

PARENTING 101

HOW PARENTS CAN PLAY AND INTERACT WITH THEIR KIDS



Get on Your Child's Level

Physically join your child where they play—sit on the floor, get outside, or enter their imaginative world. This shows genuine interest and makes you an active participant rather than just an observer.



Embrace Child-Directed Play

Let your child lead the play. Follow their ideas, imitate their actions, and describe what they're doing without taking over or directing the activity.

Incorporate a Variety of Play Activities

Try different types of play to keep things engaging:

- **Outdoor activities:** throw balls, go for nature walks, play on swings.
- **Board and card games:** teach turn-taking and how to win and lose gracefully.
- **Crafts and building projects:** puzzles, baking, painting.
- **Music and dance:** sing, play instruments, move together.
- **Imaginative games:** follow the leader, hide and seek, or invent stories together.



Use Praise and Encouragement

Offer specific praise for positive behaviors during play, such as sharing or engaging in creative problem-solving. This reinforces good habits and builds self-esteem. i.e., I like how you're using all the Lego pieces. Or, I like how you're trying multiple ways to solve this puzzle.

Model good behaviors

When playing with toys or games, you can model how to care for them—for example, by gently flipping through books, putting toys away after use, and demonstrating good game manners such as inviting others to join, taking turns, and listening respectfully.



Slow Down and Be Present

Set aside dedicated, distraction-free time for play. Put away phones and let the play unfold naturally, focusing on enjoying the moment rather than rushing through activities.

Create Family Play Traditions

Establish regular family game nights or outdoor adventures. Rotate who chooses the activity to ensure everyone feels included and invested.



HOW OT CAN SUPPORT PARENTS TO PLAY WITH KIDS

Modeling Play Techniques

OTs demonstrate effective play strategies during therapy sessions, showing parents how to choose age-appropriate toys, games, and use everyday activities to target specific developmental goals. This includes modeling sensory-rich play, manipulative play (using fine motor skills), and pretend play, all tailored to the child's needs.



Adapting Activities and Environment

OTs help parents modify the play environment or adapt toys and activities to match their child's abilities. This might involve simplifying tasks, using adaptive equipment, or creating sensory-friendly spaces to reduce overstimulation and increase engagement.



Coaching and Education

OTs educate parents on the importance of play for child development and help them recognize their child's cues, strengths, and challenges—such as signs of sensory overstimulation or potential outbursts. They offer practical strategies for incorporating therapeutic play into daily routines and provide supportive feedback to enhance parental confidence. In addition, OTs can demonstrate strategies to minimize challenging behaviors during play.



Providing Resources and Ideas

Therapists suggest a variety of play activities—such as crafts, sensory play, role-playing, and group games, and explain how each supports specific developmental skills. They may also recommend community resources or group play opportunities.

Encouraging Parent Participation

OTs actively encourage parents to join in play sessions, both during therapy and at home. This involvement helps reinforce skills learned in therapy, strengthens the parent—child bond, and fosters positive interactions.



Support Co-Regulation

Co-regulation is a crucial process where one person helps another regulate their emotions and behavior, ultimately leading to the development of self-regulation skills. OTs provide training and strategies for caregivers to effectively co-regulate with children, such as recognizing and responding to emotional cues and offering calming techniques.



References

- Advanced Therapy Clinic. (2025, May 14). *How occupational therapy enhances play skills in kids*. <https://www.advancedtherapyclinic.com/blog/how-occupational-therapy-enhances-play-skills-in-kids>
- Kutest Kids Early Intervention. (2025, February 13). *The role of occupational therapy in developing play and social skills*. <https://www.skillpointtherapy.com/social-play-therapy/>
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