Facilitating Play Dates for a Child with Special Needs

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Facilitating Play Dates

• Importance of play and leisure activities
• Readiness for a play date
• Selecting a focus
• Selecting play partners
• Organizing the play setting
• Structuring the play group
• Supporting and guiding the play date
• Questions
What is Play?

- Pleasurable
- Requires Active Participation/Engagement
- Spontaneous, Voluntary and Motivating
- Flexible and Changing
- Involves people, places, times and props
- Enables children to develop in all areas
Developmental Stages of Play

- Exploratory play
- Cause and effect play
- Functional play
- Constructive play
- Physical play
- Pretend play
Social Dimensions of Play

• Isolate
• Orientation or Onlooker
• Parallel or Proximity
• Turn taking
• Common focus
• Common goal
Types of Social Play

- Playing alone (Solitary play)
- Playing alongside (Parallel play)
- Playing and sharing with others (Associative play)
- Playing and cooperating (Cooperative play)
Importance of Play

• Develops self confidence and competence
• Way to connect with others
• Allows the use of props and themes to create social and imaginary worlds
• Way to explore societal roles and rules
• Avenue to experience cognitive, social, linguistic, motor and emotional growth
• Way to negotiate social conflicts
What is Recreation and Leisure?

• Free time
• Personal
• Voluntary and Motivating
• Can be done at home, school or community
• Both individual and group based
• Can be indoor or outdoor
• Understanding, knowing and experiencing
Importance of Leisure Activities

- Pleasurable
- Relaxing
- Fun
- Way to connect with others
- Leads to the development of other skills
- Enhances overall quality of life
Challenges for Children with Special Needs

• Communication
• Socialization
• Attention
• Imagination
• Restricted Interests/Repetitive Behavior
• Sensory Processing Impairments
• Theory of Mind
Rationale for building play into home routines

• How to use free time appropriately
• Connecting to others
• Building a repertoire
• Increasing amount of time
• Exposing
• Desensitizing to sensory and environmental factors
How Do We Get Started?
Readiness for a Play Date

- Is it developmentally appropriate?
- Does your child engage in independent play or leisure activities that are reinforcing?
- Does your child attempt to socially engage others?
- Does your child attend to others?
- Does your child imitate the actions of other people?
Selecting a focus for the play date

- Developmental play patterns
- Communication functions and means
- Socialization with peers
- Longer engagement
- Developing friendships
Individual Activity

Complete the Play Preference, Communication and Social Skill Inventory on your Child
Choosing Play Partners

• Goal is to develop meaningful, long-lasting relationships
Finding Play Partners

• From existing social network (family, school, home, neighborhood, community)
• Socially competent
• Enjoy playing with others
• Role models in the areas of weakness for children with special needs
Considerations

- Gender
- Age
- Development and Ability
- Temperament
- Social Style
- Play Interests
- Primary Language
- Sibling Relationships
Logistics of the Play Date

- When
- With whom
- Where
- For how long
- How often
- What materials
- What to do
Organizing the Play Setting

- Utilize a consistent space
- Clearly define boundaries
- Organize the area with furniture
- Limit Distractions
- Organize the materials by activity or theme
Play Area Example
Selecting Materials & Themes

- Play Fascinations
- Play Materials
- Actions with Materials
- Play Activities
- Play Themes
- Leisure and Recreational Activities

Individual Activity
fill out play inventory (3-7)
Individual Activity

• Selecting age appropriate and developmentally appropriate activities
  • Based upon your child’s play/leisure preferences, develop three play theme boxes or three leisure activities and a list of materials
  • Toys/activities should have the following:
    • High motivational value
    • Be developmentally appropriate
    • High social/imaginative potential
    • Reflect diversity of ability/gender/ethnicity
Structuring the Play Date

• Opening
• Rules/boundaries
• Plan for the Play
• Play
• Clean-up
• Plan or ideas for next meeting
• Closing
Supports

- Visual schedule for the play date
- Visually represented “play date rules/boundaries”
- Familiarize peers and your child with needs
- Social stories
- Social scripts
- Cue cards
- Visual conversation starters
Supports (cont’d)

• Visual choice board of play activities
• Visual timer
• Visual play scripts
• Communication systems/ devices
• Designated places to sit (chairs or carpet squares)
• Behavioral supports (first-then)
You Are the Director

- Be an observer
- Follow the children’s lead
- Repeat and expand on favorite activities
- Look for opportunities to target goals
- Model respectful and inclusive behavior
- Distribute attention among all the children
- Have fun!
- Reflect after each group
Follow your child’s lead and insert yourself in the play to encourage back and forth interactions.
Guiding Strategies

- **Recognize** ways children initiate play (non-verbal and verbal)
- **Interpret** for the peers what the child with special needs is communicating
- **Respond** by assisting your child in finding ways to initiate play (may need to be pre-taught)
Types of Play Guidance

- Orienting
- Imitation- Mirroring
- Parallel Play
- Joint Focus
- Joint Action
- Role Enactment
- Role Playing
Use interests, create toy appeal and structure when selecting toys for your child.
Scaffolding Play

• Adjusting assistance to match or slightly exceed the child’s independent level of play and engagement
• Knowing when to intervene and when to step back
• Linking new information to existing information
• Build on success
Examples of Maximum Support

- Setting out play materials
- Identifying toys used and roles in play
- Scripting actions or words/phrases
- Partnering peers
- Inserting a ritual
Examples of Intermediate Support

• Offering suggestions
• Posing leading questions
• Commenting on the play
• Reframing the play event

“What do you think she wants to do right now?”
Examples of Minimum Support

• Remaining on the periphery
• Being prepared to intervene as needed
Reflecting

- What went well?
- What was difficult?
- How can I continue what worked?
- How can I change what was difficult?
- Did I select the correct play partner?
- Did I have enough supports in place?
- Was the length of the play date appropriate?
- Take anecdotal notes
Resources

• Peer Play and the Autism Spectrum: The Art of Guiding Children’s Socialization and Imagination by Pamela Wolfberg

• Do-Watch-Listen-Say: Social and Communication Intervention for Children with Autism by Kathleen Ann Quill

• Skillstreaming The Elementary School Child: New Strategies and Perspectives for Teaching Prosocial Skills by Ellen McGinnis and Arnold P. Goldstein

• Tasks Galore- Let’s Play: Structured Steps to Social Engagement and Symbolic Play by Eckerode, Harshey, Fennel and Reynolds
Q&A