

Different types of play

Play helps children to develop a broader range of skills and understandings. Each week encourage your child to engage in a wide range of types of play.

Dramatic	Children take on roles in pretend games about familiar experiences — going on a family fishing trip, sharing a family celebration.
Fantasy	Children create props and use these as they engage in fantasy adventures — creating an ocean floor using sheets for water and baskets for rocks.
Exploratory	Children explore the properties and functions of materials, equipment and objects — experimenting with a tool to find out how it works with clay or dough, using a magnifying glass to view different objects.
Manipulative	Children manipulate and explore objects, parts and materials — threading beads, doing puzzles, using construction sets.
Physical	Children explore movements and ways to combine movements — running and playing ball, jumping, climbing, dancing, moving on an obstacle course.
Games with rules	Children follow or create rules to reach a shared objective in a game — playing outdoor games, following child-created games with rules, playing computer, board and card games.

Dramatic and fantasy play

Dramatic and fantasy play provides opportunities for children to imagine, create and experience a sense of wonder.

Children explore familiar experiences as they take on the roles of other people in their family or community.

They explore possibilities, go on make believe adventures, create imaginary characters and use objects to represent their ideas (e.g. a box to represent a house or a paper roll to represent a microphone).

Supporting your child's imagination

- Ask your child questions about the roles that they are exploring in their dramatic play — *What do you think a doctor would wear?* or *What words would a doctor use?*
- Ask your child questions about how they could set up for dramatic and fantasy play — *How could you make a grocery store?* or *What are some of the things that you could use?*
- Encourage your child to think of possibilities — *What would happen if ...?* or *Where could you travel to next?*

Ideas for dramatic play

- grocery store — empty food packets, pretend money, basket for shopping
- home setting — baby dolls, pretend food, old telephone
- workshop — table for a workbench, pretend tools, toys to repair, paper for writing ‘jobs’
- a vet/doctor surgery — toy animals, dolls, toy medical equipment, dress ups, ‘cages’ for animals, ‘pretend medicine’, paper for writing ‘scripts’, waiting room seats
- a restaurant/café — table, chairs, menus, cutlery, plates, pretend food.

Ideas for things that can be used for dressing up

- hats, berets, caps
- long skirts and dresses cut to child’s ankle length
- low-heeled shoes
- men’s ties, shirts, pants and coats
- handbags, baskets, jewellery, shawls and stoles
- feathers, artificial flowers, pieces of material for capes and cloaks
- police, fire and construction worker hats and costumes.

A ‘great pretender’ does not need to be shown how to play make believe games. However, the occasional idea or suggestion and a few props to add to the realism of the role are often a welcome addition.

Manipulative play

Children develop control and strength in their fingers and hands through manipulative play. Manipulative play includes using puzzles, threading, playdough, carpentry, construction sets and blocks.

This type of play helps children to develop their fine-motor skills for manipulating objects with control, visually tracking items or pictures, and using the senses of sight and touch.

Types of manipulative play

- using puzzles — lifting, turning, flipping and placing puzzle pieces
- tearing materials — strips of paper, card, newspaper, thin card, tissue paper, fabric
- cutting with scissors — straws, paper, wool, magazines, pictures, thin card, fabric
- using playdough — using utensils and cutters, rolling, pressing and poking
- building things — pressing, pulling apart and rotating Duplo, Lego or other construction equipment, or striking nails to join objects such as bottle tops to soft wood
- dressing dolls — doing clips, buttons
- dressing up — zips, buttons, opening purses, putting on shoes
- threading — thread pasta, straws, paper clips, paper (with a hole punched through) onto string or wool
- weaving — tie and twist wool, paper pieces, fabric, string or feathers through mesh or branches.

Learning to manipulate objects and tools with control requires regular opportunities to practise and refine these skills.

For further information

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