
Supporting Pretend Play with Infants and Toddlers

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INSTRUCTIONS

This handout was designed for use with the video, “We Can Clean, Too! Supporting Pretend Play in the Toddler Room,” from The Center for Early Childhood Education (CECE) at Eastern Connecticut State University. The questions and activities in this handout could be used in a work session (e.g., professional learning community, professional development session), for individual coaching, or for self-reflection.

Goals

- ◆ Identify ways to collaborate with families to support infants and toddlers as they develop imitation and symbolic representation skills during pretend play.
- ◆ Discuss effective strategies for facilitating young children’s pretend play experiences at home and within the learning environment.
- ◆ Plan to partner with families to provide infants and toddlers with more opportunities for imitation and symbolic representation through pretend play.

Activity

- ◆ Watch the video.
- ◆ Use the questions below to reflect on effective ways to support infants’ and toddlers’ imitation and symbolic representation skills.
- ◆ Implement your plan and adjust as needed.

With infants and toddlers, it’s really important that we’re allowing exploration, allowing them to use objects in various ways, figure out how materials are used.

Heather Mulrooney

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- ◆ What caught your attention from the video? What made that fact, excerpt, or example meaningful to you?
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- ◆ In the video, the educator describes how important it is that adults allow children to explore objects and how they're used. They also talk about providing opportunities based on experiences infants and toddlers may have had.
 - What kinds of pretend play have you seen children engage in? Have you seen children reenact their experiences from home?
 - What pretend play props are children most interested in?
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- ◆ While pretend play may be common in most early childhood learning environments, some children may not have many opportunities for pretend play at home for a variety of reasons. Think about the families of the children in your care.
 - What are some reasons pretend play may happen more or less often at home?
 - How can you promote an awareness of the importance of pretend play on children's development while listening to and respecting every family's unique values, situations, and practices?
 - What resources may families need if they would like to encourage more pretend play at home?
 - How can you provide or connect families with the resources and supports they need?
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- ◆ In this video, the educator discussed facilitating pretend play by modeling how materials are used while also allowing room for children to use their imagination. Some families may actively facilitate pretend play in these ways, while other families may be less engaged.
 - How do you currently facilitate imitation and symbolic representation by modeling with materials or encouraging children to use their imagination? How do children respond?
 - How can these strategies work for families? Would families need to modify them? If so, how?
 - What are other ways families can facilitate pretend play?
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- ◆ The educator emphasized individualizing activities and making pretend play interesting and fun so that children want to extend and deepen their play. One way to do that is to collaborate with families, since they know their children best.
 - How can you encourage families to share their ideas about making pretend play fun and interesting for young children, while encouraging respect for families' unique ideas and situations?
 - What specific steps can you take to partner with families to provide individualized opportunities for infants and toddlers to develop imitation and symbolic representation through pretend play?
 - Implement the steps identified, monitor children's progress, and adjust the plan as needed.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Learn more about supporting young children's pretend play experiences:

- ◆ **Source:** Rasmussen University
- ◆ **Article:** 6 Reasons Why Dramatic Play Matters
- ◆ **Link:** <https://www.rasmussen.edu/degrees/education/blog/why-dramatic-play-matters/>
- ◆ **Description:** This article outlines reasons why dramatic play for toddlers is important. It also provides ways caregivers and families can encourage dramatic play.

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- ◆ **Source:** Head Start: Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center
 - ◆ **Video:** Make-Believe Play
 - ◆ **Link:** <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/make-believe-play>
 - ◆ **Description:** This video highlights the key components of make-believe play, describes what play looks like for children ages birth-to-five, and provides practical ways caregivers and family members can support make-believe play for all children.

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- ◆ **Source:** First Five Years
 - ◆ **Article:** Supporting Toddlers' Pretend Play
 - ◆ **Link:** <https://www.firstfiveyears.org.au/early-learning/supporting-toddlers-pretend-play>
 - ◆ **Description:** This article highlights pretend play as a cornerstone of cognitive development. It offers practical ways to support toddlers during pretend play experiences.