

Autism Education Series: Exploring Play!

Why is play so important?

- Children learn through play.
- Play builds confidence.
- Play helps with social skills.

Types of Play

- **Sensory Play** - sounds, rhythms, taste, touch, sight activities
- **Physical Play** - climbing, running, jumping, rolling, swinging
- **Exploratory Play** - being curious, cause and effect, asking “what happens when...?”
- **Symbolic Play** - using an object to represent something else (e.g., a hairbrush is a microphone)
- **Pretend Play** - make believe, acting something out, taking on roles
- **Independent Play** - playing with toys on your own, having your own ideas and plans

How can I help my child play?

- Keep the play simple. You don’t need fancy or expensive toys to have fun!
- Limit distractions by turning off the TV or putting away your phone.
- Be at your child’s level. Be face-to-face so they can see you.
- Look for your child’s interests and copy how they are playing.
- Use the same number of words that your child might use or use sounds and actions.
- Show your child different ways to play. For example, if your child is flying their toy plane, show them how it can land in different places and then take off again!
- Try new ideas. Keep it fun! It is ok to be silly!

What if it is hard to play with my child?

- Is your child still interested in the play? Are they walking away or staying with the activity?
- Offer a gentle touch or ask your child to try something new.
- Are you asking questions during play? Try to make comments instead.
- Play beside your child and use your own toys, books, or actions.
- Stay enthusiastic and positive!

Take a look at the Exploring Play and Engagement video and handout for more ideas!

