



# Play for all

## Early play

### A brief description

Early play is important because it allows the child to explore their world and begin to make sense of it. By interacting with their environment, children learn about their bodies and important concepts such as cause and effect.

### How does having a disability impact on a child's ability with this type of play?

**Impact of abilities:** A child may have difficulties in sitting, reaching or grasping. This may prevent them from moving or activating toys to explore their environment.

**Impact on participation in activities:** If a child is unwell or has many medical appointments, then the amount of time and their ability to engage in explorative play may be adversely affected.

**Impact of environment:** The environment may not permit access to toys and exploratory activities because toys are out of reach. Conventional toys may also be difficult for some children to use.

## Strategies to assist early play

**Reduce impact of physical limitations** by helping the child to achieve a well supported position that will allow them to use their hands and other body parts. Young children with severe physical disabilities may need to have experiences brought to them and be assisted to use and explore toys and other objects. Toys which engage multiple senses will also be helpful (e.g. toys with lights and sound). Allow the child to explore and experience different textures. Use everyday items and things from the natural environment as well as conventional toys.

**Promote participation** by providing the child with opportunities to choose and presenting activities at an appropriate level to match that child's development. Allow the child sufficient time to explore things independently; some children with movement disorders take longer to organise their body and achieve the movements they want.

**Engineer the environment** by removing clutter to allow optimum access, placing activities and toys within reach and on the same level (e.g. a child who is unable to sit may benefit from a frame with toys suspended overhead). Individual toys may also need to be adapted to allow for adequate grasp (e.g. a neoprene strap to allow grasp, switch-adapting a toy so it can be activated by hitting a switch).

## Occupational Therapy Information Sheet

Novita Children's Services  
[www.novita.org.au](http://www.novita.org.au)

### Special points of interest:

- Early play should be fun.
- Make use of everyday object found around the house and garden.
- Allow the child to sufficient time to initiate movement.

### Useful References

Positioning for Play: Home Activities for Parents of Young Children. Rachel B Diamont, M.S., OTR

HELP....at Home: Hawaii Early Learning Profile Activity Sheets for Parents. VORT Corporation Palo Alto, California

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# Play for all

**Play** is one of the major life areas of children and adolescents. It is fun, enjoyable, something the individual wants to do, requires interaction with objects, people and/or pets and allows creativity, individuality, and problem solving. Play develops as an individual grows. It is a way they develop their skills and abilities, and enables them to engage in an activity simply for the enjoyment it gives. Children with physical and/or multiple disabilities are at risk of not being able to develop their play abilities or have limited opportunities for play.

## How does having a disability impact on a child's ability with this type of play?

*Impairments* such as reduced strength, limited ability to move, pain; sensory impairments; or difficulties with motivation, interest and ability to interact; learning and attention make moving to play activities, and using play materials difficult

*Participation in activities* is influenced by having the skills to play, knowing how to play with objects and people, being able to move with control, being able to communicate preferences and choices, and having the time to play

*Environmental challenges* to access the play space, cope with the sensory demands (eg noise, activity levels, lighting), availability of appropriate play spaces, materials (toys, dress-ups, paints, etc) and play mates; and expectations that enable opportunities for a variety of play experiences.

## Strategies to assist play

Reduce impact of limitations by:

- adapting and modifying activities and play materials
- using technology options.

Promote participation by:

- creating opportunities for play
- selecting and matching activities to abilities.

Engineer the environment to ensure ability to access play space and provide appropriate toys, play materials and play mates.

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### Special points of interest:

- Toy libraries provide a range of toys.
- Novita Toy library has a range of adapted toys, and software available to loan for clients.
- Occupational Therapists can provide special skills and advice on appropriate play spaces, toys, and activities for all ages.

### Useful References

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Novita Toy Library	RPC
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Occupational Therapist	
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