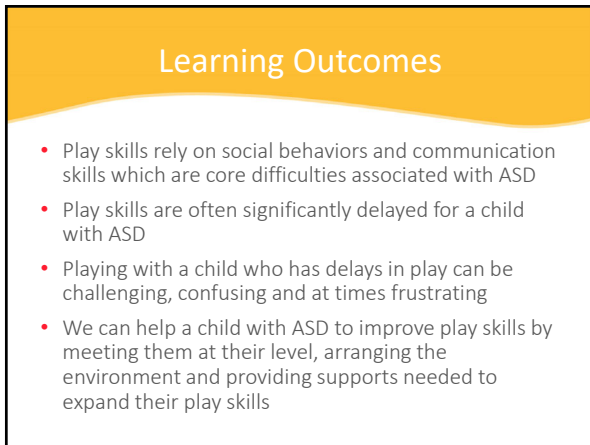




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2



3

Common Challenges

- Play is repetitive and isolated
- Child may leave when others attempt to join
- Child is resistant to “new” ideas in play
- Child avoids or does not seem interested in age appropriate toys/play areas
- Child does not play near other children
- Child does not “understand” how to share

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Why is play so hard for children with ASD?

- Earliest play requires the child to “know” what to do with a toy.
- Then a child must learn how toys “go together” in play.
- Play then relies on attending to others, responding to them, imitating, sharing attention and materials with them.
- More advanced play relies on understanding language, imagining what others are “thinking” (perspective taking) and taking turns

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STEP 1
Consider the toys and environment

- Set up the play environment
- Choose toys that are appropriate for your child’s skills
- Arrange toys and spaces thoughtfully so child does not have too many choices
- May need to fade out some toys that child uses too repetitively or that interfere with learning to play at the next level

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STEP 2 Consider **how you will play** with your child

- Follow the child's lead-join their play
- Expect to play at the child's play level
- Communicate at the child's level
- Support child's play using pictures and play scripts
- Prompt child as needed to play with, assemble toys
- Fade prompts in play so child is more independent
- Balance interactions (don't be too directive)
- Keep it fun for your child

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STEP 3 Be a **responsive** play partner

- Sit face to face with the child
- Get on child's level (language and play)
- Observe: what does your child seem to enjoy about the toy/activity
- Don't interfere with their play... join it!
- Be sure to use gestures (pointing, facial expression) to support your interactions


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Putting it all together


- Environment
- Responsive play partner
- Matching language
- Play levels

▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V-c50HNNPgQ>

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What were important changes the grandmother made in play?



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Putting it all together

What goes wrong here?

▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fZcr8YVZV>
[Go](#)
(fast forward to 7 minutes to train table play)

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What important changes should this person make to be a better play partner?



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Summary Points

Setting up the environment and being a responsive play partner

- Arrange the environment and toys thoughtfully
- Sit face to face with your child
- Watch what they are doing and JOIN
- Match your language to the child’s language level
- Match your expectations for play to your child’s play level

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Identifying your child’s play levels

Exploratory Play: holding, looking at, touching items.

Cause and Effect Play: Engages with a toy to get a single desired effect. Pop up toys, toys that activity with a button, simple put-in play such as shape sorters.

Functional Toy Play: Using toys as intended such as pushing a toy car, kicking a ball, hugging a stuffed animal, putting a toy phone to ear.

Constructive Play: Using toys to create a finished project. Includes: stacking blocks to make a tower, completing a puzzle, assembling Potato Head.

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Identifying your child’s play levels

Physical Play: rough and tumble play, developing gross motor skills, climbing, running, sliding, etc.

Pretend Play: Using items in a symbolic way, pretending to cook, take care of a baby or stuffed bear, combine toys in play to imitate real life, putting people in a vehicle and driving them to work or school.

Role-Play: Interactive and each person takes on a role. “you be the mommy and I will be the daddy” “you be the teacher and I will be the child”

Pretend Play and Role-Play are very sophisticated and a child typically has significant language skills to support this play.

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Identifying your child’s play levels

- Children may have skills in a few areas, but prefer one
- Manage your expectations by identifying where your child’s play *currently is* and what steps you can take to help them *move up the play ladder*
- Focus first on joining your child in their play
- Slowly work on expanding their play skills as appropriate based on other skills (language/communication)
- **One Step Up Rule** = model one step above where the child’s skills are for *language and play*

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Mia

- Mia is 2 and has ASD
- What play level do we “see” her demonstrating here?
- What might we do to “join” her in play?



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Identifying child’s play level: **Mia**

- Mia is demonstrating **cause and effect play**
- Putting items in the piggy bank is one step or action
- The toy likely “counts” as she puts another coin in the slot.
- When the coins are gone Mia can open it and do the same activity again.
- To join we might hand her a coin
- We might extend an open hand or just put one in too.

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Identifying child’s play level: **Mia**

- We could add simple language “in” or “all gone” or “open” or “help” if she needs help to open the pig
- Expand her play by “one step” by modeling “feeding” the pig a coin before putting it in his tummy saying “yum yum”

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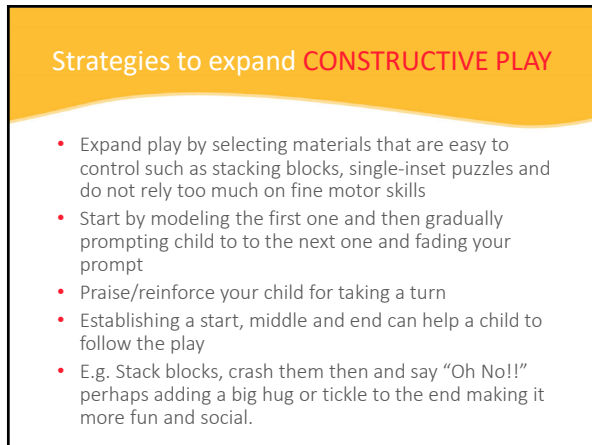
Strategies to expand **CAUSE AND EFFECT PLAY**

- Expand play by selecting materials that are easy to activate and do something immediate
- Model that action (pushing a button) then prompt the child to “do it”
- Reinforce the child for activating the toy and imitating your turn
- Add simple language such as *Ready, Set...Go!*
- Consider toys that have a few “turns” to take before starting over
- Examples: Pop up Pals, spinning ball toys, ball chute toys, Jack-in-the box, rain stick toy

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Constructive play:
Visual supports

- Use materials contained within a single container with only the number needed to complete the toy
- Use a picture of the “finished product”
- Could provide pictures for each “step” in the process

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Constructive play:
Visual supports



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Strategies to expand **PHYSICAL PLAY**

- Pair physical play with social engagement
- Child anticipates something fun that depends on the adult to “do something”
- Typically includes many opportunities to repeat the routine
- Play depends on the adult to make it fun

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Physical Play: Social Play



A B C

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Physical Play: Social Play



A B C

29

Physical Play: Social Play



A B C

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Strategies to expand **FUNCTIONAL PLAY**

- Start with common objects/toys
- Add an action that is associated with the object
- Cars > drive/push
- Phone > listen/talk
- Balls > roll
- Stuffed animals > hug
- Play food > eat
- Cup > drink
- Baby stroller > push

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Strategies to expand **FUNCTIONAL PLAY**

- "Do what you do" with the object modeling it for your child
- One object = one action
- Consider having a box of items and taking them out one at a time, modeling then prompting the child to imitate the action

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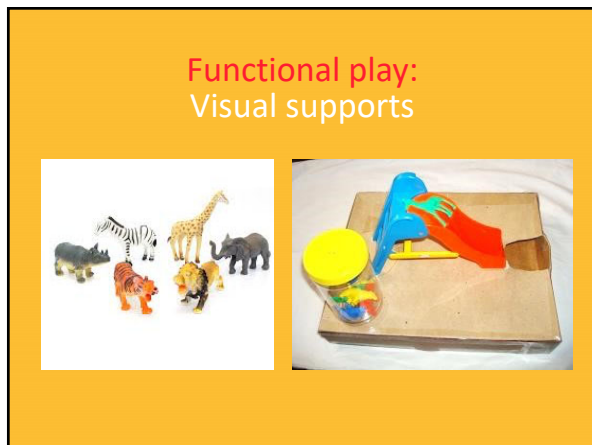
Functional play:
Visual supports



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Strategies to expand **PRETEND PLAY**

- Arrange the environment so items are ready to play and organized well
- Use pictures to show child what to do with the objects
- Begin to use two objects together in a relational way (play food to feed stuffed animal)
- Model how the two things “relate” to one another in real life
- Put play food on plate then pretend to eat it
- Put person in a car and then push it along
- Hug baby then put it in a toy bed

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Strategies to expand toward **PRETEND PLAY**

- Transfer skill with other items within a more natural context
- Use modeling, prompting and praise/reinforcement
- Provide many opportunities to practice the play skill
- Join in the play do not direct the play
- Remember to “match” or follow the “one step up” rule for language
- “Cookie Monster eats” “Doggie eats”

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Visual scripts to support **PRETEND PLAY**
with several steps:



Cut pizza. Put on plate. Eat pizza.

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Pretend play routines



- Tea party/making a meal together
- Taking care of baby or stuffed bear
- Playing doctor or veterinarian



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Playing with PEERS

- Remember this requires many skills
- Social play skills follow a developmental sequence too.
- Social play will rely a great deal on communication skills
- Provide opportunities for your child to “play with peers” but support them at their level
- Plan play opportunities that capitalize on your child’s strengths and interests

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Summary

- Developing play skills will help your child in many ways
- You can help your child’s play skills improve with planning and support
- Plan to talk to your BCBA about how to individualize a plan for your child !

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