

STRATEGIES FOR *OBJECT PLAY*

GOAL: create a game where the help of the caregiver is needed to find or get a toy or object the child really likes. The game can be a search game, a hunt game, or simply a problem-solving game—a simplified treasure hunt. Then, bring in specific exercises to support the motor, spatial, language, and sensory modulation capacities listed below as possible.

The first step is to show and then put a highly desired object out of reach or hide it and then help getting it. However, the “lazy” caregiver needs to be pulled to open the door or to help in getting through the complex obstacle course. On the way to the goal, the caregiver will insert numerous challenges, much like is true for any journey: walking on a balance beam; jumping on a mini-trampoline; throwing and catching big Nerf balls; balancing on air cushions; tracing and grabbing moving objects that need to be tracked and grabbed. Change up the speed from fast to slow to fast to very slow, etc. There may even be some music with dancing or other forms of rhythmic movement. Certainly there will be a need for some big bear hugs and some soothing and calming. Throughout the journey, naturally, you will work towards a continuous flow of back-and-forth gestures and, when possible, words and phrases. Also, when possible, toss in islands of imagination, such as pretending to be Superman as the child jumps on the trampoline or some other favorite character. In other words, create a journey that incorporates many of the processing exercises listed below.

In addition to this integrated exercise, it is important to try to practice the other exercises listed below, particularly ones that don’t get incorporated into this “special journey.”

ACTIVITIES

A. Floortime Summary

- Focus on extending the circles of communication by keeping any interaction going for as long as possible. For example, if the child wants to go out the door, play dumb so he has to show you where the doorknob is and then go get daddy to help open the door and then show daddy how to do it and then help him pull it himself, etc.
- Attempt to broaden the range of emotions the child expresses and the caregiver expresses during Floortime interactions by being very animated and expressive, for example, showing surprise, delight, concern, etc.
- Attempt to bring in as many processing areas as possible into the fun Floortime interactions. For example in the play, the object can be hidden, words or sounds can be used, and more and more complex actions challenge.
- Facilitate pretend play and the use of words by, for example, talking for the dolly and seeing if, as the dolly, you can get a hug or a kiss or some food. Initially, use familiar situations. Also, as part of the continuous flow of interaction, try as much as possible to elicit, in addition to gestures, words. This will be most likely in situations where you have created lots of pleasure, affect, and motivation.

Specific Floortime Goals (in order of development)

1. Create extra steps in Floortime plots.
 - *For example, you might try announcing “The car won’t move. What shall we do?”*
2. Create interesting barriers or obstacles to the child’s goals.
3. Work up to a continuous flow of circles of communication.
 - *Try to string together 30, 40, and even 50 back-and-forth’s.*
4. Be animated and show your feelings through your voice and facial expressions to help the child clarify intentions.
 - *If the child vaguely points to a toy and grunts, you might sometimes feign confusion, put a puzzled expression on your face, and fetch the “wrong” toy. The child’s gesturing and vocalizations will become more elaborate and perhaps heated as part of working harder to make wishes understood.*
5. Increase the child’s ability to plan movements and use senses and imitative skills in different circumstances (such as hide-and-seek and treasure-hunt games).

B. Motor Interventions

1. Encourage motor planning, coordination, left/right integration, and balance with *The Evolution Game*. Progress to the level of the game where the child is challenged (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

For children with very weak motor planning and coordination or with clear circumscribed challenges in basic capacities, practice this game with a focus on the movements, coordination, and left/right integration that the child has not yet mastered.

2. Gradually increase the complexity of obstacle courses with activities that require multi-step actions, such as rolling, throwing, or catching big Nerf balls.

3. For fine motor activities bring in scribbling, copycat scribbling games, and if possible, simple shapes.

4. Start pre-sport fundamentals, including kicking, throwing, catching, and bouncing big Nerf balls. Gradually increase the speed and decrease the size of the balls. Use:

- balance, coordination, and left/right integration
- balance beam
- rocking boat and airplane games
- shifting weight games
- air cushion games
- standing on one leg with or without eyes closed
- postures on therapy ball
- trampoline
- throwing and catching and then try it on one leg, etc.
- change of direction and change of speed games
- rolling and catching with both hands and lots of activities with hands crossing the midline

C. Visual Spatial

Have fun with:

- Treasure hunts and search games
- Throwing and catching and rolling games
- Body awareness activities, e.g., avoiding banging into the sides of the obstacle course
- Mirror games (looking in the mirror together and having fun with movement and making funny faces)
- Tracking in addition to throwing and catching above. Use pendulums, bubbles, flashlights and other activities that help the child follow moving objects.

D. Language

1. To improve articulation:

- identify difficult sounds
 - try copy-cat games making difficult sounds beginning with the easiest ones
 - while looking in the mirror, see how caregiver moves their tongue and mouth
 - chew different textures
 - sip through straws with circles
 - try blowing games with ping pong balls, etc.
2. Follow direction games combining gestures and simple words
 3. Read and follow directions in the Affect Based Language Curriculum book (ABLC).
 4. Challenge the use of more and more words during Floortime and problem solving time.

E. Rhythm and Timing

- Dance and move to music
- Do copycat games with changing rhythms
- Involve hands, feet, alternating moves

F. Sensory Modulation

1. Swinging, spinning, jumping, hugging and massage games with the child taking a greater and greater role in directing the games.
2. 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.
3. 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.