



# Play for all

## Imaginative play

### A brief description

Imaginative play involves engaging in pretend play. It incorporates the use of themes, sequences of play actions, object substitution (e.g. using a box for a bed), social interaction, role play and teddy play. Imaginative play is essential to assist developmental skills, particularly cognitive and language skills.

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

**Impact of Abilities:** A child may have limited mobility preventing crawling or walking to desired toys or activities. Difficulties in sitting, reaching or grasping may prevent them from moving toys to create desired stories.

**Impact on Participation in Activities:** Lack of access to toys or activities may increase feelings of dependence and passivity, with desire to participate decreasing over time.

**Impact of Environment:** The environment may not permit access to toys and exploratory activities because toys are out of reach. A cluttered environment may also hinder access or create safety issues for a child who is mobile but who moves slowly, awkwardly or with extreme exertion.

## Strategies to assist imaginative play

**Reduce impact of physical limitations by** helping the child to achieve a well supported position that will facilitate movement. Young children with severe physical disabilities may need powered mobility to assist them to better explore their environment. Toys which promote use of the child's strengths will also be helpful (e.g. tactile and sensory toys for children with visual impairments).

**Promote participation by** not assuming that because the child is passive that they do not want to participate! Children are more likely to extend their play if adults model enthusiastic involvement and are prepared to get down on the floor. Modelling and encouraging imitation is essential for children with delayed imaginative play: they need assistance to develop ideas, themes, sequences etc. Provide play *activities* that are not too challenging, but play *materials* that are age appropriate.

**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 uses a wheelchair may need toys at table height rather than on the floor). Individual toys may also need to be adapted to allow for adequate grasp (e.g. a neoprene strap to allow grasp). Also consider other aspects of the environment (eg. lighting, visual clutter).

## Occupational Therapy Information Sheet

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

### Special points of interest:

- Imaginative play should be fun.
- Children are more likely to be involved if playing with fun, enthusiastic adults or peers.
- Model and allow imitation but also allow the child to lead.
- Creative play, while essential for skill development, is how children relax—it is their leisure time.

### Useful References

Lear, Roma (1996). *Play Helps—Toys and Activities for Children with Special Needs*. Oxford, England; Butterworth Heinemann

Stagnitti, Karen (1999). *Learn to Play. A Practical Program to Develop a Child's Imaginative Play Skills*. Co-ordinates Therapy Services, Australia



# 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

NAME	Location
Novita Toy Library	RPC
Occupational Therapist	