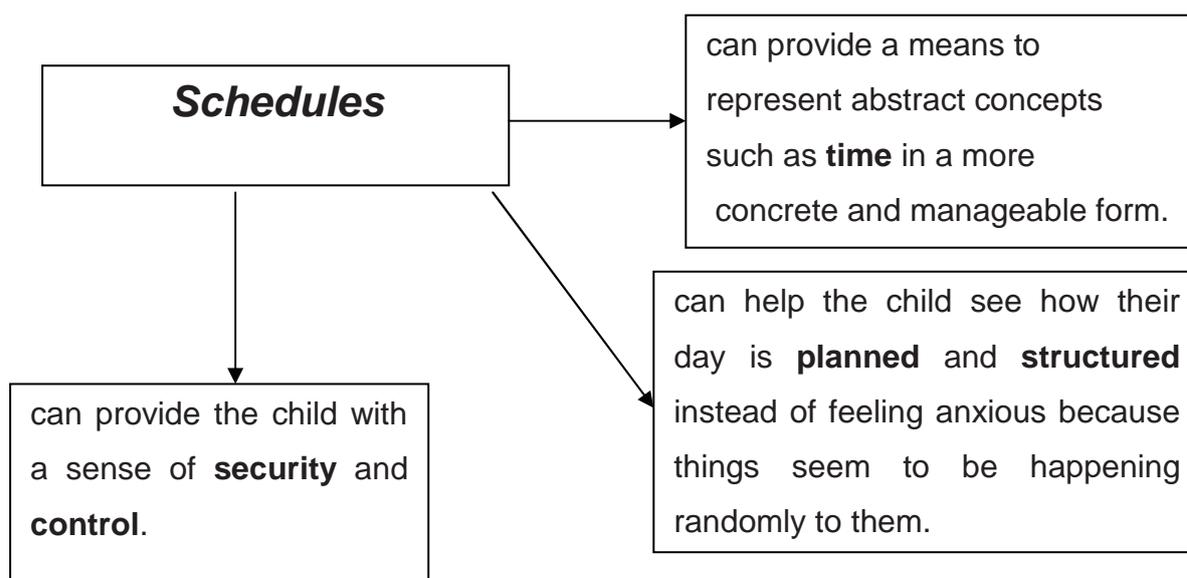
Whatever your child's level of participation i.e. observer or partial or complete participant remember to use the strategies outlined in the **'Play partner → 'Interacting during play'** section.



PLAY SPACE MODEL → PLAY STRATEGIES FOR THE CHILD → MOVE → *Visual Systems used during play*

1 VISUAL SYSTEM - Schedules

A schedule is a visual system that provides information about the **sequence and order of activities** in a particular time period.



You can use object symbols or photos or computer line drawings to represent the items in the schedule. The pictures are placed on the chart by using Velcro on the chart and on the back of each picture card. You can have a set of cards for each day so that all the various activities can be represented. Laminating each card will help to protect it for longer. Keep the cards always in the same safe place, and as your child becomes more familiar with the system they can take the cards for the day and put them on the chart.

An **important** activity in the daily schedule should be play. Children with disabilities need to have **opportunities** within their day to play. It is a good idea to set aside **regular short periods** each day when you ‘play’ with your child. Some children do become frustrated when their parents try to play with them. You can help your child get used to playing with you by **scheduling times** to play everyday. This will help your child **anticipate** playtime by keeping it predictable. This predictability will **form recognition** of daily events and help the child feel that life begins to make sense which will help the child acquire the concept of time and stability.

The daily schedule shows the **big picture** for the day and is generally not specific. The schedule may say, “playtime” but that may be anything for example playing with puzzles, trains, blocks, playing outside etc. Consider **how many** activities you will display on the schedule at the one time; for example, morning activities vs. the entire day’s activities. When an activity has **finished** the child can remove the picture symbol and put it in a finished envelope/box. Alternatively, the child can turn the picture around to indicate that the activity has finished.

DAILY SCHEDULE: Morning. Afternoon, Night Activities

Morning 	Get dressed 	breakfast 	hair and teeth 	play 
Afternoon 	Lunch  sleep 	snack 	play 	reading 
Night 	TV 	dinner 	bath 	bed 

Keep finished cards in special envelope or box

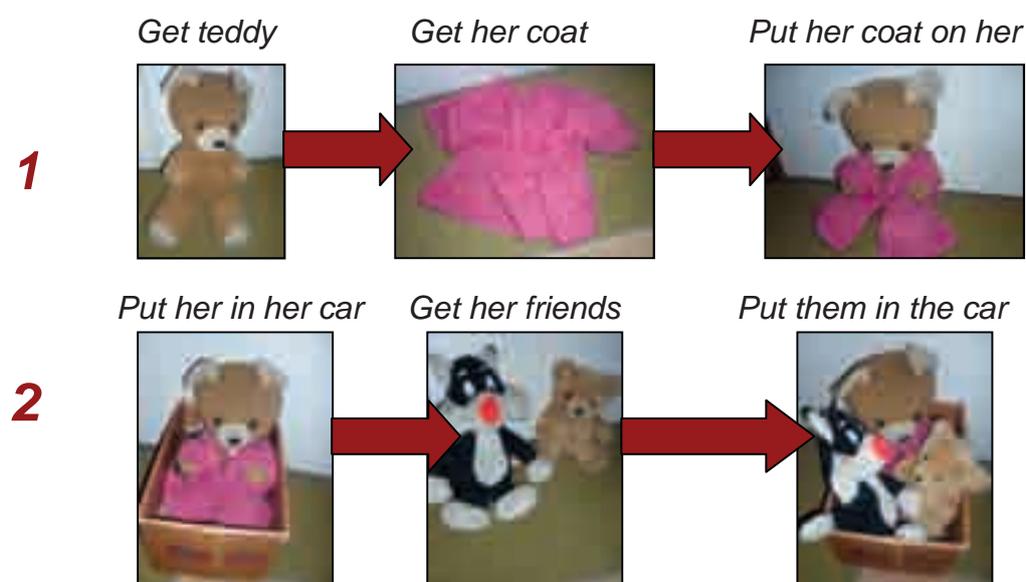
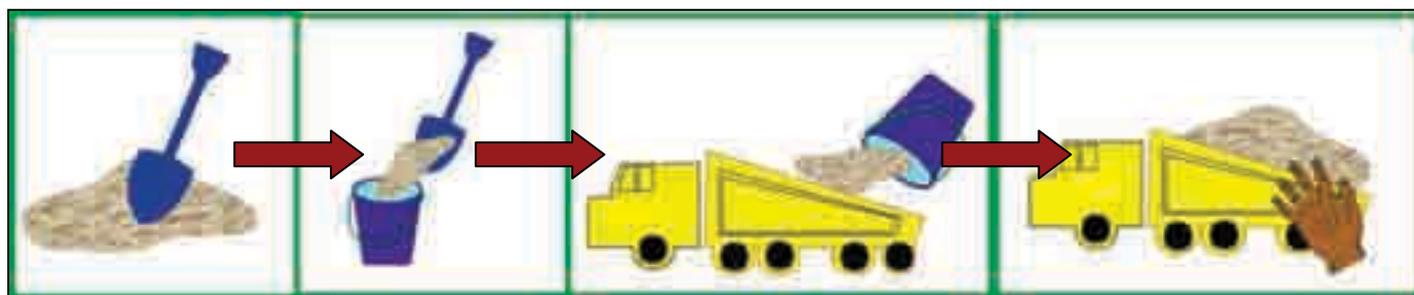


2 VISUAL SYSTEM - Mini Schedule

A mini schedule is a visual system that can help your child **learn** how to play, by breaking a play activity according to their emergent play stage, into **small, teachable steps**. The **size and number of steps** will vary depending on the complexity of the task and the child's abilities. Each step should be **simple and easily understood** by your child. For example, playing with sand is very general, but 'put the spade into the sand', 'lift some sand into the bucket', "tip the sand into the truck" and 'push the truck" defines the precise steps within the "play with sand" instruction.

Examples of Play Mini Schedules

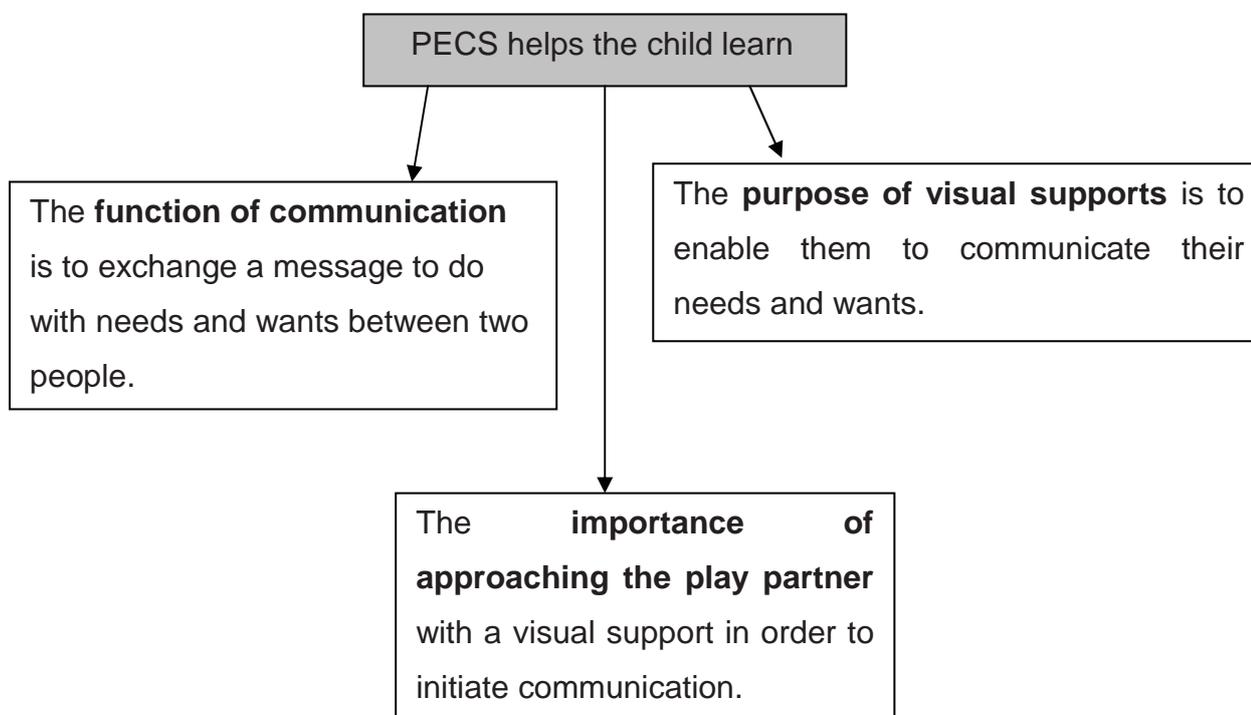
Each card is placed next to the previous step.



In this chart, the activity is separated into two distinct sections for better clarity.

3 VISUAL SYSTEM - PECS

PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System) is a visual system that can help your child learn how to **initiate communication**.

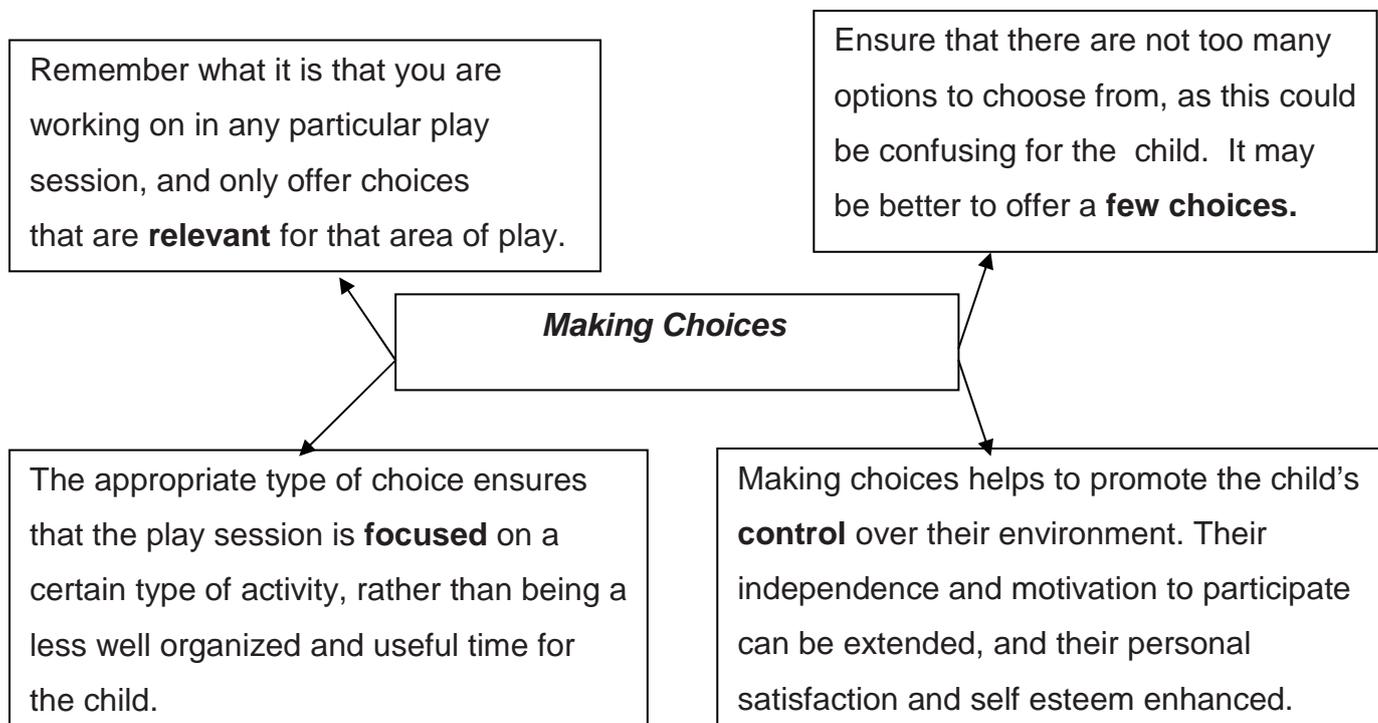


A PECS folder has a selection of laminated cards held in place by using Velcro spots on the back of each card. The child can show you what he would like to do by taking the relevant card and giving it to you. Each page shows pictures to do with one area of activity only. You can offer choices of play activities from their current and previous emergent play stage/s.



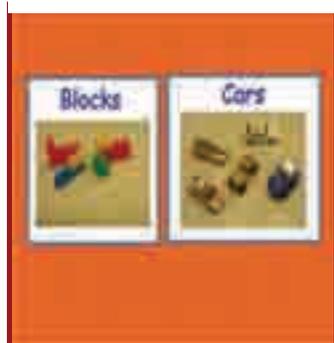
4 VISUAL SYSTEM - Choice Making

A choice making visual system is a **set of choices** that can provide your child with the opportunity to **select one** toy or activity from a set of options. Learning how to make a choice is a skill that is learnt by having plenty of **opportunities to practice** making choices in appropriately managed situations.

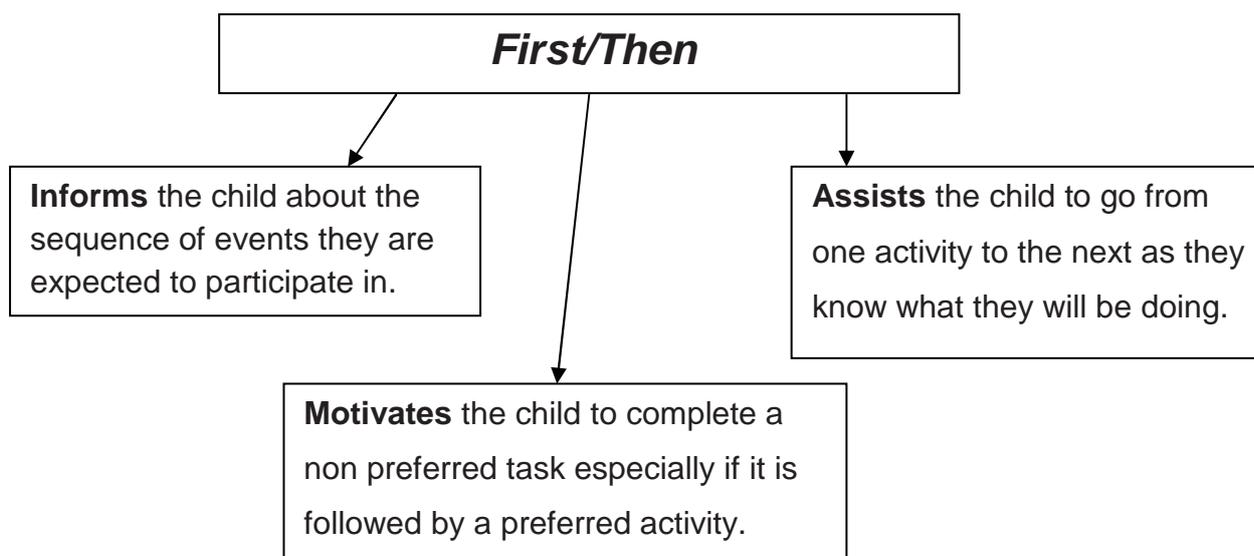


It is important to offer a realistic number of choices, depending on the child's ability to think and choose what he actually wants to do. Some children are overwhelmed by the idea of making a choice so you may need to choose the activity and then within the activity give them a choice. Also, in deciding what choices to offer, the play partner needs to be aware of what emergent play stage the child is at, what play activities the child will enjoy, and also what activities are needing extra practice for the better development of skills. *The choices offered have to reflect the play partner's understanding of the child's abilities, interests and level of participation.*

Offer choices according to ability to choose and level of physical activity desired



5 VISUAL SYSTEM - First / Then



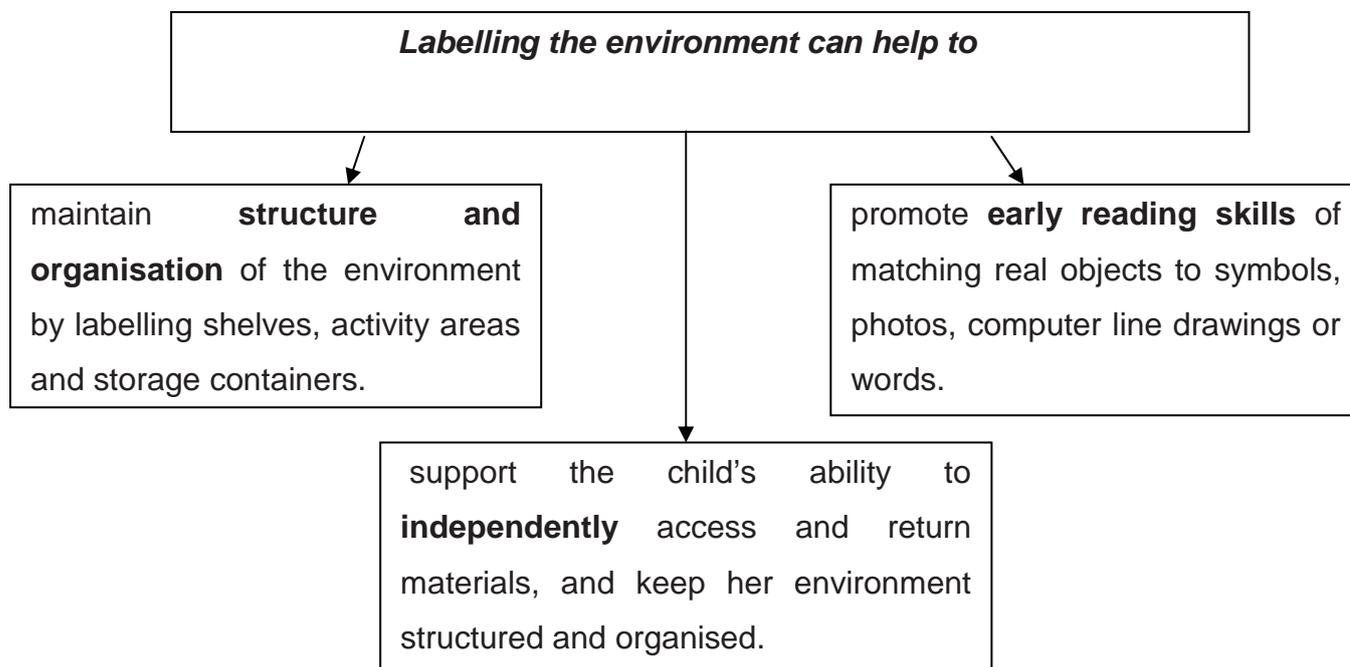
• Moveable green arrow indicates what the child has to do next

• The use of different colours highlights the difference between first and then.



This visual system can be used to help your child to **participate** in an activity that does not really appeal to them. In the above examples, the child engages in an unappealing activity - putting clothes on/playing with blocks and then in an appealing activity – going to the park/ playing with teddies.

6 VISUAL SYSTEM - Labelling the Environment



You can go on a label walk where you point to or touch the labels and say or sign the name of the item. This way the child is more likely to feel more secure in their environment and become more familiar with where items are kept.

- Toys can be stored in **differently coloured boxes** that are clearly labelled.
- Each box should be kept in the **same spot** on the shelves so that the child can remember where each set of toys is to be found.
- The order of the boxes could be changed around only when the child can **confidently identify each label**.
- An important part of any play activity is to **spend time at the end** putting the toys away in their proper places, with each one going into the right box, and each box going into its spot on the shelves.



7 VISUAL SYSTEM - Calendar

A calendar is a visual system that can help your child understand the meaning of **time** so that they can see how their various activities fill in the days in an orderly manner. A calendar helps a child to develop a sense of “**yesterday, today, tomorrow**”, and “this week, last week, next week”, and so on.

You can use a calendar to show the child when play sessions are coming up.

Outings and Play Calendar			
Monday	Kindy	Doctor	Play at home
Tuesday	Kindy	Music	Doctor
Wednesday	Kindy	Litrany	Park
Thursday	Shops	Therapy	Play at home
Friday	Park	Therapy	Play at home
Saturday	Shops	home	Play at home
Sunday	home	Play at home	

8 VISUAL SYSTEM - Activity Checklist

An activity checklist is a visual system that **identifies the materials or items needed for a play session**. To enable your child to become as independent as possible, activity checklists are a **reminder** of what is needed to have to carry out an activity. Children who have difficulty with **organising** themselves for play, find activity checklists extremely beneficial.

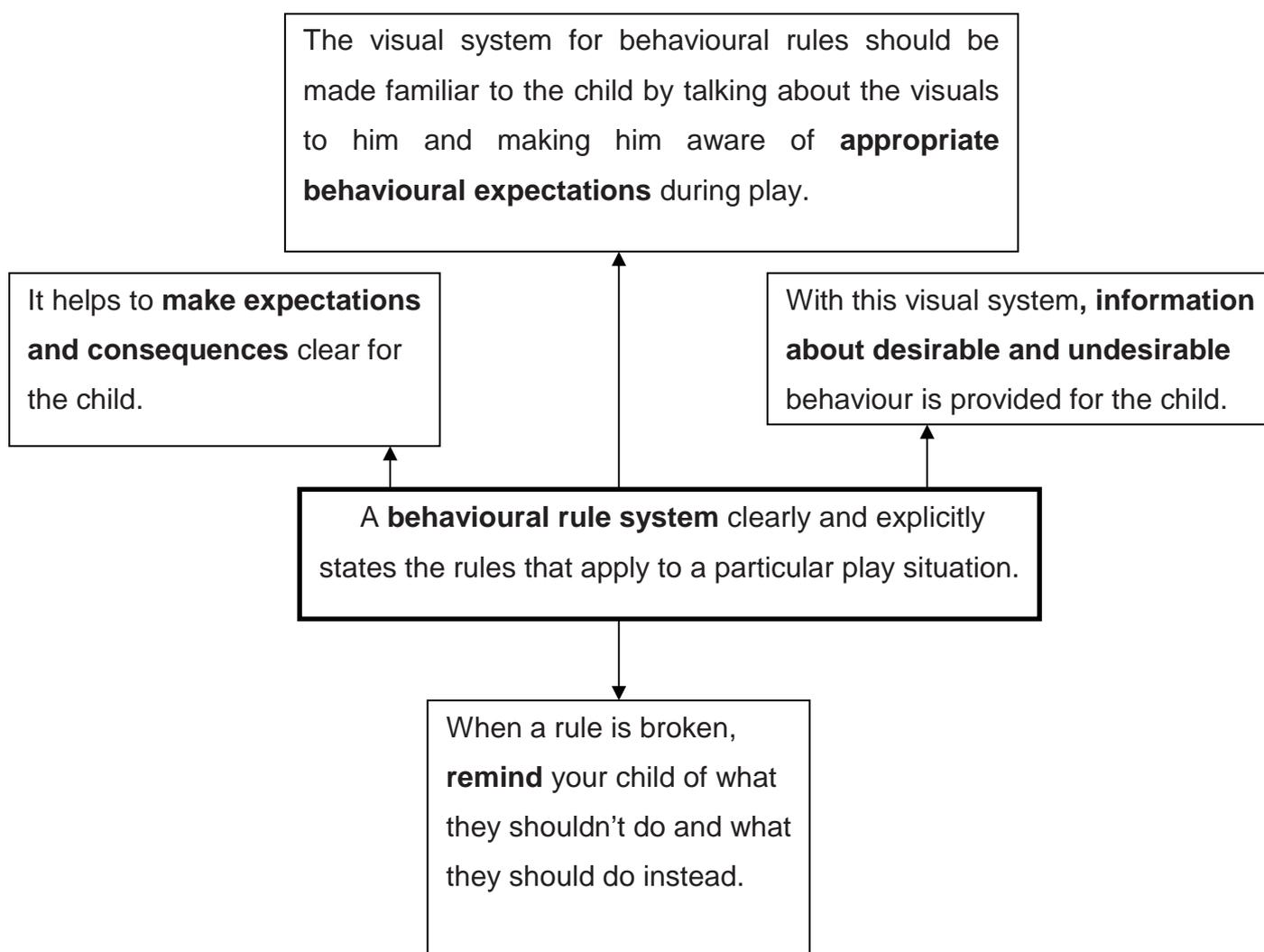
Checklists for Play Outings



Checklist for Play at Home



9 VISUAL SYSTEM -Behavioural Rules



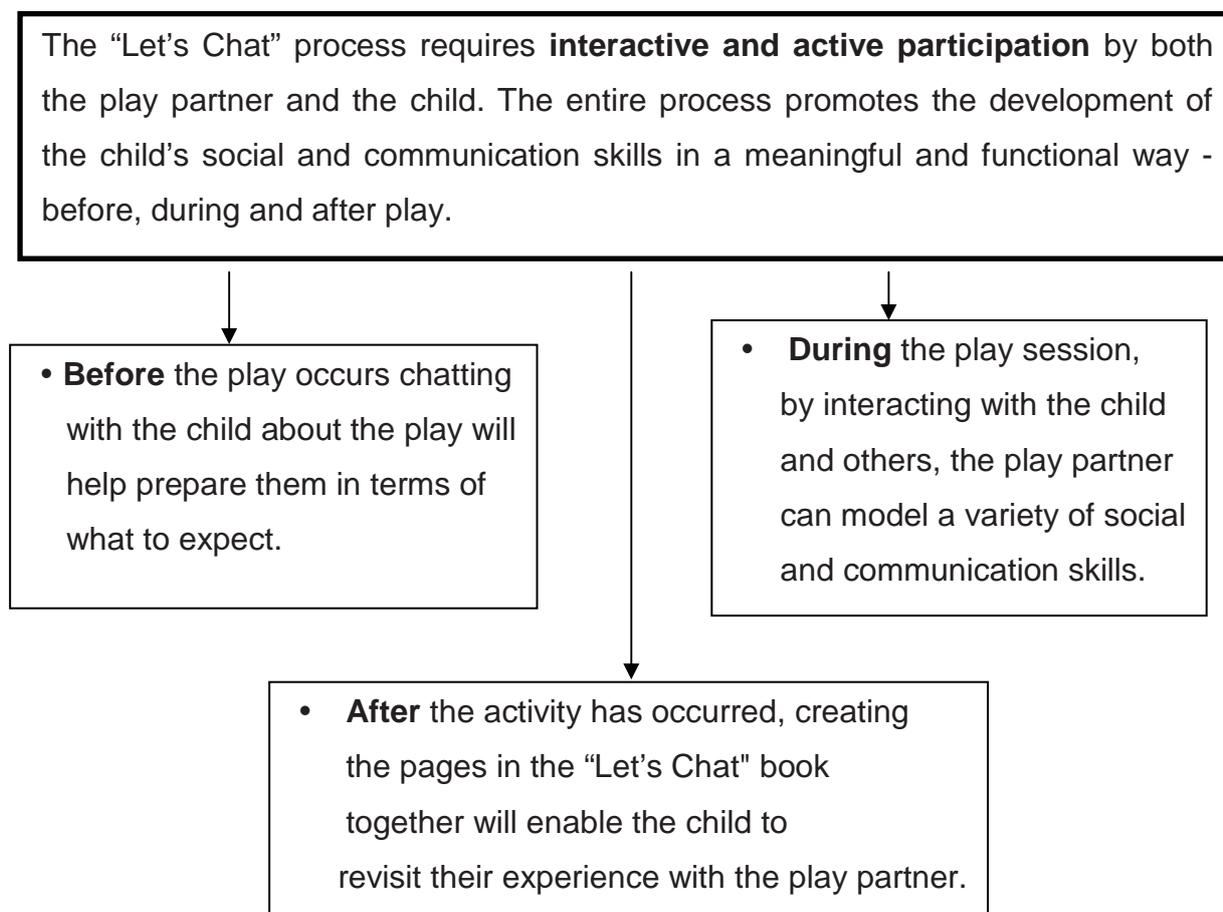
Simple rules charts should be clear, uncluttered and relevant to the child's capabilities and activities.



10 VISUAL SYSTEM - 'Let's Chat' System

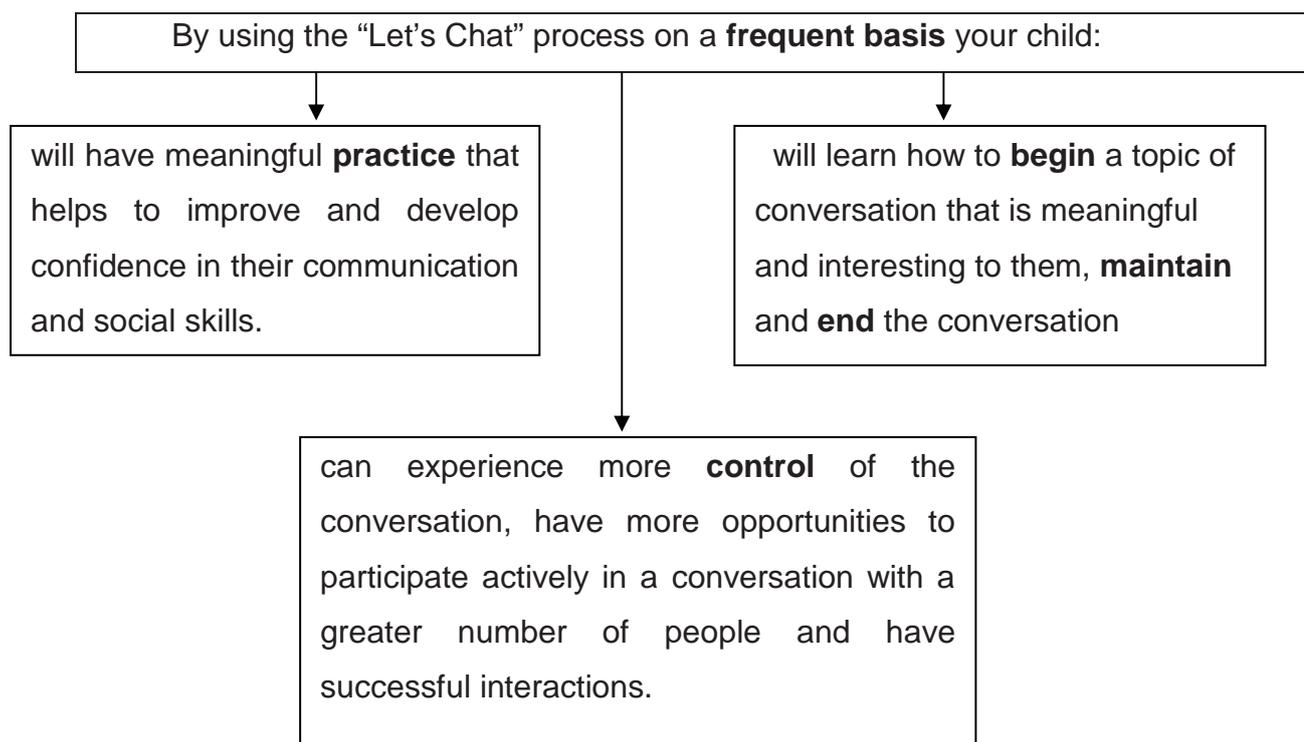
The 'Let's Chat' system is a visual system that offers the **play partner specific strategies** to engage with your child in a chat and help develop your child's communication and literacy skills. The 'Let's Chat' book is a tool that can be used by both your child and the play partner to have an **interactive chat** about their play sessions that are meaningful and interesting to your child.

The 'Let's Chat' book is produced using a **child centred approach**, where there is a direct connection between the contents of the book and your child's life. It contains a written account about your child's play experiences, accompanied by visual information. The content of the chat book is built on play activities that your child has enjoyed. This is a great way of **tapping** into your child's interests. This then contributes to the development of a **positive attitude towards literacy and communication**.



The Let's Chat system has several benefits for your child's communication and social development.

- **Firstly**, it acknowledges your child's experiences and background knowledge.
- **Secondly**, it can be used as a reference where your child has a good chance of knowing what the play partner is referring to.
- **Thirdly**, by reviewing such information it develops their observational skills, which helps their understanding of their play.
- **Fourthly**, it provides them with a means of expressing themselves and conversing about their past, present, future needs and aspirations.
- **Finally**, it provides the play partner with the opportunity to show your child how they can share information about their experiences with others. They can use their method of communication which may be speech, sign or gesture along with the visual and written information to get their message across.



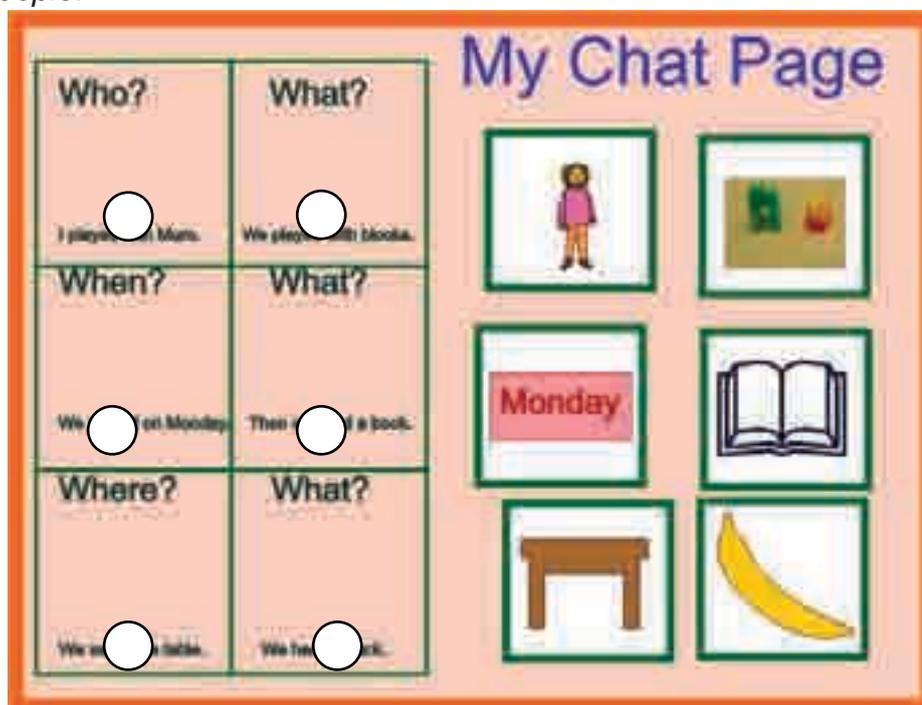
*For more information on the 'The Chat System' to develop your child's communication and literacy skills please refer to: Bloom, Y. & Bhargava, D. (2003) **Let's Read Together. Part 2 Creating personalized material to promote literacy in children and adults using AAC Strategies.** Beecroft: Innovative Communication Programming*

<p>QUESTIONS THAT CAN BE USED TO CREATE THE 'LET'S CHAT' PAGE</p>

- **Where** did you play? (Location of the activity)
- **Who** did you play with? (Identify the participants involved in the activity)
- **What** did you do? (The sequence of events)
- **When** did you play? (Time of activity)
- **Why** did you play? (If there was a specific reason)
- **Comments** (Additional information not included in the above questions)

A Play Chat Page

This chat page is designed to help a young child to communicate about their play. It can be shown to friends and family, and your child can be helped to participate in discussing what they have been doing. This is very important to children and the Chat Book is a most valuable visual tool in enabling communication for those children who cannot easily interact verbally with others. The Chat Book can help a child to connect with others, and to feel accepted and confident when interacting with other people.



Each picture on the *right of the page* is a separate laminated card which is attached with Velcro to the page. The *left hand side* also has Velcro so that the cards can be positioned as appropriate. Use light card rather than paper. Make Chat pages for various activities and keep them in a ring folder to form the Chat Book.

11 VISUAL SYSTEM - Who? What? Where? When? Why? System

This Wh -? system helps to develop your child's understanding of the different types of situations that make up any play activity especially when playing with more than one person. The "Wh" questions enable children to focus on one particular aspect of their play, to think about what is happening and to make decisions based on the answers to the "wh" question. The number and variety of these questions can be gradually increased as your child's understanding develops.

Where?

The play area must have clearly defined and clearly visible boundaries. This will help clarify for your child:

- Where the play is to take place?
- Where they are to not play?

Your child can see clearly where to play, and where to stay whilst playing



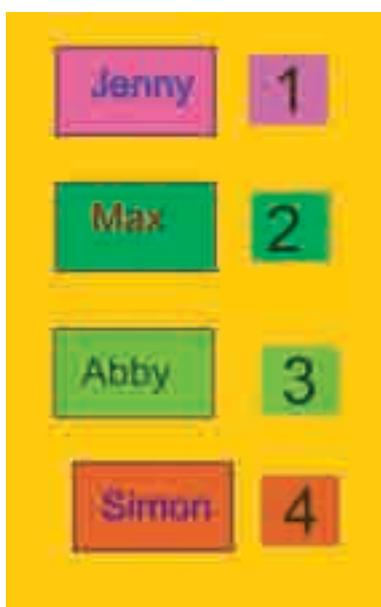
Clarifies where the equipment is kept:

- The equipment/toys are always kept in their own designated place.
- The equipment and toys are always put there at the end of play.



Who?

- Before a game or play activity begins, ensure that each child is fully aware of who is playing in a group situation.
- If turn taking is necessary, each child should be given a number so that the right order is consistently followed. The numbers can be written on a slip of paper and stuck onto the chair and/or table where the child will sit.
- This will help the children's understanding that they are part of a group and that they need to interact appropriately within the group.

**What?**

- The children need to understand what they are using in the game or activity. This can be clearly explained with visual guides as may be needed for each separate situation.



- The children need to know before they begin what games they will be playing. A chart can be made with cards attached with Velcro showing the games in their right order, one after the other. The children can clearly see then what they will be doing, and the order in which they will be doing the games. It is a good idea to have a few short games prepared to maintain children's interest and motivation to participate.



When?

- Ensure that the children clearly know when to start and when to stop a game.
- A clearly audible signal is needed if a game does not have a built in end point. For example, a bell or a timer could be rung in conjunction with saying 'Time to finish' and signing 'finished'.
- When the game is finished, the materials and toys should be put away in their right places, before the next game can begin.
- When the game finishes, its card can be taken off the chart and placed into the "Finish" envelope or box.



A SPECIAL NOTE

Remember the focus is NOT the visual system it is the INTERACTION between YOU (the play partner) and your child when playing so use the strategies outlined in the 'Play partner → 'Interacting during play' section.



Please refer to:

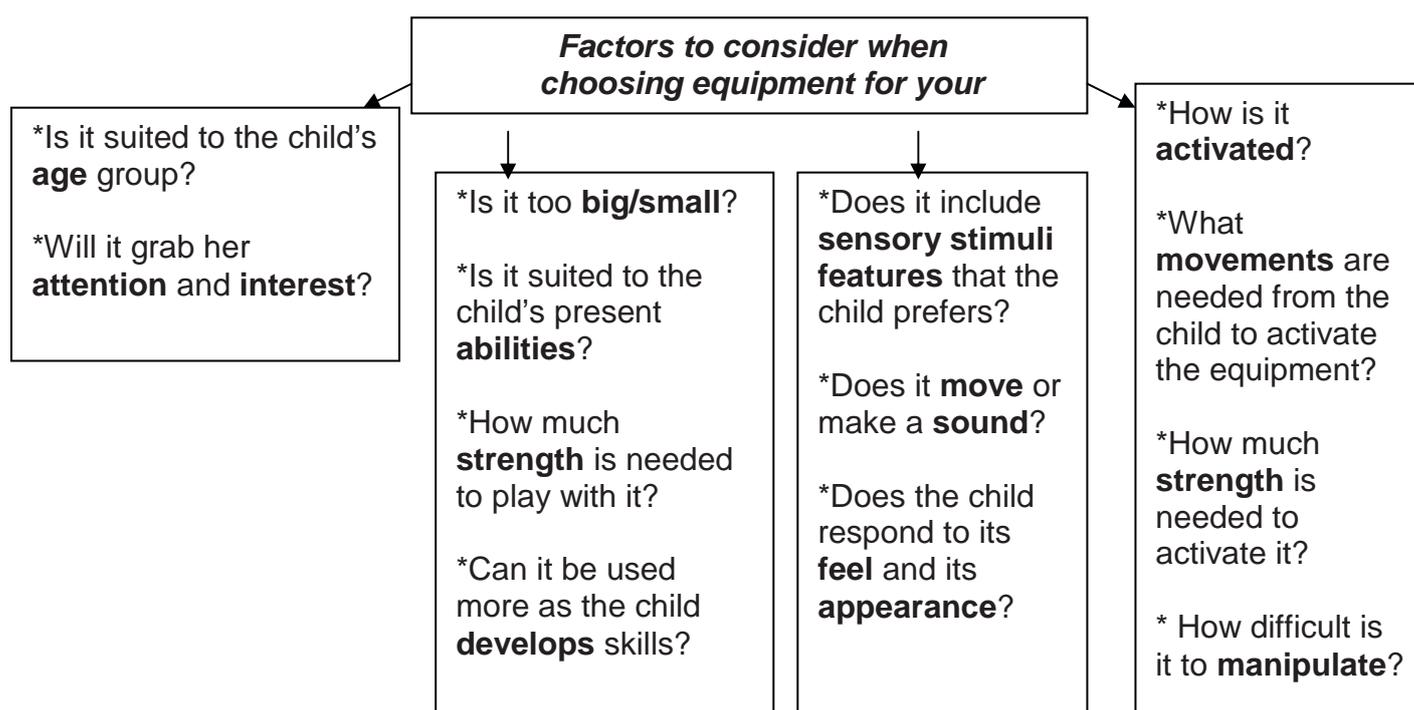
Bhargava, D. (2009). Getting Started!!! Using Visual Systems to Promote Communication. Perth, Australia: Carson Street School.

You can access the booklet and DVD for free online at:
www.carsonst.wa.edu.au/parent_school.htm

PLAY SPACE MODEL → PLAY STRATEGIES FOR THE CHILD → **MOVE** → *Equipment used during play*

Children **differ enormously** in their rate of growth and development, so equipment (**toys, games and activities**) should keep pace with your child's changing needs and ability levels. Your child's interests and abilities should **drive** the selection of equipment. **Observe** to find out how your child responds to different equipment. For example, some like equipment with a **specific sensory characteristic** (e.g. visual – bright lights, auditory- loud noises or textures –rough/smooth); whereas other children may '**shut down**' when presented with these sensory features. Look for equipment that is **easy** for the child to interact with: to grab, hold, hang onto and move. Provide equipment that will **invoke curiosity, provoke questions, awaken their imagination and inspire them to explore**. By providing your child with access to a **wide variety** of equipment they can choose the ones that interest them. Give your child the **time to discover** what they must do to make a piece of equipment work and then how they can use it in different ways. From there they can begin to learn how to use the equipment in **creative and imaginative ways**.

When selecting equipment for play i.e. outdoor or indoor, **several things** need to be considered. Observe your child closely to determine preferred activities and skills level. Based on these observations you can get a clue on what types of equipment your child would prefer.



SAFETY MATTERS

It is absolutely essential that you take extreme care with all toys and give due attention to the following safety issues:

- Does the equipment have sharp edges, small parts, wires, cords, strings, or elastics that can get tangled around the child?
- Equipment made with toxic or flammable materials should not be purchased
- Repair or discard equipment that is broken

Close supervision is still the best method to protect children from injury.

CONCLUSION

Growing and learning is a **journey** each child must take. Play is an essential and **critical** part of growth and learning, and provides the opportunity for a child to reach their individual potential. **Easing the path** and trying to ensure that each child travels smoothly, is surely a worthwhile thing to do.

Play starts in the child's infancy and ideally, continues throughout her **life**. Play is how children **learn** to socialize, to think, to solve problems, to mature and most importantly, to have fun. Play **connects** children with their imagination, their environment, their parents and family and the world.

Parental involvement in a child's world of play is not only beneficial for the child but is extremely beneficial to the parent. Playing with children establishes and strengthens **bonds** that will last forever. Parent-child play **opens doors** for the sharing of values, increases communication, allows for teachable moments and assists in problem solving. Play enables children to show their **mental representations** of the world and enables children to interpret their world. Hence, allowing the parent to **view the world** through the eyes of a child once again.

Let's Play and Have Fun!



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