

“Play gives children a chance to practice what they are learning.”

Fred Rogers

Spotlight on Development

Make believe play allows a child’s imagination to increase, their language to expand, and social skills to develop.

What might my child say or do?

When to expect it:

- **18 and 24 months**, begin to play their first "pretend" games by acting out daily actions they have seen adults do. Examples: talking on the phone, putting on shoes, using keys to unlock a door.
- **24 months**, show signs of "representational thinking" and "symbolic thinking" - one object begins to stand in for another. This age may start to play with dolls as if they are "real:" feeding them, putting them to bed and giving them roles to act out.
- **Age 2 and 3**, your toddler will start to demonstrate increasingly complex representational and symbolic thinking in her play. Example: A 2-year-old needs a toy to look like a bottle, whereas a 3-year-old might use a shoe as her "bottle".
- **3 years old**, your child's pretend play is maturing: This is the age children play tea parties, construction sites, dinosaur battles, stuffed animals come alive.
- **Age 4**, your child's imaginative play will include extended storylines and lots of character acting.

What can I do to help my child develop?

The key to helping the child develop their pretend play is “be involved.” Don’t watch from the sidelines – get “into” the play. However, remind parents to “facilitate” (*make something easier or to help cause something*) **not** “dominate” (take over) the play.

Key Points to help parents:

- **Face-to-face** (on their level). The child will be able to see your face, gestures, and pretend actions.
- **Know your child's interests.**

- **Introduce new ideas.** Use lots of language, ask open-ended questions and label, expand, recast, describe (for more details, see <https://childmind.org/article/helping-toddlers-expand-their-language-skills/>).
- **Don't put out too many toys at once.** This can be overwhelming to some children. Limit the selection to (two or three) key toys that you think your child may like.
- **Keep it simple.** Children love repetition and learn from it, so they will likely enjoy practicing any new pretend actions over and over again.

Activity 1: Language and Literacy – I Like It When

What your child will learn from this activity

Books are a great way we teach our kids important skills. Children are more receptive to new ideas when we read about them first; this is especially true for social skills, which are a tricky concept for many children to grasp. *I Like It When* allows the child to learn about kindness and the activities will connect and reinforce the concept.

What to do

7 - 8. Modeling is important – for this activity the child needs to be **in front** of the parent. Repeat several times with the child. The first reading familiarizes the child with the rhyme, the second reading the child may attempt motions (and a few words), repeated readings the child will become more involved. Remember “Repeat to Learn, Learn to Repeat”.

Activity 2: Language and Literacy – I Like It When

What to do

3. Strategy for a child that does not verbalize and answer.

- Allow the child to point to the picture.
- Model, Model and then Model. **You** point and **say** the answer to the question and then see if the child will repeat. The child will begin by repeating in one-word answers. This is a step to **joint attention** – For however brief you and the child shared a moment. (verbal or non-verbal)
- EXPOSURE IS THE KEY! Children need to hear language. A parent repeating the word will help increase receptive language.

5. A dusting cloth that is child size will help the child be more successful with the new “dusting” skill. Possible choices; washcloth, **sock**, etc.

Remind the parent to understand the child dusting, making beds, washing dishes, etc. will be far from perfect, but helping family members makes kids feel good.

THINK

Home visitors might ask parents how their child helps them and offer a few other age appropriate small job suggestions. **Examples:** pick up toys and books, put clothes in hamper, wipe up small messes, help set the table, carry in groceries, etc.

Make it fun by turning on music.

"I like it when" statements are important. Rewarding and focusing on positive behavior (rather than negative) will increase the positive behavior.

Note: Even when having to correct a negative behavior use positive words by telling them what they **can do**.

Examples:

"Please walk inside." **versus** "Quit running."

"Take the ball outside." **versus** "Stop throwing that ball!"

"Be gentle with your brother." **versus** "Don't hit your brother."

Activity 3: Think and Explore – Senses, Touch

What your child will learn from these activities

Ask home visitors to build on feedback received from reviewing Week 10 **Thinking and Exploring: Senses**. This knowledge will help the home visitor/parent **build** on this week's lesson.

Remember: Sensory play builds nerve connections in the brain's pathways allowing a child to make connections to build deeper meaning and understanding.

You will need

Help each family Identify the items they will use to complete the activity. What did they use last week (week 10)? Try and encourage the parent to introduce a few new items along with a few familiar items from last week.

What to do

1. It is very important for the child to identify each item. Parents should confirm, complete, correct each item. This will help encourage and reinforce language.
2. If needed, the parent may model how to reach into the box (no peeking). The parent will name a specific item (brush) and the child will find that item by feel.

Note: The child may enjoy reversing the roles and asking the parent to find an item by name.

3. The parent will have the child find an item *by describing the item*

Example: Find something you drink from, find something hard and we wear in our hair, etc.

*Note: Parent and child use language to describe an item. Remind parents this is not a **visual** activity.*

Activity 4: Think and Explore – Senses, Touch

What to do

1. Child uses language – if a child is nonverbal, have them point to an item and have the child repeat the word.
2. We want the child to feel and describe the item. The parent models and (thinks aloud) as they reach into the box. Parent modeling how to use language to describe an item.
3. The child will take their turn. If the child names the item instead of describing it. Ask the child is it what can we do with the item? Do we use it to brush our hair? Etc.
4. Allowing the child to take the leadership role helps the parent assess for understanding. Using this information, the parent can repeat the activity later in the week and build on the knowledge.

THINK

Encourage the parent to have the child to identify and name items that are not familiar to them.
Examples: sofa (instead of couch), lamp (not light), mailbox, street, etc. (Always include a few familiar items as you introduce new items.)

Activity 5: Motor – Silly Singing

What your child will learn from this activity

Research shows that exposure to music can also improve children's ability to learn. Music and movement instruction have been shown to improve children's memory, cognitive development, learning skills and expressive ability.

Other benefits of music and movement include:

- Developing small motor skills
- Developing large motor skills
- Learning to express emotions
- Improving balance and coordination

What to do

The parent will model and sing the song and motion. If needed, a verse can be repeated to allow the child to gain understanding and join in. Remind parents to go slow and overemphasize the motion.

2. If needed, repeat the song/motions before moving to the next verse "sad". Some children may not be familiar with "If You're Happy and You Know It".

THINK

How would we show Grouchy? Excited? Crazy? Lazy? Have home visitors/parents show the motion for this feeling word.

Example: If you're grouchy and you know it . . .

Possible other feeling words: bored, thoughtful, surprised. Remember, an action has to go along with the feeling word.

Family Feedback

This feedback will be reviewed when the lesson is picked up and should be reviewed each week to help parents know what to look for as they complete the activities throughout the week. It is important to have the home visitors review the questions during staff development.

How hard is it for your child to learn words to the songs and fingerplays?

What strategies do your home visitors have to offer?

- Repetition
- Slow
- Help child (hand over hand) with motions.

How do you think the song “If You’re Happy and You Know It” helps your child understand their feelings?

To understand an emotion, you must know how to label it. Naming these **feelings** is the first step in helping children learn to identify.

What activity did you like best this week? Why?

The song and motions. Why? My child loved it!