

### **Tips for Expanding Play: People Games, Object Play, and Flexibility in Play**

A **delay** means that your child is behind in developing their plays skills compared to children of the same age but they are showing the same developmental progression.

A **difference** means that your child is playing in **atypical** ways (i.e., interacting with toys in a different way or moving through stages of the development of play in a different order).

#### **Examples of atypical play behaviors:**

- Collecting and organizing toys but then the “play” ends there. Your child may not extend their play with toys beyond organizing them into lines or stacking them.
- An insistence that the environment or routine remain unchanged. Playing with toys in the same way, using the same script each time, and may get upset if you try to change it.
- Impaired symbolic play skills. Demonstrates difficulty playing with toys in new ways (e.g., stick is always a stick not a wand) beyond age when this is expected.
- Seems to prefer interacting with objects as opposed to people

#### **What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?**

It is a lifelong neurodevelopmental disorder that affects an individual’s social interaction and behaviour.

Children who get a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder differ widely in terms of their symptoms and in terms of the amount of support they need with respect to social interaction and behaviour. If this is something you have thought about with respect to your child or have concerns about make sure you see your doctor and also refer your child to Early Intervention Services in York Region. Early Intervention Services may be called something else in different areas of Ontario. Call your local preschool speech and language program and they will connect you with the appropriate supports in your area (or ask your doctor).

There are developmental milestone charts at <http://childdevelopmentprograms.ca/speech-and-language/eligibility-criteria-and-referrals/6-months/> that may help you pinpoint if there are red flags for autism spectrum disorder or not.

#### **Where do I start?**

People Games: A great place to start is with people games.

- Choose games that can be made into routines. Something like “peek-a-boo” that can be played the same way each time. You know your child and what your child likes/does not like. For example, if your child loves being thrown up in the air and caught, likes big hugs, likes running, likes being ticked, start with those games. Some children like touch, others do not. Create games based upon what you see your child likes. After many times repeating the game your child will become familiar with this routine. S/he will start to anticipate what you are going to do and might start doing some parts of the routine with you, such as counting with you, or pulling on your hands to get you to the hugging part of the game.
- Get them to notice you. Get your own car and imitate what your child is doing to get them to notice you and include you in their play.
- Hide puzzle pieces or cars in a bag so that your child has to come to you to get another piece. Be sure to keep it fun and playful, instead of controlling.

Expand Object Play: Before teaching any play skill, you should make sure that your child has the motor skills to play with that toy. Pick toys that are interesting, easy to manipulate, and appeals to their senses.

- Pick motivating toys: Children will become more interested in toys when they learn that they can make toys do fun things.
- Show your child how to work the toy, repeat if necessary. This will help your child learn which movements are most important when playing with that toy.

Expand Flexibility with Toys: In order to move your child beyond stacking or lining up, you may need to help your child by setting up toys so that they learn what else to do with the toy.

- Teach your child how to play with the toy to expand their skills beyond collecting and organizing toys.
- For example, If your child enjoys spinning puzzle pieces, show him what else he can do with the puzzle pieces. Set this up by doing all of it at first and letting your child do the very last step. Take a puzzle piece, put it on the space where it goes, and slide it until it is almost in place. Then take your child's hand (if tolerated) and help his hand slide it in place. You can choose puzzles that make a sound when the puzzle piece slides into place so that it is rewarding and motivating. Repeat and fade steps gradually until you can show a puzzle piece and the child knows to take it, find where it goes, and slide it into place.