

To be able to enjoy and learn through play, children with disability often require help to overcome additional challenges.



PHYSICAL CHALLENGES

Physical challenges may include children have difficulty moving around in their environment, sitting on their own and moving and using their limbs. For example, where the child:

- is not able to sit or stand with hand free to play
- has difficulty in being able to hold onto a toy
- is not able to follow their friends to another play activity
- needs help from a person or equipment to play.
- is not able to signal when they want an activity or would like to change activities

Suggestions

- With the help of a physiotherapist or occupational therapist, explore a variety of positions for the child that make it easier for the child to play.
- Consider different mobility choices, including use of wheelchairs or splints, that may make it easier for the child to move and enjoy play.
- Consider other equipment, such as standing frames, corner seats and prone wedges to provide positioning choices so that the child can play at the same level as their friends, such as when their friends are sitting on the floor.
- Consider using assistance from helpers, for example, help from someone to turn the pages of a book, or to load up a switch game on a computer.
- Children may be able to learn skills need for independent play by providing assistance initially

SENSORY CHALLENGES

Sensory challenges are difficulties experienced when processing information from one or more of the senses (vision, hearing, taste, smell, touch and sensing body movement). They can result in the child finding experiences overwhelming or needing help to understand what's going on. Examples include:

- The child not reaching for a toy – because they can't see the toy and therefore don't know it's there.

- A child having difficulty playing in the sand pit - due to the feeling of the sand overwhelming them.
- The child having difficulty playing where it's noisy – because loud sounds confuse and distract them.

Suggestions

Contact an occupational therapist for help with addressing sensory challenges and for advice in setting up the appropriate play environment. Examples include:

- Strategies to assist with coping with sensory challenges.
- Gradual introduction of activities that include the affected senses.
- Use of a dark room for play with a toy that has flashing lights to allow play to be more effective.

LEARNING CHALLENGES

Challenges may be associated with the child having: an intellectual disability, developmental delay, speech & language difficulties or reduced opportunities for play. Many factors can impact on a child's learning to play. Examples include:

- A play activity may be too hard for the child to succeed.
- A child is not motivated to try new things
- The child requires social skills training in order to engage in appropriate social play.

Suggestions

- Consider breaking down the play activity and have the child practice only one part. For example, the child placing the final piece into a puzzle board.
- Consider psychology or occupational therapy input relating to play skills
- Set aside special times, just for play.
- Select toys that are suitable for the child's level of cognitive and physical ability
- Model playing with toys appropriately, encourage copying and their ability to play on their own.

BEHAVIOUR CHALLENGES

Behaviours such as withdrawal from an activity and tantrums may indicate that the child is having difficulty handling new activities, may be related to the child having an intellectual disability or be an expression of frustration. Examples include when a child is:

- feeling anxious about trying new things
- unable to cope with the sensory challenges of the environment
- not understanding what is expected of them

- being unable to understand the activity
- feeling frustrated because of the effort they have to use.

Suggestions

- Explore the reasons that may be causing the behaviour with a psychologist or another professional.
- Adjust the play activity if it is found that it is affecting behaviour.

CHALLENGES WITH SURROUNDINGS

Examples include:

- The local playground being impossible for the child with a physical disability to access or use.
- The child not being given a choice of play activity.
- Others not being aware of how to include a child with special needs.

Suggestions

- Contact the local council to find the locations of the nearest wheelchair-friendly playground or visit different playgrounds with your child to find one with equipment that your child can enjoy.
- Involve the child in choosing their play activities.
- Recognise that every child can be involved in almost any play activity – the biggest limit may be your imagination!

COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES

Communication challenges may include the child:

- not being able to choose toys
- not being able to talk and 'connect' with play-mates.
- not being able to understand the language input that is part of a play activity and their ability to learn and be a part of play.

Suggestions

- Limit the number of toys so that choosing becomes easier.
- Think about other ways for the child to communicate other than talking, such as by movement, facial expression, gestures, signing, picture symbols, photos or objects.
- With the help of a speech pathologist, provide a means for a child to communicate and interact within play, including to request a play activity, make

choices between and within play activities and communicate about what they are doing while they are playing.

- Consider how to position yourself so that you can play with your child, including being face to face and holding a book or other objects.
- Try using 'person' based play activities such as rhymes, songs or physical routines such as 'row, row, row your boat' or 'tickles' to help engage your child.
- Create play 'routines' that use repetitive and predictable language and then create opportunities within the routines for your child to take a turn or to indicate.

Play is important for all children and every child *can* play, regardless of their level of disability. Novita therapists help children with physical disability meet these challenges and enjoy their play experiences.

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