

Peer Interaction in Play

As children develop, they learn about the world through play. Children move from playing by themselves to group-based play. Long before children begin interacting with others, play prepares them for these social experiences. While parent-child relationships foster affection and security, peer interaction helps to establish social skills beyond the family setting. Playing with peers helps children learn to share, wait for a turn, negotiate, and care about their friends' feelings.

Types of play

Solitary Play:

- Infants often spend much time playing on their own. They are busy exploring all aspects of their environment by using all of their senses: tasting, looking, listening, moving and feeling.
- Infants may do many repetitive actions such as **banging a spoon on a lid** or exploring toys by rubbing them on their body part or putting them in their mouth.
- Some older children will also spend some time on their own. They may **build, paint or create stories with figurines**.

Parallel Play:

- Beginning at about 2 years of age, children start playing alongside other children without interacting with one another. They may or may not be completing similar activities, but they begin to enjoy being around peers.
- Toddlers placed in the same room with similar toys may appear as though they are not paying much attention to one another. A closer look reveals that toddlers often **imitate one another's actions or words**. For example, if one child picks up a car, the other child may do the same. They may check in with one another every so often by sharing a smile or gaze.

Associative Play:

- Children continue to engage in separate activities in this type of play but they begin to interact by exchanging toys and commenting on one another's behaviour.
- Children may complete **puzzles side by side or build with blocks**. They may be building the same thing and sharing materials but they are not yet talking about what they are creating or working towards a common goal. Their play may share a common theme but each child has his or her own agenda.

Cooperative Play:

- True social participation is at the heart of cooperative play. Children share a common goal and purpose within an organized activity. Negotiation and conversation often takes place and helps to develop social skills and speech and language skills.
- Children **build a fort** or act out a **make-believe theme**. This type of interactive play helps children learn about sharing and taking turns. They are able to try out new roles and their imagination allows them to explore language and emotions.
- In order to encourage cooperative play, set up situations in which your child is required to share materials with peers or take turns in a particular activity. For example, provide only one pair of scissors during a craft activity and have children take turns using the scissors or sharing craft supplies.

Rough and Tumble Play:

- A form of peer interaction that involves friendly chasing and play-fighting. It is more common among boys, although girls will often engage in chase as well.
- A friendly game of *tag* is often a preferred outdoor activity on the playground. It may involve some *rolling* and *wrestling* but can be distinguished from aggression as it includes smiling and laughing too!

Competitive Play and Games with Rules:

- Competitive play requires children to understand and follow rules. They may need to negotiate who goes first or who will play which role. While general social rules still apply (e.g., “listening, sharing and taking turns) more specific rules related to a specific game are also introduced. Children learn about compromise and following rules in order to “play fair.”
- Competitive games include physical games such as “**Duck Duck Goose**” and “**What Time is it Mr. Wolf!**” as well as table games such as **board games and cards**.

A child’s play is in fact work. It is a universal part of growing up and is vital to social development. Find time to create opportunities for your child to interact with their peers (e.g., local park, playgroups, community centres etc.)

