



STRUCTURED PLAY FOR TODDLERS AND PRESCHOOLERS

What is it?

Structuring play in ways that help your child to build skills is important for their overall development. Structured play can help a busy child to focus or a less active child become very engaged and initiate the play scenario. Depending on your child, they may require more or less structure for optimal learning.

Strategies

Here are some strategies to try with your child for structured play:

- Set aside a specific amount of time to play with your child. It may be beneficial to set aside blocks of time each day. Pick a time of the day when your child tends to be most alert and calm.
- Develop a 'Play Plan.' Think about what types of skills you'd like to develop with your child during play ahead of time. Set up activities and objects that will help with this, so your child can have more success.
- Focus on promoting one area of learning during play at a time. For example, choose to encourage exploration, manipulation or interaction one at a time, versus all at once.
- Follow your child's lead in any activity that takes place. If your child chooses to play with dolls, pick up a doll and interact with it and your child. You can help to guide your child by asking questions or making small suggestions.
- Provide play sessions that vary based on the child's interests.
- If your child is having trouble with imagination, help to spark this by providing him / her with choices. For example, if your child is playing with a stuffed animal you might ask "Is Stuffy going to the mall or to the restaurant?" Ask in a way that you're providing the answer, rather than asking "Where is Stuffy going?"
- Talk directly to the dolls, rather than just directing questions to your child to model interaction.
- Insert obstacles into play and help your child to problem solve by thinking of alternative scenarios. For example "Stuffy's hurt his finger- what can we do?"

- Give symbolic meaning to objects as you play. For example, if your child climbs on top of the sofa, pretend they have just climbed to the top of a mountain.
- Encourage your child to participate in 'pretend play'. Let your child assign the roles and direct the scenarios.
- Be prepared to play your child's games over and over. Encourage your child to put a new twist into the game occasionally.
- Teach play skills in a variety of situations and settings, such as at home, at a play group or drop-in, and at grandma's house.
- Provide your child with lots of praise during playing activities. For example, you might say "what a good job you did brushing Barbie's hair!"