



# Welcome to The PLAY Project Introductory Online Course Resources Packet





# The 7 Circles of the PLAY Project

**The PLAY Project is a play-based early intervention program that can improve social interaction, communication, and functional development in children on the autism spectrum.**

- 1) Ready, Set, PLAY! An Introduction to Principles and Methods** To begin, the PLAY Project Consultant (PPC) introduces the family to the principles and methods that will help parents understand the program's goals and gain skills that will lead to improved engagement and social interaction with their child.
- 2) Understanding Your Child: Creating a Unique Profile** Next, the PPC invites the family to share their knowledge about their child. This parent-professional partnership helps to create an individualized plan for the child. Assessment tools are used to identify the child's Neurological Comfort Zone, Sensory Motor Profile, and Functional Developmental Level. The goal is to determine the child's unique profile in order to best support the child through each stage of social and emotional development.
- 3) The PLAY Plan: Individualized Techniques and Activities** Guided by the child's unique profile, the PPC collaborates with the family to determine appropriate PLAY Project activities and techniques. The PLAY Plan empowers parents to build their skills as players while supporting their child through the stages of development. The plan is updated and changed as the child makes progress.
- 4) Family Guidance: Coaching, Modeling, and Feedback** During each home or clinic visit, the PPC supports the family in their role of play partner with their child. The PPC answers questions, coaches the parents as they play, models the recommended activities and techniques, and provides written feedback. Video footage is taken of both the parent and the PPC, to be used as part of the visit review, which allows the PPC to track and measure progress.
- 5) Engagement: PLAY Time Between Parent and Child** Between visits, the family follows the PLAY Plan's activities and techniques as they interact with their child during daily routines and short play sessions throughout the day. The family is encouraged to playfully engage their child 15-20 hours per week. The goal is to make every interaction a *good* interaction, providing the intensity needed to improve the child's social and emotional development.
- 6) Visit Review: Video and Written Feedback** During PLAY visits, video is used to capture the child playing with the family and the PPC. After the visit, the PPC reviews the video to assess the child's progress and the family's engagement in PLAY Project activities. The PPC provides the family with a digital copy of the video and an updated PLAY Plan, including helpful observations and suggestions.
- 7) Change and Growth: Revising the Plan as the Child Develops** Children are dynamic and so is the PLAY Plan. On an ongoing basis, the PPC will reassess the child's progress, modifying the PLAY Plan to best meet the changing needs of the child and family.

# The PLAY Project Principles & Methods



## Circle 1: Principles

1. **Fun with people:** Do what the child loves
2. **Put in the time:** 2 hours/day, divided into 15-20 minute sessions
3. **Profile the child** in terms of their **a) Comfort Zone**, **b) Sensory-Motor Profile** and **c) Functional Developmental Levels**
4. **Play at the right level:** based on the child's profile, determine how to PLAY with the child



## Circle 1: Methods

1. **Read the child's cues and intent**
2. **Slow the pace of play, observing and waiting for the child's idea**
3. **Follow the child's lead, responding to what the child wants**
4. **Open and close circles of communication (back and forth interactions)**
5. **Build on the child's interests**

# Functional Developmental Level Thumbnails



## FDL 1: Self-Regulation & Shared Attention

\*begins at birth to 3 months

- Can remain calm and regulated enough to share attention with people
- Can sustain brief episodes of interaction
- Regulation derailed by *Comfort Zone* activities
  - Stimming, scripting, lining up, etc. remove attention
- When you see CZ, child has holes in FDL 1
- Use 'The Rabbit Hole Techniques' to join the child at FDL 1



## FDL 2: Engagement & Relating

\*begins between 2 and 7 months

More sustained attention = engagement  
You call to them and they look—Circles begin!!  
Peek a boo is the classic FDL 2 game  
Key Question: How easy is it to engage the child?  
This is the 'sweat' level. The parent/professional has to do the work (i.e. sweat) to keep the child engaged  
Hard to follow child's lead, but you can!  
Watch out for visual activities  
Use Rabbit Hole Techniques



## FDL 3: Intentionality & 2-Way Communication

\*begins between 3 and 10 months

Opening and closing of 6-10 circles  
Key activities: Simple cause and effect games  
Key Question: Is the child initiating?  
We want to 'create a monster' (i.e. child won't leave you alone!)  
This is the 'wait' level. The parent/professional has to wait to see if the child will initiate (i.e. open circles)  
Beginning of understanding routines  
Beginning of first single words



## FDL 4: Social Problem-Solving & Mood Regulation

\*begins between 9 and 18 months

Opening and closing of 10-30 circles  
Solid 4 =Totally 'with us'. Continuous flow of interaction  
Gestural communication along with words. Imitation  
50+ words  
Follows spontaneous 1 step commands: Go, get, give to. . .  
Feelings more and more organized  
Problem solver! Has his/her own ideas  
'Little stories': 'Gets' meaningful sequences  
Simple pretend: Phone to ear. Bottle to baby's mouth



## FDL 5: Creating Symbols & Using Words & Ideas

\*begins between 24 to 30 months

Classic two year old communication  
1-2 word phrases  
What, Where, Who, Actions, Yes/No

- Not open ended 'What', Why, or When or Pronouns

One thematic pretend play with adults  
Follows 1-2 step commands.  
Greetings emerging  
Compliance

- It is not following their lead to follow their lead



## FDL 6: Emotional Thinking, Logic, & Sense of

\*begins between 36 to 48 months

Talking in sentences  
'Why'. Can recall the immediate past  
Builds bridges between ideas

- Identifies own and others' feelings
- Recognizes relationship between feeling, behavior and consequences

Two thematic play  
Carries on simple conversations  
Peer play established  
Misbehavior as developmental accomplishment



# PLAY Project Sample Techniques

## Functional Developmental Levels 1-4

### Being With

Simply sit at the child's level as they play in their *Comfort Zone*, observing and gently joining in. Show the child you are respectful of their space and interested in *their* ideas.

- Follow his cues and gently keep engagement going, opening or closing one or two circles of communication
- Using simple language, describe what the child is doing: "You're jumping high!"
- Repeat words/sounds if they say anything: "Weeee!"
- Give the child what he wants (e.g. hand him toys to line up)
- Use natural motivations (e.g. turn on and off the water faucet together)
- Do not command, direct, teach

### Sensory-motor play

Think about engaging a variety of the senses when trying to open and close circles of communication. Often children are more socially connected when the adult engages multiple senses.

- **Touch:** rub the back, tickle, wrestle, rough house
- **Movement:** Swing the child in a blanket; put the child on a chair and spin while saying "go" then stop while saying "stop"; jumping on the bed
- **Vision:** Blow bubbles and watch them float
- **Sound:** Hum and sing, drum on different surfaces
- **Rhythm:** Clap on the child's back with rhythm
- **Kinesthetic:** Shake the child's arms in rhythm

### Theme & Variation

When playing, change up the play after you have done the same pattern three times in a row. For example, here are some variations you could use to join a child's Comfort Zone Activity of opening and closing a door.

- Open and close the door with the child
- Open and close the door with a song
- Put your hand in the door and close it (gently) and say "Ouch!"
- Hold the door closed until the child complains
- Play peek-a-boo on the other side of the door
- Use a puppet to play peek-a-boo
- Bonk your head into the door & fall down



# PLAY Project Sample Techniques

## Functional Developmental Levels 4-7

### “Speaking To” and “Speaking For” the Child

These two related techniques help the child expand their language once they begin talking at FDLs 4-5.

- When speaking **TO** the child, use a regular tone of voice and appropriate language. Do **NOT** baby talk. This helps the child learn the natural rhythms of language.
- When speaking **FOR** the child, use words to express the child’s perspective. You want to ask yourself, “What would the child say if he could say what he means?” You will use simple language that is just a little bit more complex than their current abilities. (e.g. if the child says, “Up,” then you would say, “Pick me up, daddy!”)

### Feelings & Empathy

As children move into the higher FDLs, they often need help understanding their own emotions. They also need support in empathy (i.e. understanding other people’s feelings).

- Label the child’s feelings in the moment: “You’re mad your brother took your toy!”
- Model for the child by identifying your own feelings and using clear facial expressions
- Draw feeling faces and ask the child questions: “I wonder why he’s smiling?”
- Incorporate feelings into simple and complex pretend play: a stuffed animal could knock over a tower of blocks and say “Boo hoo! I didn’t want the blocks to fall down!”
- Explain characters’ feelings when reading books

### Everything Comes Alive

As the child begins simple pretend play, you can make any object “come alive” and talk to the child. This technique models a sense of silliness and imagination.

- Make any object act like a puppet: a napkin could say, “Let me wipe your hands! What a mess!” and then tickle the child on the sides of the face and neck
- Use a silly voice and big gestures to show that you are being playful
- Make a (half a) glass of milk waddle along the table like a person and say: “Hi! Would you drink me?” or “No, no, no! Don’t drink me!!”
- Any objects that are part of your daily routine can “come alive”: shoes, pillows, a tooth brush, etc.



# PLAY Project Sample Techniques

## List of PLAY Project Techniques: FDL 1-4

- 1. Being With/Going for Affect**
- 2. Sensory-motor Play**
- 3. Theme & Variation**
- 4. Taffy Pulling**
- 5. Salient Language**
- 6. Rhythm & Music**
- 7. Sense of Humor, Suspense, Surprise**
- 8. One and Two Step Commands**
- 9. Playful obstruction**
- 10. Making them work**
- 11. Rewarding/Reinforcing**
- 12. Making behaviors purposeful**
- 13. Expectant waiting**
- 14. Going for fun**
- 15. Big, little, & micro circles**
- 16. Add a word**
- 17. Asked and answered**
- 18. Sequences/little stories**
- 19. Problem solving**
- 20. "Rabbit Hole" Techniques**

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# PLAY Project Sample Techniques

## List of PLAY Project Techniques: FDL 4-7

1. Simple pretend play
2. More complex pretend play
3. Multiple circles of communication
4. Feelings, Empathy
5. Outings
6. Using motivation
7. Appropriate Language
8. Essays
9. Answering 'wh' questions
10. Time Concepts
11. Practicing Pronouns
12. Model, Rehearse, Expect
13. Theory of Mind: Puppet Play
14. Social Stories
15. Meta-cognitive strategies
16. Everything come alive
17. Mirroring/Reflecting: Feelings
18. Three-way modeling
19. Speaking 'to' and speaking 'for' the child
20. Finishing up/completing a task
21. Negotiating the relationship
22. Overdramatizing





LEVEL	GOAL	ACTIVITIES
<b>1: Self-Regulation and Shared Attention</b> <i>(calm and alert and ready for the possibility of engagement)</i>	<b>To help the child sustain attention &amp; regulation</b> <i>(create an optimal environment, while eliminating distractions)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give deep pressure on the child's body: rolling exercise ball on body, squeezing or gently shaking arms/leg/hands/feet, etc.</li> <li>• Dancing while holding the child</li> <li>• Tickling the child's arms, back, belly, etc.</li> <li>• Singing, making sounds, or making faces to capture the child's attention</li> </ul>
<b>2: Engagement and Relating</b>	<b>To engage with the child and maintain continuous engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Imitation games (<i>adult imitates the child</i>)</li> <li>• Peek-a-boo with your hands</li> <li>• Singing to the child and pausing for his/her engagement</li> <li>• Tactile play (i.e. water play, rice &amp; beans, cooked spaghetti, play dough, squishy balls, etc.)</li> </ul>
<b>3: Two-Way Intentional Communication</b>	<b>To open and close circles with the child and to challenge the child to initiate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Balloon play (i.e. hitting a balloon back and forth or blowing one up and letting it fly around the room, etc.)</li> <li>• Blanket play (swinging or pulling the child in the blanket or using it as a parachute)</li> <li>• Simple chase games</li> <li>• Ready-set-go or 1-2-3 games</li> </ul>
<b>4: Purposeful Problem-Solving Communication</b>	<b>To engage in long, back and forth interactions that includes meaningful communication, problem solving, simple pretend play, and sequences</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asking the child to point to various body parts on his/her body and on play partner's body</li> <li>• Begin to introduce more animal or car sounds-ask the child to make those sounds</li> <li>• Simple puppet play (i.e. making puppets open their mouths and say <i>ahh</i> or <i>hi!</i>)</li> <li>• Simple hide and seek behind a blanket</li> </ul>
<b>5: Creating and Elaborating Ideas (Symbols)</b>	<b>To encourage a better understanding of one's emotions and to increase pretend play, symbolic thinking, conversational, &amp; negotiation skills.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Playing catch</li> <li>• Coloring together- and talking about what you are coloring</li> <li>• Mock Anger, pretend crying, pretending to be afraid, etc.</li> <li>• Playing doctor (<i>keep it simple and meaningful based on the child's experience</i>)</li> </ul>
<b>6: Building Bridges Between Ideas (Logical Thinking)</b>	<b>To support the child in engaging peers and adults in complex pretend scenarios, while appropriately responding to the feelings and ideas of all involved. To help the child make associations between ideas.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advanced role play: Playing house, going on a pretend picnic, going on a pretend adventure, etc.</li> <li>• Treasure hunts, scavenger hunts, complex obstacle courses</li> <li>• Reading and analyzing stories/books</li> <li>• Discussing similarities between people, objects, or places</li> </ul>



## Circle 2: Child Profile

### Functional Developmental Levels (FDLs)

- 1. Self regulation and shared attention (FDL 1)**
- 2. Engagement (FDL 2)**
- 3. Two-way Communication (FDL 3)**
- 4. Complex two-way Communication (FDL 4)**
- 5. Shared Meanings & Symbolic Play (FDL 5)**
- 6. Emotional Thinking (FDL 6)**





## Circle 2: Child Profile

### Sensory Motor Profile (SMP)

**The unique way a child experiences the world through the 7 primary senses. These include:**



- 1. Visual**
- 2. Auditory**
- 3. Olfactory**
- 4. Gustatory**
- 5. Tactile**
- 6. Vestibular**
- 7. Proprioceptive**



## Circle 2: Child Profile Sensory Motor Profile Cont.

- It is important to identify how the child experiences the 7 senses and whether or not Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) exists. If SPD is identified, we recommend an occupational therapy evaluation.
- The child's SMP is gather through:
  1. Parent interview
  2. Clinical observation
  3. Assessment measures





## Circle 2: Child Profile

### Comfort Zone (CZ)

- **The comfort zone (CZ) is something the child does when you let him do whatever he wants**
- **Is usually an attempt to keep the world the same or to self-regulate**
- **Typically focused on repetitive interests**
- **Children appear to be in their own world - not 'with us'**
- **Examples of CZs:**
  - **Lining up trains**
  - **Visually self stimulating on wheels, lines, objects**
  - **Watching TV, videos, pressing keys on Ipad, etc.**
  - **Stuck on the same topic: planets, trains, dinosaurs**

# Information Links for The PLAY Project

## For Parents



**To find a PLAY Project provider near you:**  
[Click Here](#)

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