



All Children Love to Play

Children with disabilities also love to play & a disability does not automatically mean that a child will have difficulty playing. We do know, however, that some disabilities present challenges in play.

Some examples of these challenges include:

- physical limitations, which make it difficult for children to play with some toys or equipment,
- limited social skills, which may lead to difficulties playing with peers, and/or
- attention problems, which challenge children to stay focused on a game or other play activity.

When parents say play is a problem, occupational therapists take it seriously. We will provide assessment and/or treatment services, focusing on play in different ways, such as...

- Using play as a means to an end. Play activities can help children develop skills for the job of living; for example, we may use different toys & play materials to encourage a child to develop fine or gross motor skills, problem solving abilities, etc.
- Promoting specific play skills; for example, we may suggest that children participate in an activity group to develop social play skills with peers.
- Encouraging children's playfulness, or their approach to different activities. We may help them to develop a more playful approach which often leads to feelings of success and confidence.

Occupational therapists view play as the primary occupation of childhood. We recognize that play includes children's actions (their play skills) & their approach or attitude towards an activity (which is called playfulness), as well as the environment (the people, the space & the things) in which children play.

Did you know?

Play allows children to suspend reality, i.e. play "make believe". When children play, they are free from rules, they can do activities in 'non-serious' ways, & they can do what they want with objects & toys, as long as it is safe.



Promote play and playfulness by...

- Providing old clothes & hats for dress-up, & letting children's imagination lead the way.
- Allowing children to experiment with different objects, for example a banana may be a telephone.
- Providing children with objects that encourage many uses, for example, blankets, boxes, etc.

Children need some control over a play situation.

Play provides children with control by allowing them to make, & learn, from their choices. A key to encouraging "playfulness" in children is to make sure they are motivated to do the activity. Few children choose an activity in which they are not interested.

People, things, place and time all affect play.

Occupational therapists are often asked by parents to adapt the play environment; for example we may suggest placing toys within easy reach, using velcro on dress-up clothes or simplifying the rules of a game.

Promote play & playfulness by...

- Giving them choices & time to play by themselves as this is when they will try new things & learn about themselves & the world around them.
- Providing familiar toys & introducing new ones when children are ready.
- Not expecting children to play easily until they know one another; start with easy activities to build friendships.
- Making sure children are safe at all times. Check equipment & tables & chairs for safety as well as comfort.
- Picking times when children are not tired & therefore easily frustrated.
- Letting the children lead. If you are present — ask, don't tell— be a player, not a leader.

