



LET'S PLAY! PROJECTS

University at Buffalo • Center for Assistive Technology

Website: <http://letsplay.buffalo.edu/>

Guidelines to Promote Play Opportunities for Children with Disabilities

All children need successful opportunities to play and interact with toys and others. Because disabilities present barriers to play for some children, we need to identify strategies that will help children to circumvent these barriers and benefit from play itself. The following guidelines see the adult role as play partner and facilitator. Keep in mind that play is active, directed by the child and is fun!

Getting Ready for Play: Positioning Supports

In “getting ready” for play, make sure that children have the necessary physical supports so that their efforts can focus on playful interactions. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What is the most comfortable position for the child?
- Does the child have more than one positioning option for play?
- Do you need to consider options that allow the child to be mobile in the play environment? (If the child is not mobile you will need to consider additional methods to allow for choice making in play)
- Are additional supports necessary to help the child comfortably maintain positions? (Remember you want the child to spend his/her energy on playing not maintaining a position)
- Is the child positioned so that play partners and materials are situated in his/her line of vision?

Getting Ready for Play: Communication Supports

In “getting ready” for play, make sure that children have the necessary communication supports to be a play partner. Ask yourself the following questions:

- How will the child make choices/decisions during play?



LET'S PLAY! PROJECTS

University at Buffalo • Center for Assistive Technology

Website: <http://letsplay.buffalo.edu/>

- Include interactive play phrases (“it’s my turn”; “Yeah “You go first”; “Come and see”).
- Should alternatives beyond verbal communication be considered? (eye gaze, picture boards and/or simple voice recordings can be considered)

Getting Ready for Play: Social Supports

Children benefit most from playing with other children. There are several things to do to ensure success:

- Bring children to parks, centers and other places where children play as frequently as possible
- Provide your child with the supports she needs for playing in a group. This can include practicing appropriate phrases, words to songs and expectations of game/play “rules” (e.g. turn taking)
- Role playing provides familiarity to help the child interact with other children. For example, provide structured props and routines to “play” store, library and zoo with your child.

Selecting Toys for Children

Select toys for children that motivate, are easily used and are flexible enough to be used in different ways. The less defined a toy is, the more room for imaginative play!

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What features of a toy does the child seem to enjoy (visual, sounds, textures)?
- How does the child respond to these features(visual, sounds, textures)? Can you adjust these features or turn some off? (Observe the child’s reaction to different toys. Remember that although some toys may be very “interesting” to a child, too much stimulation can actually overwhelm a child and become another barrier to play)
- What movements are required to access or activate the toy? Do these required movements match the child’s abilities?



LET'S PLAY! PROJECTS

University at Buffalo • Center for Assistive Technology

Website: <http://letsplay.buffalo.edu/>

- How much strength is required to activate the toy?
- Can the toy grow with the child or be used in different ways or different positions?

Adapting Toys for Success

Set up the play environment for children – they may need different supports to maximize fun and minimize frustration. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Can the child reach the toy? (If not bring it closer with links or a tray.)
- Do you need to make the toy more stable so that it stays in a certain position? (Consider using non-slip material or add Velcro to the bottom of the toy)
- Does the toy move? Will it “get away” from the child? (Consider confining the toy so it stays in reach. You can use containers or boxes)

Play Strategies

Below are additional strategies that may assist in facilitating children’s abilities to be successful and in control of their play experiences.

- Let the child be the leader; do what he does! Children really like the “power” this gives them. Peek-a-boo is a great game to try this with. Waiting (and anticipating) their initiation is very rewarding.
- Take turns with the child; give the child plenty of time to respond. Children may need longer to process what is happening and to figure out “what’s next”.
- Offer just one toy at a time or gradually add related toys. For example, adding a car to crash into blocks when building, or a ball to push through a tunnel can expand play to new dimensions and encourage new explorations.
- Pretend and fantasy play result in higher levels of play as it demands the combination of language, cognition, and creativity. Playing with puppets or dolls is a good way to begin. Being “silly” by changing voices and exaggerating facial expressions can be very motivating and exciting to a child.



LET'S PLAY! PROJECTS

University at Buffalo • Center for Assistive Technology

Website: <http://letsplay.buffalo.edu/>

Play Strategies for Switch Toys

The following ideas are ways to expand play if children are using switches for play.

- When using switches for play, think beyond simply cause and effect or making the toy stop and go. Consider using the toy action to:
 - Facilitate communication (vertical toys work well) – try putting picture symbols in various places within the toy's movement pattern. Have the child stop when they get to what they want to say.
 - Promote pretend play by creating "Spatial Adventures":
 - "Make sure the pig doesn't fall into the swamp" (off the table)
 - Use the toy to do something else:
 - Knock the blocks down
 - Go up the ramp to push the cup over to feed the fish
 - Get into the box and hide!
 - Meet the frog in the pond
 - Add props to the toy
 - Carry a cookie to a friend (tray on back of toy)
 - Include other kids and have a race!
 - For Communication: Use single message switches as an interface to enhance play with language; this is especially helpful in promoting pretend play and social interactions:
 - "Help me! Help me!"
 - "Catch me if you can!"
 - "I'm coming



LET'S PLAY! PROJECTS

University at Buffalo • Center for Assistive Technology

Website: <http://letsplay.buffalo.edu/>
