



# **A Parent's Guide: Teaching Play Skills to Children with Autism**



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## Play Skills: Introduction

“You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation.” Plato

For most children, play is a naturally occurring phenomenon that promotes their engagement and learning, independent performance and social inclusion. Play is the foundation of learning to socialize with others. Typically play happens, voluntarily, often spontaneously, and offers internal reinforcement and rewards. In contrast, play of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is characterized by impairments in reciprocal social, communication, and restricted and repetitive stereotyped patterns of behaviour. This play lacks qualities of diversity, flexibility, and creativity and can occur without social engagement. Therefore, without specific guidance, children with ASD are less likely to engage in functionally appropriate play. Research has shown that play may help develop cognitive, social, linguistic, and emotional development.

This resource is based on evidence-based practices and looks at strategies that can be used to teach your child with a diagnosis of ASD how to begin play. This teaches the basis of how to play independently and ultimately socialize with their peers. The following strategies lay out a systematic and structured way of teaching play skills.



# Levels of Socialization in Play: Solitary Play

## What is Solitary Play?

When looking at levels of socialization in play, Solitary Play (when a child plays by him/herself), is typically the first level. In solitary play, the child manipulates objects on their own. Learning to play by himself/herself allows for:

- increased independence during free time.
- the development of alternative behaviours to engaging in stereotypical behavior (for example pushing a car on a racetrack instead of shaking the car up and down in front of their eyes).
- replacement behaviours for automatic reinforcement.
- a way for interacting socially with peers.

## How can I prepare my child for Solitary Play?

- Toy manipulation
- One-step toy manipulation
- Two-step toy manipulation

### Toy manipulation:

The goal of toy manipulation is to teach your child to imitate actions with toys. This is the basis to teach your child the functions of how to use objects and play with toys functionally. Imitation skills are the building blocks of observational learning and are essential for more complex play and may improve imitative skills.

### How to teach one-step toy manipulation:

Begin by teaching your child to imitate one action, for example, putting a single puzzle piece in an inset puzzle, putting a peg in a peg board, placing a shape in a shape sorter, or rolling a car. Remember to provide positive reinforcement to your child when he/she is engaging in the activity. Also use appropriate prompts, and gradually fade prompts so your child is engaging in the activity independently. Furthermore, teach different actions for each toy to expand his/her play skills with different toys (rolling a car, flipping a car).

### How to teach two-step toy manipulation:

When your child develops one-step manipulation with toys, you can work on teaching your child two-step sequences of actions. For example, put a doll in the car then roll the car or bottle to doll's mouth then doll to bed.

Additional examples of toy manipulation ideas:

One-step	Two-step
Bang toy hammer	Bottle to doll's mouth, put doll to bed
Stuffed toy jumping	Roll ball, bounce ball
Brush doll's hair	Press buttons on phone, phone to ear
Roll ball	Animal figurine walking, feeding animal figurine
Bang tambourine	Put spoon in a bowl, stirring the spoon in the bowl

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## Levels of Socialization in Play: Solitary Play

### Common Difficulties:

- Your child might memorize the action, so it is important to teach more than one action for each toy
- Automatic reinforcement behaviours may occur, for example, hand flapping or scripting which interfere with the play activity should be redirected
- Your child may not enjoy playing with certain toys, despite the adequate amount of reinforcement and prompting given. You might have to switch to toys that may interest him/her more.



### Teaching Independent Play Activities:

Children with autism may not pick up on social cues that are required to play a game with their peers or how to play with a toy in the way it was intended. Teaching a child with autism how to play independently may require more structured planning for him/her to acquire the appropriate play behavior.

To teach your child how to learn to play with a new toy independently, please consider the following:

- Select a toy that matches their skill level (For example, peg board, shape sorter, puzzle).
- Keep it simple. If your child finds it difficult he/she may not be motivated to play.
- Choose a toy based on your child's interests (for example, Thomas the Train, Dora, etc.).
- Provide a model to show your child how to use the toy appropriately. You can model it or use a sibling or a friend.
- Provide the appropriate prompt level for your child to be successful using the toy (for example, providing a hand over hand prompt to put the puzzle pieces together). Fade your prompts as your child engages more independently with the toy.
- Remember to reinforce your child for using the toy appropriately (for example, providing your child with an edible reward and/or social praise so your child sees play as a positive experience).

Initially keep the play time short and increase the time as your child becomes more motivated to play. Always end your child's independent play time on a positive note to encourage future play.

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# Levels of Socialization in Play: Parallel Play

## What is Parallel Play?

Parallel Play is described as two children sitting near or beside each other while playing with similar objects (for example, playing with blocks, colouring, play dough, sand and water play). Parallel Play teaches your child to share space with another child while engaging in solitary play. This progresses to social awareness of other children and leads to interactions with one another which can result in an increase in length and complexity of play (for example, imitating peers and learning rules of play).

## How can I prepare my child to be able to engage in Parallel Play with other children?

Teaching your child to engage in Solitary Play and therefore playing functionally with toys would be the first step (for example, rolling cars or stacking rings). In the table below, there are examples of activities you can use to teach your child to play on their own (Solitary Play). When your child has several activities, you can use these as your basis for Parallel Play.

Activities to prepare your child for Parallel Play
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Colouring</li><li>• Painting</li><li>• Water and sand play</li><li>• Blocks</li><li>• Play dough</li><li>• Beadwork</li><li>• Puzzles</li></ul>



## How can I support my child's development at this stage?

### Parallel Play with an adult

By teaching your child these skills and expanding his/her repertoire of toys and activities, you yourself are engaging in Parallel Play with your child. A good way to start this is to sit at a table or on the floor with your child. Select an activity or toy to teach your child, for example colouring. Have two sets of materials (one for you and one for your child). Begin colouring the paper and observe if your child will engage in the activity. If your child does not engage, you can give a verbal prompt to "colour" and point to the crayon. As much as possible, use physical or gestural prompts to engage your child in the activity. Try to avoid using verbal prompts as they are the most difficult prompts to fade. When your child begins to colour, reinforce him/her by giving praise and a tangible reward (for example, candy) if needed.

### Parallel Play with another child

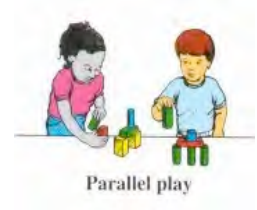
Teaching your child how to play functionally with various toys and activities prepares them for playing with another child. A beginning strategy you can use is to set out toys and/or activities that are highly motivating for both children. Also, keep in mind how to set up the environment to promote closer proximity between the children. Use small carpets and table tops to encourage closer proximity. Using a water and sand table, setting blocks on a small carpet, or having arts and crafts materials on a table are examples of activities

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## Levels of Socialization in Play: Parallel Play

When you are teaching your child Parallel Play, also consider how close your child can tolerate being to another child. Initially the children may be far apart, but gradually move them closer together and remember to provide reinforcement (for example, social praise “good job” with a tangible reward [piece of candy]). Also select a peer that would be cooperative and would be a good model for your child. Remember to reinforce both children when they are engaged in Parallel Play!



## Levels of Socialization in Play: Associative Play

### What is Associative Play?

In this stage of play, children interact with other children by giving, taking and sharing play materials. In typically developing children, this usually starts at around three years of age. In this stage your child begins to engage in activities in which a group of children participate in similar or identical activities without formal organization, group direction, group interaction, or a definite goal. The children may borrow or lend toys or pieces of play equipment, and they may imitate others in the group, but each child acts independently, as on a playground or among a group riding tricycles or bicycles. An example of this may be when a group of children are playing with a set of building blocks and they're all sharing the blocks but building their own towers. Social interaction at this stage is minimal between peers.

### How can I support my child's development at this stage?

You can help your child with ASD learn skills for Associative Play by encouraging him/her to take turns or trade items while still playing on his/her own – for example, trading dolls and doll clothing, trains or cars, tricycles and scooters etc. with other children. When you play with your child, teach and practice turn-taking behaviour. Turn-taking games will promote communication. When teaching this skill to your child, begin by being in close proximity so you can prompt and reinforce your child through the task to promote turn-taking. Initially, you may need to physically prompt your child through all the movements involved and reinforce him/her when a willingness to follow through is demonstrated. Begin teaching turn-taking with an item that your child has some interest in to increase his/her motivation to participate. For example, if your child enjoys playing with a toy car you may want to teach him/her to take turns passing it back and forth. You may also use an additional person such as a sibling, peer or other adult while you prompt your child from behind. This may take the form of:

- Either you or another person sits on the floor across and in close proximity to your child.
- Count “1, 2, 3” and either you or the other person push the toy car to your child making sure it reaches them.
- If you're the only one teaching this activity to your child, place your child's hands on the toy car and provide a hand over hand prompt (physical prompt).
- Count “1, 2, 3” and while prompting, have your child push the toy car back toward you. If you have an additional person, prompt your child from behind.
- Reinforce your child for pushing the toy car back to you and taking a turn.

Remember to fade the level of prompts needed as your child demonstrates this skill successfully. Increase the number of turns in the sequence with each practice and have your child engage in the turn taking in different environments with a variety of peers to promote generalization of the skill. Some other examples for teaching this skill could be sharing a musical instrument such as the drums, taking turns writing on a chalkboard, or using a computer program.



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## Levels of Socialization in Play: Cooperative Play

### What is Cooperative Play?

Cooperative Play takes place between two or more children as they grow and develop socially and emotionally. In Cooperative Play, children exchange ideas about the game or the toy they are playing with at that moment in time. Rules tend to still be very loosely constructed, but children know who is playing which role in their game. Play may last only a few minutes or it may stretch out for longer periods of time. Gradually they learn to respect the property rights of others. This is a clue that they are gaining social skills; at this same time they begin to understand that they need permission to play with certain materials and certain people. They are also more willing to share their toys for the sake of the game. Communication about the play is the critical point of Cooperative Play.

Cooperative play can take place almost anywhere — outside on the playground or downstairs in the basement. In any environment, children learn from watching other children play and interacting with them socially

### What are some considerations to promote successful interaction with his/her peers?

- a positive environment. Model and encourage polite, respectful behavior toward others. Reward social skills such as helping others, giving and accepting praise, compromise, etc.
- the number of children who will play together – you may wish to start off with just 2 and then work up to a larger number of children in your group.
- how long the groups will work together. You may start off by working/playing for 2 minutes and extend the time as children tolerate being around each other for longer.
- present and clearly explain the activity to your child.

### What are some activities I can use to encourage Cooperative Play with my child?

The fact that learning to cooperate is essential doesn't mean that it's easy. Getting children to share and play together can be tricky. Parents and teachers know that the key is to set up activities that give each child a distinct role while also requiring kids to help one another. Here are some examples of activities that may help guide some Cooperative Play:

#### Side by side Science:

Simple experiments can be great opportunities for kids to explore the world together and share ideas.

- **Test things out:** Using household items, children can investigate what floats and what sinks, what is transparent and opaque, what is light and what is heavy, or how many rocks weigh the same as one toy truck. One child can be the "recorder," keeping track of the experiment, while the other places objects in water, on a scale, or holds them up to the light. As children work together, encourage a dialogue between them. A give and take of ideas, with each child sharing his/her unique interpretation of the results of the experiments, will enrich the experience for everyone.
- **Stimulate the sense:** Give children items that have distinctive odors, such as lemon, vanilla, cinnamon, onion, garlic, and licorice. Put each item on a small plastic lid and encourage the children (with their eyes closed) to take turns smelling and identifying them. Ask how these different

## Levels of Socialization in Play: Cooperative Play

- foods and spices smell. Are these smells familiar from the food they eat? Point out what is different and the same in each child's take on the smells. As they describe the smells and their experiences with them, children will see that they each have a distinct perspective to contribute, all of which add to a full comparison of the smells. (You can also try the activity with objects of different textures, different shapes and colors, and those that make different sounds.)
- **Create a garden:** Block out part of your yard for an area where children can plant flowers and vegetables. Let your kids and their friends work together to make a drawing of the garden they'd like to create. As they plan and then work on their garden, point out how they're all contributing. Encourage them to take on different jobs, such as planting, monitoring, and watering. This project requires all of the little gardeners to share ideas and tasks: The bounty the garden bears will truly be the product of everyone's labor.

### Outdoor

Here are some ways kids can exercise their ability to cooperate as they build large-motor skills.

- **Car wash:** One child can run the car wash and ask what kind of service the customers want for their bike or wagon. Another child can be the ticket or money taker. A third can wash the vehicles with a cloth or big sponges and a pail of water. The kids can work together to create car wash signs and tickets in advance. Encourage children to take turns playing the different roles.
- **Construction site:** As children play in the yard or sandbox with trucks, pails, and shovels, they can deliver the sand or dirt, pretending they are preparing a construction site. Each child can be a different kind of worker (such as steam shovel operator, trench digger, or truck driver). Encourage the little builders to take turns using different vehicles as they work on the project and collaborate on building something.
- **Relay races:** Kids can write or draw a secret message and then work together to get it from one place to another. Help them set up a relay race course through the yard or park. Each child can stand in a designated spot and then run with the message from one spot to the next, passing it along to the next child. Point out that each runner helped to deliver the secret message. (Works well with tricycles too!)

### Art

Creating works of art is a wonderful way to promote cooperation while helping children develop their creative-thinking and fine-motor skills.

- **Table paint:** Tape a large sheet of paper over a low table and let two or more children finger paint all over the paper. They'll love squishing their fingers and hands through the paint — and they'll each help to create a unique painting.
- **Make a mural:** Post a long sheet of paper on the wall and let children decide what the topic of the mural will be (a forest with animals, an ocean with all kinds of boats and fish, a neighborhood). Then they can each select items to draw and can choose a medium (markers, crayons, poster paint, water colors) with which to create the mural. When they're done, ask the children to describe how they each helped to make the mural.
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## Levels of Socialization in Play: Cooperative Play

- **Buddy tracings:** On a large sheet of paper, have one child trace another as he lies down and stretches out his arms. After the tracing is finished, both can work together to fill in the details. Then the child who was traced can outline his partner. Display the tracings together, and point out that the kids couldn't have made them without each other.
- **Build something:** Using play dough or clay, children can collaborate on making a zoo, a pet shop, a bakery, a house, or a toyshop. Encourage them to help each other create the animals and objects that they want in their setting. Ask the kids to describe how they each contributed to the project.

### Acting

Research shows that children develop important skills through pretend play. In restaurant play, for example, kids increase their vocabulary as they learn words such as "menu," "waitress," and "bill." They learn to be flexible, substituting objects for those they do not have on hand, and to sequence and put events in order (you can't serve the food until you cook it). And, most importantly, when children are involved in dramatic play, they're strengthening their social skills and learning to share, take turns, and cooperate.

- **Prop up play:** Give your children and their playmates some simple props to use in dramatic play: empty food containers; wooden spoons; pots and pans; paper plates; old clothes and shoes; hats; index cards and markers; and old phones and typewriters. These items can spark kids' imaginations and spur them to share ideas for collaborative dramatizations.
- **Start a business:** Encourage children to set up a pretend store, zoo, restaurant, or other establishment. Help them think of and create the materials they'll need. Children can decide who will be in their place and what role each of them will take. Point out how many different people need to pitch in and help out to make this business work.
- **Dramatize stories:** Bringing favorite tales to life is a sure-fire way to engage a group of youngsters. Let them pick a story and then create props, take on different roles, and act out the action. Working together, they'll be able to recreate their beloved story.



### Toys to share

Not all toys lend themselves to cooperative play — some are simply best for independent play. When your child is having friends over or playing with a sibling, it's best to provide toys and games that work well with small groups. Try putting out these playthings, all of which are easy to share:



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## Levels of Socialization in Play: Cooperative Play

- **Musical instruments:** From maracas to tambourines, using instruments together allows children to make music they couldn't create on their own. When kids form a band, they hear the power of collaborating.
- **Cards:** Playing basic card games and learning to follow simple rules is a big step toward cooperation for youngsters. At around the age of 4, children are able to put aside what they want to do and abide by the group's rules.
- **Puppets, dolls, and stuffed animals:** Playmates can bring inanimate pals to life and act out tales and adventures with more than one character.
- **Children's books:** Kids love sharing cherished stories. Encourage them to each take on a different character's voice and make the sounds described in the story as they read or retell the tale together.
- **Puzzles:** Putting all the pieces in place is easier — and more enjoyable — when little problem solvers put their heads together.
- **Figures, cars, and blocks:** By building with blocks, adding figures, cars, road signs, and the like, children learn from one another's ideas and see how the power of group play can add fun.
- **Dress-up clothes:** Old hats, bags, shoes, and shirts are perfect props for letting children share imaginative ideas and transform themselves into an infinite roster of roles.



# Playskills: Playdates

## **What are Playdates and why are they important?**

Playdates are scheduled time periods for your child to interact with another child in both structured and unstructured activities. Your child's ability to engage in play with other children teaches problem-solving skills, enables him/her to practice imaginative play, and helps develop his/her sense of humor. All of these skills are crucial in improving the ability of children with autism to think abstractly and understand how to succeed in a natural environment. Children with autism may not be able to generalize skills across environments and people, which means even when they've mastered a specific skill in one setting with one person they may not be able to demonstrate the same skill in another setting with another person. Playdates provide your child the appropriate experience to generalize his/her skills with different peers and in a variety of environments as well as develop friendships and have fun!

## **How can I prepare my child to be able to engage in a Playdate?**

Before your child is ready for formal Playdates it is essential that you involve him/her with his/her peers even if he/she doesn't have independent play skills. Just having your child learning to tolerate being in close proximity to others is supportive in moving toward developing play skills. Public areas such as playgrounds, pools, and indoor gymnasiums are places that you can utilize where your child can engage in motor movements that require minimal social interactions with peers. You may need to expose your child repeatedly to these environments for longer periods of time for him/her to become increasingly comfortable. Consider these activities as they may be less stressful to your child than being in a one to one situation with increased social demands that occur during a Playdate. Teaching your child how to move from one activity to another in a variety of settings is an important and essential skill to prepare him/her for the many transitions that can occur within a Playdate. (For example, try moving from location to location within your house, or other settings going from toy to toy or activity to activity. You can provide your child with the appropriate prompts and reinforcement to increase his/her success in this area. This will support smooth transitions when it is time for him/her to engage in Playdates with a peer.

## **What are some of the skills required to promote successful social interactions with peers?**

You can teach your child to:

- Be able to request items from adults and peers. Be able to make his/her requests known.
- Tolerate being in close proximity to other children.
- Play with several toys in the manner in which they're intended.
- Play with sensory materials (e.g., play dough, sand and water).
- Be able to use manipulatives (e.g., blocks, rubber stamps, crayons).
- Be familiar with a social game (e.g., Tag, hide and seek).
- Sing and/or act out some songs (e.g., "Old MacDonald", "If you're happy and you know it").
- Play a simple game (e.g., Candyland, Chutes and ladders).
- Engage in outdoor play (e.g., play on playground equipment, wade in a swimming pool).
- Engage in pretend play (e.g., dress up like a cowboy, robot, favourite cartoon character).



## Playskills: Playdates

### **How do I select the appropriate peer to play with my child?**

When selecting peers for your child's Playdates it is important that the peer demonstrates patience and understanding toward your child. The peer should be able to take direction from adults and prompt your child when needed. Look for peers that are role models, have good manners, and engage in appropriate behaviours. They should be outgoing and energetic. To find the appropriate peer for your child, you could ask professionals involved with your child about who may be suitable (e.g., your child's teacher, camp counselor, daycare provider, etc.) You can also look to children in your neighbourhood and siblings.

When putting together a set of Playdate peers for your child, try to involve a variety of peers of both sexes and age ranges. Look for children that have different skills and preferences.



## Playskills: Structuring a Playdate

### What are the primary goals for Playdates?

- Teaching your child appropriate ways to initiate interactions with peers.
- To learn to be persistent in starting an interaction with a peer.
- Learning to focus on something else if peers don't respond to your child after several attempts to interact.
- Responding to initiations from peers appropriately, positively or negatively (for example, "Lets play", "No thank you, I'm going to play this.")

### How do I structure a Playdate?

When planning a playdate remember to:

- Include a variety of activities with which your child and the peer can engage.
- Decide on what type of reinforcement you're going to use for both your child and the peer (for example, stickers, edible treats, prizes at the end etc.).
- Ensure that the children are engaged and having fun.
- Observe the children to check to see if they're maintaining interest or becoming bored with an activity.
- Change the activity to something else if needed.
- Direct children to communicate with one another rather than through you.
- Fade yourself over time and have children decide the order of activities and timing.

### Tips for early Playdates:

- Keep them short in duration.
- Make playdates reinforcing for both children.
- Include indoor and outdoor activities.
- Incorporate toys that both children enjoy.
- Associate your child with a peer preferred toy so that your child becomes reinforcing to the peer.
- Keep the focus on parallel play and don't force interaction between the children too soon.
- Try bringing your child and peer to a family friendly restaurant and then to a playground.
- Over time increase the duration of your child's Parallel Play within a Playdate and reinforce any social interaction.

As your child becomes for comfortable playing in proximity to his/her peer and is able to participate in play for longer durations you can incorporate more structure within the Playdate. With the increase in social demands on your child it may be necessary for you to provide prompts to your child and his/her peer to sustain their interactions.



## Playskills: Structuring a Playdate

### Tips for later Playdates:

- Continue to include reinforcing activities for both children.
- Begin to include preferred and lesser preferred activities to encourage your child to be flexible.
- Schedule free play and outdoor play.
- Include simple board games that require turn taking.
- Focus some activities on pretend play such as dress up.
- Plan some community outings.
- Come up with some fun arts and crafts activities.
- Provide opportunities for physical play.
- Offer a snack.
- If the activity doesn't look like fun, keep it out of the Playdate.
- Focus on teaching play skills with peers and not behaviours for school.

Once your child is able to attend to playing a few activities, begin to increase the amount of activities that the children can engage in as well as allow them to choose the activities and order. At this stage in the Playdate your role is to keep track of the time for each activity and monitor for turn-taking etc. If your child uses a visual schedule you can create one in the format with which he/she is familiar (object, photo, picture symbols or text). You can provide the children with a choice board and they can choose them, placing the activities on the schedule). This will help support independence in play and transition from activity to activity. Have your child remove the activity from the schedule once it's completed to reinforce that the activity is completed, and how many more play activities are to come before the playdate ends. End the Playdate on a calm and quiet tone.



# Playskills: Preparing Peers for Playdates

## How can I prepare the peer for my child's Playdate?

Prior to your child's Playdate you may want to meet individually with your child's peer. Here are some ideas that may assist you in supporting your child's peer and to give them some strategies for interacting with your son/daughter:

- If your child has difficulty sustaining a conversation, remaining focused on an activity or walks away, teach the peer how to be persistent with your child (for example, saying your child's name when they walk away ("Johnny, I'm talking to you" as they tap your child on the shoulder or, take them by the hand back to the play area.
- Show them gestures that work with your child in drawing their attention to people and other items they need to attend to during play.
- Demonstrate how to address any of your child's potential challenging behaviours or when to ignore them by providing the peer with phrases that work for redirecting your child (for example, "Sally, stop that!", "Stop grabbing", etc.).

It is important to prepare your child's peer so that he/she doesn't experience being socially rejected. Speak to your child's peer about what to do if your child attempts to initiate an interaction in an unconventional manner (for example, shoving a toy in front of the peers face or grabbing them on the arm and squeezing hard). As a parent, you want the peer to have an appropriate response in order to reinforce the correct social initiation behaviour.

## How can I support my child's peer during the Playdate?

### Flashcards

Create flashcards to prompt your child's peer. During the playdate you can use the flashcards to non-verbally guide the peer to prompt your child when needed. This will allow you to remain in the background without providing verbal instruction to minimize interrupting the social interactions between your child and the peer. It is beneficial to use this strategy as it can also be used to have the peer reinforce your child's appropriate play interactions.

The visual system can be simple directions for the peer regarding social interaction, praising your child, or the structure of the Playdate. For example, you can write on flash cards prompts for the peer such as, "Take a Break", "Get Attention", "Look Here", "Say Help me", "Ask me for \_\_\_\_\_", "Your turn", "Way to go!" etc. Phrases should be developmentally appropriate and reflect the language of same age peers.

### Reinforcement Inventory

Take some time to put together a list of items, activities, foods etc that your child enjoys. Tell the peer about your child's likes/dislikes. Ask the peer what they find interesting and incorporate mutual interests within the Playdate. Watch what both the children play with during their Playdate and take notes so you can remember for future Playdates what your child and his/her peer enjoyed playing with and how he/she played with the toys. Your child's peer can also bring to the Playdate an item he/she enjoys playing with.

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## Playskills: Preparing Peers for Playdates

### Sample Flashcards:

Take a Break

Get Attention

Say “Help me”

Your Turn

Ask me for \_\_\_\_\_

Reinforce

\*Cues the peer to provide social praise, or other tangible reinforcement.



# Playskills: Preparing Peers for Playdates

## Blank Template:


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# Playskills: Preparing Peers for Playdates

## Sample Reinforcement Inventory:

Make a list of potential reinforcers that your child may find motivating. Refer to *Potential Reinforcement Sample* below for a list of potential reinforcers. By observing your child at home or in the community and/or speaking with your child, their teachers, friends or other individuals involved in their life, place a checkmark in the column that represents your child's interest level in that item or activity.

Description of Potential Reinforcers	LIKES			
	Very much	Much	A little	Not at all
<b>Tangible</b>				
Action figures				
Blocks				
Food (*caution allergies)				
<b>Activities</b>				
Classroom helper				
Cooking				
Extra recess time with friend				
<b>Social</b>				
Applause				
High five				
Being Praised				
<b>Tokens</b>				
Bingo chips				
Graph progress on chart				
Paper money to trade in for other reinforcer				

# Playskills: Preparing Peers for Playdates

## Potential Reinforcement Sample:

Tangible	Activities	Social	Tokens
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Action figures</li> <li>○ Beads</li> <li>○ Bean bags</li> <li>○ Blocks</li> <li>○ Books</li> <li>○ Cars, trucks or trains</li> <li>○ Cartoon/movie figures</li> <li>○ Crayons and paper</li> <li>○ Dolls</li> <li>○ Fans</li> <li>○ Flashlight</li> <li>○ Food/drink (*Caution Allergies)</li> <li>○ Jacks</li> <li>○ Jewelry</li> <li>○ Kaleidoscope</li> <li>○ Lego</li> <li>○ Marbles</li> <li>○ Models</li> <li>○ Musical instruments</li> <li>○ Play dough</li> <li>○ Puzzles</li> <li>○ Sand toys</li> <li>○ Shape sorter</li> <li>○ Silly putty</li> <li>○ Slinky</li> <li>○ Stickers</li> <li>○ Stress ball</li> <li>○ Stuffed toys/animals</li> <li>○ Any Vibrating toy</li> <li>○ Yo-Yo</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Computer time</li> <li>○ Going for a walk</li> <li>○ Listening to music</li> <li>○ Painting</li> <li>○ Playing a game</li> <li>○ Playing Nintendo, Xbox, PS3</li> <li>○ Showing special object/hobby/ interest</li> <li>○ Singing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Applause</li> <li>○ Being praised</li> <li>○ High five</li> <li>○ Positive comment cards</li> <li>○ Smiles</li> <li>○ Thumbs up</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Bingo chips</li> <li>○ Graphing progress on chart</li> <li>○ Happy face on paper</li> <li>○ Movie tickets</li> <li>○ Paper money</li> <li>○ Points</li> <li>○ Ribbons</li> <li>○ Special certificate of completed work</li> <li>○ Stars on chart</li> <li>○ Stickers</li> </ul>

\* This is not an exhaustive list

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## Playskills: Monitoring Progress

### **Why is monitoring the progress of my child's Playdates important?**

Gathering information on your child's progress will be an important component of guiding your Playdate goals and determining any changes you need to make to increase social engagement (for example, changing the activity to one that provides more turn taking and requesting). Direct observation of your child's playdates will allow you to assess how much your child is interacting with his/her peer(s) and the quality of those social interactions.

### **What am I looking for when observing my child's playdates?**

When observing your child's Playdates look at:

- whether the peer initiates interactions with your child
- whether your child responds to the peer's initiations
- whether your child initiates with the peer
- whether the peer responds to your child, and
- whether your child is engaging in any inappropriate behaviors

Take note of any types of behaviours that the peer or your child is demonstrating that are interfering with the social interactions, for example:

- your child pushes a toy toward a peer, but the peer does not respond
- your child asks for help, but gets no response
- the peer asks a question, but does not give your child time to respond
- your child responds nonverbally, but the peer doesn't realize that it was a response
- the peer continually tells your child what to do

Once you have identified any behaviour that may be interfering with social interaction, you can provide alternative behaviours to increase social interaction during the Playdate (for example, if the peer is asking your child a question and doesn't give him/her enough time to answer, you can let the peer know they need to wait longer for your child to respond).

Frequent progress monitoring also can support you in:

- determining the success of the activity
- recording specific skills that your child is consistently demonstrating
- determining target skills for your child that can become the focus for future skill development
- recording change across time (Odom et al., 1993)

# Playskills: Playdate Observation Form

## Playdate Observation Form:

### Playdate Observation Form:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Peer(s) Present: \_\_\_\_\_

Activity: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Activity

Please circle the following Yes (Y) or No (N):

1. Did the children participate in the activity after your introduction and modeling how to play/do the activity? **Y N**
2. Did the children enjoy the activity? **Y N**
3. Did the activity contain materials that promoted social interactions? **Y N**
4. Did the activity promote positive or negative social interactions? Give examples.

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Did your child use the toys in the manner in which they were intended or engage in a non-useful manner? Give examples.

\_\_\_\_\_

6. What changes can be made in the play environment to improve social interactions (for example, materials used, providing the peer with a play script, role playing with peer the activity prior to its introduction, asking the peer to choose a phrase to socially praise your child, etc.)

\_\_\_\_\_

7. Do any changes need to be made to the peer(s) involved in the playdate? **Y N**  
If yes, describe: \_\_\_\_\_

# Playskills: Playdate Observation Form

## Sample Playdate Observation Form:

Please fill in information below and indicate frequency of target behaviours that you've chosen:

**Legend:** Yes (Y): target behaviour occurred  
No (N): target behaviour didn't occur

Time	Activity	Target Behaviours					
		Looks at Peer	Parallel Play	Taking Turns	Exchanging Materials	Requesting Items	Asking to Play
10:00-10:10am	Rolling ball back and forth on floor 10 exchanges.	Y, Y, Y, N, Y, Y, N, N, Y, Y  * Peer provided my child with a verbal prompt to look at him and roll the ball on three exchanges		Y, Y, Y, Y, Y, Y, Y, Y, N, N  * I provided two visual prompts to peer to indicate my turn to my child on last two exchanges.			Y independently asked peer to play.
10:15am-10:30am	Building a train track.		Y child and peer building their own train tracks in close proximity to one another.		Y my child shared materials. Peer asked my child 3 times for a piece of train track from box and he gave it to him.	Y my child requested by signing to peer and gesturing he wanted a piece of track 5 times during activity.	





# Playskills: Playdate Observation Form

## Sample Blank Playdate Observation Form:

Please fill information below and indicate frequency of target behaviours:

Legend: Yes (Y): target behaviour occurred  
No (N): target behaviour didn't occur

Time	Activity	Target Behaviours					
		Looks at Peer	Parallel Play	Taking Turns	Exchanging Materials	Requesting Items	Asking to Play



# Playskills: Playbooks and Play Scripts

## **What are Playbooks and Play Scripts?**

Many children with ASD may find it challenging to play with toys appropriately or in the manner in which they were intended for use. Playbooks and Play Scripts are visual strategies that are used to support children with ASD increase play skills.

Play Scripts are visual prompts that help guide the play. For Play Scripts to be effective your child needs to be able attend to others actions and imitate them in a sequence of multiple actions (for example, you're able to say "copy me", do several motor movements such as unzip coat, hang up hat and place shoes in closet, and your child copies your actions). There are times when your child will engage in play outside of the script you may have prepared. When this happens, depart from the script and interact spontaneously with your child until the play stalls. You can always go back to the prepared script

Playbooks and Play Scripts are very similar tools for teaching play in that they show simple sequences of steps in a play routine. For both strategies a book format may be used and each page of the book represents one step in a play sequence. In a Playbook, only pictures are used to illustrate the sequence (for example, stacking legos, or colouring a picture). However, in a Play Script both pictures and words are used to illustrate the sequence (e.g., playing with a doll house, driving toy trains).

Play Scripts can be short or long, based on a child's current skills. Typically, the script starts out in a short form that the child can quickly learn. Once a child is successful with the interactions in the short script, additions are made to facilitate spontaneous and creative responses during the play.

## **Pre-requisites for using a Playbook:**

- Be able to do at least five different play activities
- Tolerate waiting for reinforcement
- Understand that pictures represent objects
- Have the motor and attending skills to seek out and bring back toys

## **Playbooks and Play Scripts are used to:**

- Teach a greater range of play skills
- Increase the complexity of language
- Increase imagination and creativity
- Expand range of interests and increase topics of conversation
- Provide opportunities for observational learning
- Learn to follow rules, practice community and societal norms for social behaviour
- Increase social interactions

# Playskills: Playbooks and Play Scripts

## Considerations for Playbooks and Play Scripts

1. Choose an item that interests your child but one that they don't play with appropriately.
2. The item should be easy to manipulate and developmentally appropriate.
3. Playing with the item can be easily illustrated using pictures.
4. Develop some play ideas for selected item.
5. Start with simple steps (2-4) and build to more complex steps (8-12+).
6. Activities in your child's Playbook should have a clear beginning and end.

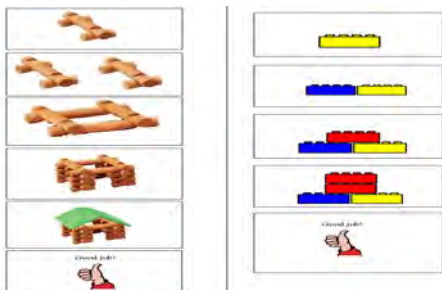
## Creating a Playbook

1. Develop a title page (for example, building a house).
2. Photograph each step to the play activity.
3. Place photographs on a single page in sequence.
4. Consider building in reinforcement at the end of the Playbook as a reward for your child remaining on task and engaging in an appropriate play activity.

## How do I teach the Playbook?

- Introduce the book to your child by presenting it with the materials required to play.
- Show your child how to turn the pages of the book and create the play activity from the pictures in the book with the materials. This provides your child with a modeling prompt of the finished product so he/she know what it is you're asking him/her to create.
- You can say to your child, "Time to play \_\_\_\_\_!" and encourage your child to take his/her turn with the materials and provide the necessary prompt for him/her to follow the pictures as needed (for example, hand over hand, partial physical prompt, gestural prompt, or verbal prompt). Prompt your child from behind.
- When your child has completed the Playbook provide him/her with a reinforcer to promote independent play behaviour.
- You can add/or replace pages once your child has learned the play sequence to expand his/her play repertoire.
- You can build in social and communicative opportunities (for example, if one of the activities is colouring with crayons, the next page might cue your child to pick up the picture and bring it to you, saying "Look what I did!" or "Look."

## Playbook Samples:



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# Playskills: Playbooks and Play Scripts

## Creating Play Scripts:

- Select a character and setting to be include and a theme/storyline that your child will enjoy.
- Develop a title page.
- Alternate pages with characters saying something and characters moving or being in action.
- Limit the number of words on each page to direct your child's actions with materials or what is happening in the script story (for example, everyone sings "Yo, ho, ho", the pirates board the ship, fire cannons, sail to the island, find a treasure map, hunt for treasure, etc.).
- Place 1-2 pictures on each page to show the main focus of the instruction (for example, for a pirate ship theme Play Script, Captain Jack fires the cannon could be represented with a picture of the pirate and a cannon going boom, leaving out other information such as putting in the gun powder, cannon balls and lighting the fuse).
- Pictures can be made with photos, drawings, Boardmaker™, clipart etc.
- Start with a short script of 2-4 pages and increase to 8-12+ once child becomes familiar with Play Script.
- Prior to teaching the Play Script go through each step to ensure it makes sense.
- Consider building in reinforcement at the end of the Play Script as a reward for your child completing the Play Script and engaging in appropriate pretend play.

## How do I teach a Play Script?

- Introduce the book with script to your child by presenting it with the materials required to play.
- Show your child how to turn the pages of the book and create the play activity from the pictures in the book with the materials. This provides your child with a modeling prompt of the finished product so he/she knows what it is you're asking him/her to create.
- You can say to your child, "Time to play \_\_\_\_\_!" and encourage your child to take his/her turn with the materials and provide the necessary prompt for them to follow the pictures as needed (for example, hand over hand, partial physical prompt, gestural prompt, or verbal prompt).
- When your child has completed the Play Script provide him/her with a reinforcer to promote independent and pretend play behaviour.
- You can add/or replace pages once your child has learned the play sequence to expand his/her play repertoire.
- Be sure to vary the order of the activities.

# Playskills: Playbooks and Play Scripts

## Sample Play Script:

### Dentist

**Characters:** Dentist (D), Patient (P), Secretary (S)

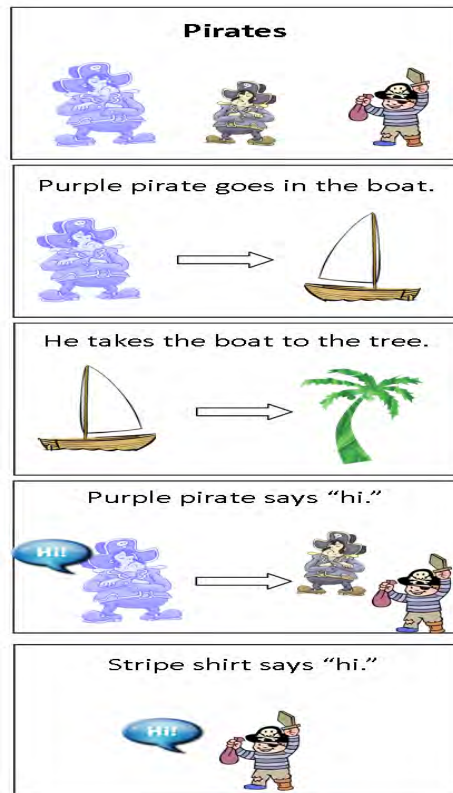
**Materials:** Rubber Gloves, Mask, Dental Instruments, White Coat, Telephone, Table/Chair

1. **P:** I have an appointment for 2 o'clock
2. **S:** Have a seat. The dentist will see you soon.
3. **D:** Hi, I'm Dr. (name). Come in and take a seat.
4. **P:** Okay, thank-you.
5. **D:** Let's have a look. Open your mouth.
6. **P:** (patient opens mouth).
7. **D:** You have no cavities. Keep brushing.
8. **P:** Thank-you doctor.
9. **D:** See you in 6 months.

### Variations:

- Filling in cavities.
- Taking X-rays.
- Cleaning teeth.

## Sample Play Script:



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# Playskills: Teaching Ball Play

## **What is Ball Play and why is it a good place to begin?**

Imitation is an important part of early childhood development, as it promotes learning and the development of social behaviors. Children with autism tend to show impaired ability to imitate skills and actions in certain contexts, which vary depending on the child. Ball play is a common childhood activity that is a great shared activity to promote imitation and learn further skills like attending, following the instructions of a peer or adult, and sharing.

## **What are the benefits of teaching Ball Play?**

- Increases your child's ability to imitate appropriate play behaviour.
- Builds your child's ability to attend.
- Gives him/her eye/hand and gross motor practice.
- Prepares him/her for other sports games that children play in school and the community.

## **The Stages of Ball Play**

- Imitates actions with ball.
- Follows instructions to perform a variety of actions with the ball.
- Engages in back and forth ball play with another person.
- Practices basic skills with ball (for example, bouncing and throwing a ball).

## **What are the pre-requisites for my child to learn Ball Play?**

- Your child can follow your directions most of the time without engaging in challenging behaviour.
- Your child is able to imitate five to ten one-step instructions (for example, "Do this," you raise your arms up in the air and your child does the same).

## **Ball Play Imitation Stage:**

Once you've determined if your child has some of the pre-requisite skills to learn ball play, the goal is to teach him/her to imitate your basic actions with the ball.

- Sit facing your child either in a chair or on the floor.
- Choose a ball that your child can manage. As he/she learns to imitate your actions with a ball change the size and colour to promote generalization.
- Say, "Do this," and demonstrate the action you want your child to imitate (for example, bouncing the ball once).
- Hand the ball to your child.
- Provide the prompt necessary for your child to be successful (for example, pointing to the floor to indicate they need to bounce the ball).
- Reinforce your child for successfully doing the action.
- Repeat.
- Teach several ways of using the ball (for example, bouncing, throwing, kicking, and rolling).



# Playskills: Teaching Ball Play

## **Ball Play and Receptive Commands:**

Once your child has learned to imitate several actions with the ball, the goal is to teach them how to follow one-step instructions in using the ball. It is beneficial to have an additional person to support you in prompting the child from behind as needed. To promote this skill, it is beneficial for your child to already be able to follow some directions in using other toys.

- Face your child either sitting on the floor or standing in front of your child.
- Provide your child with a direction (for example, “kick the ball”).
- Have the person prompt your child from behind if needed to complete the action (for example, providing them with a hand over hand prompt) or you may prompt from in front by pointing to a visual representation of the action such as a picture card on a key ring).
- Reinforce your child for successfully completing the action.
- Repeat.
- Teach several receptive commands such as: “Throw the ball”, “Kick the ball,” “Roll the ball,” and “Catch the ball.”

## **Reciprocal Ball Play Stage:**

The goal for this stage of ball play is to teach your child to engage in back and forth actions with the ball (for example, you bounce the ball to your child and he/she bounces it back to you). Initially your child may only be able to complete a single exchange. Continue to reinforce your child for being successful, for example, “Great throw” or “Awesome catch.” It is important over time to fade the level of reinforcement to more natural levels. As your child becomes more confident and successful in completing numerous exchanges (ten to fifteen) you may introduce a peer.

A strategy you may use to support your child with a peer is to place a coloured piece of tape on the floor to indicate to him/her where he/she needs to stand or sit during the exchange. Also, marking the area for play with orange pylons or chalk can be used to visually represent boundaries for play.

# Playskills: Pretend Play

## What is Pretend Play?

Pretend Play happens later in development (usually around two years of age in typically developing children) and is the most sophisticated form of play. There are two different types of Pretend Play:

***In vivo*** Pretend Play: your child is using his body to pretend with or without props. Here your child is acting out scenes or activities or even pretending to be different characters.

***In vitro*** Pretend Play: your child pretends using an object such as a doll or a puppet and is moving and acting for the figurine rather than for themselves. The figurine has the personality that your child creates. *In vitro* Pretend Play is an advanced skill and appears toward the end of play development.

Pretend Play is particularly important for developing the skills needed for social relationships, language and communication. Playing the rolls of others may give your child some empathy for the experiences of these other people. This type of play is often delayed in children with ASD, but many children with ASD can and do ultimately develop Pretend Play.

Levels of Pretend Play can include:

- Pretend nonverbal imitation.
- Pretend receptive actions.
- Pretend representational play (pretending to be what we are not – e.g., using a cardboard box as a spaceship and pretending to be an astronaut).
- Pretend joint imitative play, including play narration (Pretend Play with another person).

## What are some of the skills I can develop in my child to promote successful Pretend Play skills?

You can teach your child:

- Imitation using toys.
- Gross motor imitation.
- Chain several gross motor imitations into a series.
- Pretend simple actions (drinking, eating, brush hair, lick ice cream cone).
- Pretend with props (push a stroller, play kitchen).
- Pretend to use objects that are not present (ride a horse, hold a baby, talk on the phone).
- Pretend to be something (train, airplane, teapot).
- Pretend to be someone (superman, princess, dog).
- Daily routines (going to school, eating breakfast).
- Pretend to go somewhere (zoo, the beach).
- Dress-up and character pretend.
- Practice turn taking.
- Teach information about daily activities in the community (e.g., What does a police officer do?; What happens in a supermarket or in the dentist office?)



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## Playskills: Pretend Play

### **How do I teach Pretend Play?**

There are lots of simple, everyday pretend actions your child can learn to use in Pretend Play, such as driving a car, riding a horse or banging a drum.

Once your child can do some pretend actions, you can develop his/her imaginative and pretend play skills by breaking the Pretend Play activity into steps. You can also use written or picture instructions to help your child understand what to do. You might want to make it funny – for example, try using a hair brush instead of a spoon to feed a teddy bear. You can also encourage your child to join in with a fun game of 'let's pretend'.

This type of play also includes role-play. You can encourage role-play by taking your child's favourite story and getting him/her and others to act it out. You can give the children costumes and suggest changes to the characters' voices and gestures. By slowly introducing new themes and gradually changing parts of the play, you can guide your child towards independent creative dramatic play.

# Playskills: Social Games

## What are the levels of Socialization in Play?

Levels of Socialization in Play
<b>Solitary Play:</b> Child plays by himself/herself.
<b>Parallel Play:</b> Child plays near another child, may show interest or occasionally exchange toys but not really interactive.
<b>Associative Play:</b> Several children are engaged in the same play and interact with one another. They share equipment or toys, but each child goes his/ her own way.
<b>Cooperative Play:</b> Children work together toward common goal or share a fantasy theme that requires mutual exchange to build scenario.

## What are some ideas of games or activities I can play with my child based on each level of socialization in play?

	Solitary Play	Parallel Play	Associative Play	Cooperative Play
Tag				√
Hide & Seek				√
Tug of War				√
Monkey in the Middle				√
Dodge Ball				√
Relay Races			√	√
Musical Chairs			√	√
Guessing Games Which hand? Which cup?				√
Treasure-Hunt visual	√	√	√	√
Treasure-Hunt verbal	√	√	√	√
Flashlights	√	√	√	√
Hot or Cold		√	√	√
Red Light/Green Light	√	√	√	√
Mother May I?		√	√	√
Red Rover				√
Duck Duck Goose			√	√
Hokey Pokey	√	√	√	√
Happy And You Know It	√	√	√	√
Simon Says	√	√	√	√
Interactive Hand Games	√	√	√	√
Charades		√	√	√
Magic Tricks	√	√	√	√

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## Playskills: Social Games

	Solitary Play	Parallel Play	Associative Play	Cooperative Play
Broken Telephone (down the line)		√	√	√
"20 Questions"-who, what, where		√	√	√
I went to the store and bought...		√	√	√
Hungry Hippo	√		√	√
Candyland				√
Monopoly Jr.			√	√
Trouble			√	√
Barnyard Bingo			√	√
Dominoes	√	√	√	√
Memory	√	√	√	√
Blue's clues	√	√	√	√
Connect Four	√	√	√	√
Simon Says			√	√
Guess Who?			√	√
Pop up pirate	√		√	√
Sorry			√	√
Chicken Cha Cha Cha			√	√
Don't break the Ice			√	√
Don't wake Daddy			√	√
Hi Ho! Cherry-O			√	√
Mouse Trap			√	√
Snakes and Ladders/Chutes and Ladders			√	√
Card Games	√	√	√	√
Tinker toys	√	√	√	√
Lego sets	√	√	√	√
Car/Train sets	√	√	√	√
Baby dolls/figurines	√	√	√	√
Doctor kits	√	√	√	√
Toy kitchens	√	√	√	√
Tool benches	√	√	√	√
Dress up	√	√	√	√
Play dough	√	√	√	√
Puppets	√	√	√	√
Mr. Potato Head	√	√	√	√

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## Playskills: Social Games

	Solitary Play	Parallel Play	Associative Play	Cooperative Play
Marco Polo			√	√
Twister			√	√
Ring around the rosie			√	√
London Bridges			√	√
Follow the Leader			√	√
Air Hockey			√	√
Tic Tac Toe			√	√
Ball play	√	√	√	√
Water play	√	√	√	√
Sand play	√	√	√	
Finger painting	√	√	√	
Drawing	√	√		
Rock paper scissors				√

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# Independent Activity Schedules



## What is an Activity Schedule?

- A set of pictures or words that cue your child to engage in a sequence of activities.
- Usually a three-ring binder with pictures or words on each page to cue your child to perform tasks, or enjoy rewards.
- Incorporates the strength of the ASD learner through routines and visual representation of activities.
- They can be very detailed- breaking tasks into all of its separate parts, or it can be very general- using one picture or symbol to cue your child (for example, a sequence of pictures showing how to build a tower using coloured blocks or a picture of a puzzle).

## Why use an Activity Schedule?

- Promotes independence.
- Helps manage structured and unstructured time.
- Encourages social language and interactions.
- We all use them in one type or another (i.e., day-timer, calendar, to-do list).

## What format should I choose?

- Individualize and tailor your child's schedule to his/her abilities:
  - Three ring binder with one picture per page.
  - Activity strips.
  - Words or numbers instead of pictures.
  - Play and work activities.
  - Closed and open ended activities.

## Selecting Activities:

Your child will learn the schedule more quickly when:

- The initial schedule is brief (3-5 activities).
- It begins with activities that your child is already familiar with.
- Activities initially have a clear ending, graduate to open-ended activities with a timer.
- Activities that reflect your child's current skills and interests.

The first schedules should end with an enjoyable activity or snack. Also consider making it easy for your child to pick up and put away the activities (e.g., storing them in boxes or bins.)






# Independent Activity Schedules

Samples of activities that may be included in the Activity Schedule:

Example: Giving your sister a high 5



Example: Making a sandwich

<p>On binder cover (end product)</p> 	<p>Page 1</p> 	<p>Page 2</p> 	<p>Page 3</p> 	<p>Page 4</p> 
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------



## Independent Activity Schedules

### What are some of the pre-requisite skills my child needs to learn an Independent Activity Schedule?

Your child needs to be able to:

- Attend to relevant information in the picture. For example, your child needs to be able to focus on the actual item in the picture and not the background. Ensure that the pictures in your child's activity schedule have neutral backgrounds and don't have distracting backgrounds. Some children respond better to actual photos of the activities instead of representative pictures such as Boardmaker™.
- Accept being prompted. When teaching an activity schedule it is important that you're able to touch their hands, arms, and shoulders to guide them to make the correct responses. If your child is resistant to physical touch you may teach them to accept being touched by finding types of contact they enjoy (i.e. tickles, spinning, piggy back rides, hugs). Introduce physical touch when you share these activities. Take their hand to tickle you before you tickle them, or guide them to climb on a chair before you give them a piggy back ride.
- They have learned that pictures represent objects.

### Materials needed: *(for the binder format)*

- Binder
- Pictures/words
- Activities
- Bins/Containers
- Velcro

### Preparing to Teach:

#### ***Arrange Materials***

Have everything ready! Place the materials on a work surface or shelves, from left to right, in the order they will be used. Arrange space so that the schedule book will always be clearly visible. Make sure his/her reinforcers (e.g., snacks) are in an easy to reach place for you. Don't use large bites as your child may still be eating their reinforcement while making an error. Try to choose an area that is away from some of the larger distractions in your home (e.g. the door, TV, the phone), but don't worry about occasional distracting sounds or people going by. Your child must learn to engage in activities when distractions are present.

# Independent Activity Schedules



## Initial Instruction

Give your child one initial instruction, such as “Time to play”. After giving the one initial instruction, **DO NOT TALK** to your child again until there is an activity that may involve interaction with you or until he/she is done the schedule. *Verbal instructions may become embedded in activities, preventing him/her from achieving independence.*

## How do I teach the Activity Schedule?

### Prompting

Stay behind your child and provide the appropriate prompt to him/her to:

- Go to the activity schedule.
- Open the book and point to the first picture.
- Pick up materials for the activity and complete it on a nearby workspace.
- Put away the activity.
- Go back to the schedule and repeat the procedure for every picture in the schedule.

Teaching the activity schedule initially begins with full hand over hand guidance to ensure that your child is not making any errors. After using the activity schedule a few times you may notice that your child will become less dependent on your prompts. Their response will let you know how much prompting they need.

### Delivering Reinforcement

When just starting a schedule, deliver rewards frequently, and deliver the rewards from behind. If your child is working well and cooperatively, reach around and place the snack in his/her hand and try to time delivery in occurrence with appropriate behaviour. If you reinforce them when he/she is doing something correctly then they are more likely to do it correctly again.

### Fading Prompts

As your child becomes more successful in completing the activity schedule remember to fade your prompts, for example, you may go from using a hand over hand prompt for him/her to turn the page on the activity schedule to using a partial physical prompt where you guide from the elbow, to a touch on the elbow. Generally you will learn from your child when to fade your prompts. When your child correctly performs desired behaviours by merely touching him/her, you may begin shadowing him/her by following his/her movements closely with your hands. If he/she continues to respond correctly then you move your hands further away from him/her. When he/she is completing the tasks correctly by shadowing, you can take the final prompt-fading step, fade your presence. Initially step back and slowly increase the distance between you. Remember Waiting too long to fade may slow your child’s progress, but fading too soon results in too many errors.





# Independent Activity Schedules

## Common Challenges:

- **My child enjoys playing with activities but ones with *no clear end!***
  - Watching TV, playing with dolls/cars and computer games all have no clear end. A timer could be introduced and can be set by your child (make setting the timer a task itself).
- **My child will wait for the physical contact and will wait to be physically guided.**
  - Some children enjoy physical contact and will wait to be manually guided. If this is the case, increase the amount of physical contact that you give your child to include in the schedule “physical activities” that act as rewards earned at the end of the schedule (e.g., tickles, hugs, hive fives, etc.).
- **My child engages in repetitive behaviours during her activity schedule.**
  - If your child is engaging in repetitive behaviours (e.g., hand flapping, rocking) be careful not to deliver reinforcement when your child is displaying repetitive behaviour. Learn through observation to predict the onset of repetitive behaviours and interrupt them quickly by prompting them back onto the task.
- **My child doesn't seem to want the reinforcer we offer!**
  - To prevent boredom with reinforcers, rotate the reinforcers included in the schedule. Add new reinforcers on an ongoing basis. If your child is accessing the reinforcement before earning it, place the reinforcers out of their reach. If your child is presenting challenging behaviour, re-evaluate the rewards in the schedule and consider increasing the frequency of delivery or reinforcing item/activities especially when he/she is performing well.

# Independent Activity Schedules

## Independent Activity Schedule

### Data Collection

Child's name: \_\_\_\_\_

- Activity:** List the activities your child was expected to complete (one line for each activity).  
**Matches:** How much prompting did your child require to locate the basket/bin that contained the activity?  
**Obtains:** How much prompting did your child require to pick up the activity and bring it to his/her designated work area?  
**Completes:** How much prompting did your child require to complete the activity?  
**Puts Away:** How much prompting did your child require to put away the activity/place the activity away?

Date	Activity	Matches	Obtains	Completes	Puts away	Comments

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