

STRATEGIES FOR *SYMBOLIC PLAY*

GOAL: to create an imaginative drama, building on natural interests (e.g. such as going to the park or being a princess). As much as possible, make this a collaborative, unfolding drama. You two create an adventure, for example, to save the princess, to explore new lands, or ride a horse.

Whatever the adventure, try to bring in specific games and exercises to facilitate motor, spatial, language, and sensory modulation capacities listed below as much as possible. Keep increasing the complexity of these games and exercises as progress occurs. For example, in the search for a special treasure, the obstacle courses will have more and more complex motor actions, such as balance beams and trampolines, to practice coordination. There will be throwing, catching and kicking Nerf balls, which might be imagined to be enemy balloons that have to be thrown back or magic bubbles that have to be tossed back and, if they are, three wishes are granted, etc.

The pretend play might also involve different spatial tasks, such as using visual or verbal clues to search. It could involve following more and more complex verbal directions. It might also involve gradually dealing with a range of sensations, for example, from soft sounds to loud sounds. Periodic rest and relaxation and some good bear hugs or airplane rides over a river might spice up the journey and provide nice interludes. The key is to keep the journey, whatever its goal, interesting and to maintain back-and-forth emotional signaling and gestures and verbal exchanges throughout the adventure. New imaginative elements can continually be created within the adventure. Obviously, the more these elements can be created jointly, the better.

ACTIVITIES

A. Floortime

- Focus on interactive creative pretend play with caregivers and with peers
- Keep expanding emotional themes in the play by challenging the child (not by leading the child). For example, the caregiver's dolly can become a little negative, challenging the child's dolly to become more assertive.
- Try to have longer and longer pretend play sequences and longer and longer verbal exchanges
- Gradually challenge the child to make sense and be more logical in his pretend play and his conversations and keep trying to get to higher and higher functional emotional developmental levels, e.g., why questions.

Specific Floortime Goals (in order of development)

1. Support the child's use of ideas with meaning, intent, or affect, rather than by labeling objects or pictures.
2. Challenge the child to express needs, desires, or interests.
3. Encourage the child to use ideas both in imaginative play and in realistic verbal interactions.
4. Help the child use ideas by fostering situations in which feelings or intentions are expressed.
5. Remember WAA (Words, Action, Affect): Always combine your words or ideas with your affect (expressed feelings) and actions.
6. Make a point of using words all the time; encourage chitchat with the child!
7. Initially, encourage the child's imagination by staging familiar interactions during pretend play. Challenge with the use of new plot twists.
 - *Challenge the child's dolls or teddy bears to feed each other, hug, kiss, cook, or go off to the park and play. Jump into the drama that has begun by assuming the role of a character and really ham it up!*
8. From time to time switch from becoming a character in one of the child's dramas to taking on the role of a narrator or side-line commentator.
 - *Your comments will thicken the plot.*
9. Periodically summarize the action and encourage the child to move the drama along.
10. Encourage the use of all types of ideas.
 - *Don't forget to incorporate ideas in the form of pictures, signs, and complex spatial designs, as well as words.*

B. Motor Interventions

1. Encourage motor planning, coordination, left/right integration, and balance. Use The Evolution game as a warm-up or to work on levels in The Evolution Game not fully mastered. For example, progress to the level of the game where the child has challenges (not easy or

smooth functioning) and then provide extra practice for the level just before that level and that level. The levels include the following types of activities:

- wiggling and rolling worms
- slithering snakes
- creeping alligators or turtles
- crawling doggies, cats, or rabbits (of increasing speed)
- walking chimps
- walking person
- running person
- jumping, hopping, skipping, etc. person

2. Increase motor planning and sequencing through more complex obstacle courses and pre-sport or sports activities, such as:

- Balance, coordination, and left/right integration with balance beams,
- rocking boats,
- rapid change of direction and change of speed,
- standing on one leg with eyes closed,
- air cushion games and trampoline,
- throwing and catching while standing on one leg and gradually more complex balance beam and obstacle course games.

4. Work on using both hands together in sports such as throwing and catching. Make scribble scrabble shapes and then real shapes and eventually figure 8's using both hands together (this will need to be very gradual beginning with very simple left/right activities).

C. Visual Spatial

- Treasure hunts of growing complexity
- Sports activities involving more and more complex tracking
- Agility exercising involving body awareness in space, e.g., getting through more and more complex obstacle courses with greater and greater speed, etc.
- Left/right mirror image exercises to enhance awareness of body conception
- Copying block designs and very simple changes
- Basic conservation exercises involving one-to-one correspondence, e.g., blocks placed vertically compared to blocks lying flat on the table

D. Rhythm and timing

Use music and sports

E. Auditory Processing and Language

- Do follow-direction games with gradually more complex directions to enhance verbal sequencing.

- Encourage more and more language at higher and higher levels of abstract thinking (e.g., “Why” questions etc.) in pretend play and reality-based dialogues.
- Use exercises from the higher levels of the Affect Based Language Curriculum (e.g., those that focus on “why” questions and causal reasoning).

F. Sensory Modulation

- Swinging, spinning, jumping, hugging and massage games with the child taking a greater and greater role in directing the games.
- Gradual exposure to sensations the child is over-reactive to, with the child being in charge and in the context of soothing regulating interactions. For example, the child directing the caregiver with their arms to talk louder or softer or tickle lightly or more firmly.
- Lots of games involving change of speed, intensity, and direction. For example, running fast, slow, and then super slow.

The different processing activities suggested above to facilitate the different processing areas should be practiced 3-4 times a day for 20 minutes or more each time. It is not possible to do all these activities each time.