

Symbolic Play

What is symbolic play?

Symbolic (otherwise known as imaginative) play is acting out real life situations with toys and objects, for example, putting dolly to bed or dressing teddy.

Why is it important?

Symbolic play is an important step in language development. By understanding that the toy cup represents the real cup, a child starts to learn symbolism. They are then able to understand that words represent things, people, events and much more. For example, that the word 'spoon' represents the thing they use for eating.



How can I help my child develop symbolic play?

- ⇒ Let teddy/dolly join in all the things you do. Feed teddy, wash dolly, put him to bed, comb his hair, dress him, give him a ride and so on.
- ⇒ If your child enjoys playing with bricks/Lego help them use what they have made. For example – find a small toy which can climb their tower, fall off, jump down, and go under their bridges; use the "window" they made to look through
- ⇒ Cars don't just drive along and crash. Develop this play. Show your child how their cars can go; up and down hills, over or under bridges; fast or slow. Talk about where they are going – into the garage, shops, shopping to pick up Susie; and how the car goes along – mummy's driving, she needs a key, petrol and so on.
- ⇒ Encourage your child to set up games with teddies and dollies. They may enjoy giving them make-believe tea parties, pretending they are going for a ride on a bus or pretending to be in the park or at playgroup.
- ⇒ Cardboard boxes are great. They make a house, a bus, a car....what else?
- ⇒ Playing with dough is fun to do together – here are some ideas to encourage language: Make pretend food (for dolly and teddy to eat), make objects to use, make people out of dough – pretend they are talking and playing together, get your child to tell you how to make something – a man, a car and so on.
- ⇒ Encourage your child to act out things you do around the house like shopping (using tins of food and empty boxes), washing clothes.
- ⇒ All the above activities may be carried out with smaller toys, for example, Duplo / Playmobil