



# **The PLAY Project's Autism Intensive Workshop**

**[www.playproject.org](http://www.playproject.org)**



# PLAY PROJECT WORKSHOP PACKET

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**The PLAY Project's Mission**

“To support families in having a joyous and playful relationship with their children with autism spectrum disorders so each child can reach his or her full potential.”

**PLAY Project's Vision**

“To train a global network of pediatric professionals and child development experts to provide The PLAY Project's autism intervention program to serve as many families as needed.”

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**Mission & Vision**

**We train pediatric professionals  
and child development experts  
to coach parents to help their young  
children with autism through play!**

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**Agenda**

- **Introduction: The Need for Relationship-Based Models**
- **PLAY Project Training**
- **Overview of The PLAY Project**
- **7 Circles of The PLAY Project**
- **Research: Evidence for PLAY**

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**Case Study: Meet Julian**

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## ASD DSM 5

**Challenges in social communication and social interaction:**

- Social emotional reciprocity
- Back-and-forth conversation
- Maintaining relationships
- Non-verbal/gestural communication
- Imaginative play

**Restricted or repetitive patterns of behavior or interests:**

- Insistence on sameness
- Fixed interests
- Sensory challenges



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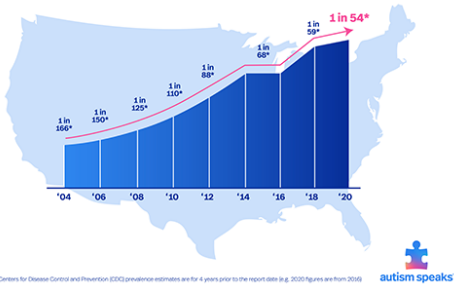
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## Autism Prevalence

Estimated Autism Prevalence 2020



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## Need: Intensive Intervention

**National Research Council (2001)**

- Begin early: 18 month-5 years
- 15-25 hours/week
- 1:1 or 1:2
- Engaging
- Strategic Direction
- Comprehensive programs address ASD

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The Autism Policy Dilemma: Part 1

- More children with ASD need more intervention
- Too many are not getting services and are on waiting lists
- The deficits of ASD are in the realm of social interaction
- Current service arrays not meeting the need

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The Autism Policy Dilemma: Part 2

- Main intervention: ABA (Applied Behavior Analysis) or EIBI (Early Intensive Behavioral Intervention)
- ABA has strong evidence for children with ASD over age 3
  - But it is delivered by professionals
- ABA is hard to administer with fidelity in community settings
- Policy: Long wait lists, too many underserved

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Parent Implemented vs Behaviorist Models  
For the Treatment of ASD in Young Children

| Key Elements                   | Parent Implemented Models<br>(e.g. PLAY Project, PACT, ESDM, SCERTS)   | Behaviorist Models<br>(e.g. EIBI, VB, PRT, ABA)                          |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| Theoretical Framework          | Developmental, Relationship, & Play-based  | Behavioral/Operant Conditioning  |
| Primary Focus of Intervention  | Social interaction   | Language & IQ  |
| Intervention Methods           | Child centered<br>Promote social interaction through play  | Program centered<br>Teach child skills using rewards/reinforcement       |
| Used as a Primary Intervention | < 3 yr olds  | 18m-6 yr olds  |
| Programmatic Approach          | Trained professionals coach parents  | Professionals (BCBA) supervise front line staff                          |
| Provider of Services           | Parents  | Therapists   |
| Annual Implementation Cost     | \$5000   | \$50,000   |
| Treatment Sessions             | 4 hours per month of parent training. Parents then provide 10-15 hours per week of intervention with the child | 20-40 hours/week provided by therapists who work directly with the child |
| Length of Intervention         | 2-3 years  | 2-5 years  |
| Assessment of Progress         | Objectives achieved.<br>Focus—Social functioning   | Objectives achieved.<br>Focus—Pre-academics, Language                    |
| Evidence                       | Very Good  | Very Good  |

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Building a House



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Climbing the Language Mountain



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Parent Implemented Interventions

- Developmental, relationship-based
- Less costly, easily implemented
- Recognized as evidence based by the National Professional Development Center
- Parents as the child's best play partner
- Uses natural environment of the home
- Gain in hours of intervention by making every interaction count

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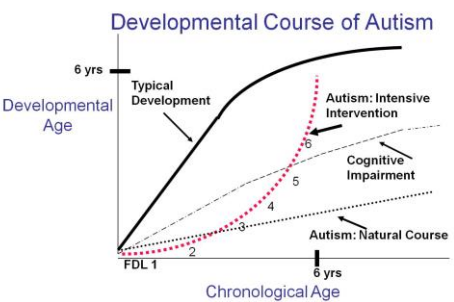
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### Developmental Course of Autism



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## THE PLAY PROJECT™

# Overview of The PLAY Project



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### What is The PLAY Project?

- Autism Early Intervention
- Intensive (15 hrs/week)
- Home-based (usually)
- Parent implemented
- Developmental & relationship focused
- Strengths oriented
- Fun & playful
- Collaborative
- Evidence-based



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**PLAY Consultants Provide the Service**

- **PLAY Consultants** are masters level pediatric professional and child development experts
- **Speech/Language Pathologists, Occupational Therapists, Social Workers, Early Intervention Providers, Psychologists, & Physicians**
- **Hundreds of PLAY Consultants** are providing **PLAY** autism intervention nationally & internationally
  - **Dozens of states and several countries\***
- **PLAY Consultants** coach parents to do what the child loves.

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**The PLAY Project Motto**

**“When you do what the child loves,  
the child will love to be with you.”  
—Dr. Rick**

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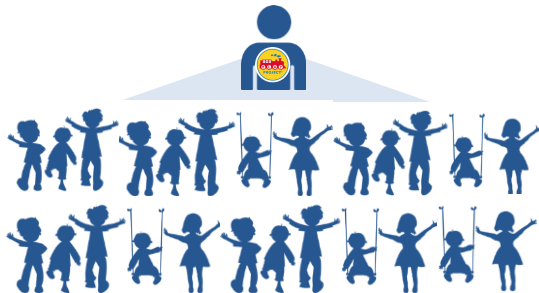
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**PLAY Efficiency**

1 PLAY Project Consultant Can Serve 25 Children



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What Agencies Use PLAY?\*

- Medical rehabilitation (SLP, OT)
  - Often covered by private insurance\*
- Early Intervention (Birth to 3 programs)
- Statewide in Ohio, Michigan, Illinois
  - 70% of Counties adopted PLAY for its Early Intervention (B-3) system
  - 25 School Districts in Michigan
- Behavioral health agencies (private insurance and Medicaid)

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What Does a PLAY Consultant Do?

- Make **home visits** monthly for a 2-3 hrs\* or once a week in Early Intervention or Rehab settings
- **Coach** the parents and **model** for the parents
- **Videotape** parents’ play & provide detailed midmonth **video review & written feedback**
- Encouraged parents to PLAY 2 hours per day in 15-20 minutes sessions & during daily activities
- Follow the 7 Circles of The PLAY Project and do what the child loves. . .

\*Clinic & office settings too

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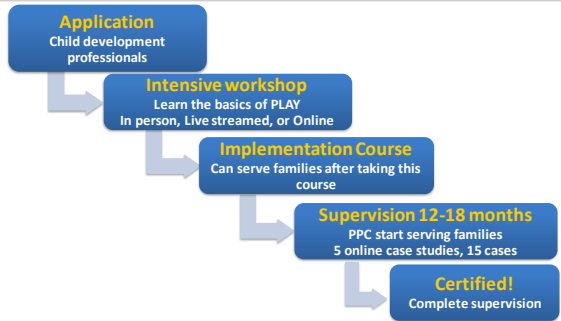
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How are PLAY Consultants Trained?



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## Supervision



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## Summary of PLAY Training Model



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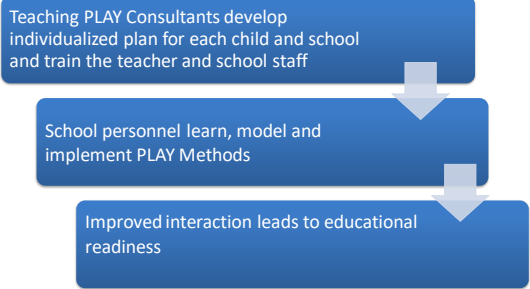
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## Teaching PLAY

*a classroom application of The PLAY Project*



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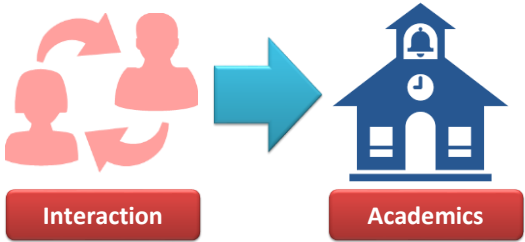
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### Interaction Promoting Academic Readiness



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### Teaching PLAY Training Options

- Introduction to Teaching PLAY (Online)
- Certified TP Professional Training
  - School staff receive training from a Teaching PLAY Consultant
- Certified Teaching PLAY Consultant (TPC)
  - Similar training as a PLAY Project Consultant (PPC)
- Dual Certified Consultant: PPC & TPC
  - Similar training as PPC
- TP Add On Certificate
  - For PPCs only

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# 7 Circles of the PLAY Project



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# PLAY Autism Intervention

- Using the 7 Circles of PLAY as a guide, PLAY Consultant trains and supports parent to effectively engage child
- 7 Circles is the actual experience of the family
- Key elements of the program:
  - Parent support and guidance: coaching, modeling, and feedback
  - Video footage: capture parent-child interaction
  - PLAY Plan: provides clear techniques and activities for parents to engage child

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# PLAY Autism Intervention is. . .

- Family and child centered
- Empowering for parents
- Relationship-based
- Playful & fun
  - Addresses the core deficit: social impairment

*“When you do what the child loves, the child will love to be with you.”—Dr. Rick*

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Circle 1: PLAY Project Principles

- Fun with people—doing what the child loves
- Put in the time—2 hours per day broken up into 15-20 minute sessions
- Accurately profile the child in terms of their Comfort Zone, Sensory-Motor Profile & Functional Developmental Levels
- Based on the child’s profile, play at the right level



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Principles: Fun with People



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Circle 1: PLAY Project Methods

- Read the child's cues and intent
- Slow the pace of play, observing and waiting for the child’s idea
- Follow the child's lead, responding to what the child wants
- Open and close circles of communication (back and forth interactions)
- Build on the child’s interests



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Circles of Communication

- When we send a message to someone else, we open a circle of communication.
- The person closes the circle when they acknowledge our message as received.
- This is the essence of social interaction.



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Case Study: Julian's 1<sup>st</sup> Circles

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7 Circles of the PLAY Project



**Circle 2:**  
**Understanding**  
**Each Child's**  
**Unique Profile**



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**Circle 2:**  
**Each Child has a Unique Profile**

- Comfort Zone (CZ)
- Sensory Motor Profile (SMP)
- Functional Developmental Levels (FDLs)



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**Circle 2: Comfort Zone**

- What the child does when you let them do whatever they want to do
- Repetitive, stereotyped, and dominating interests
- When you see CZ activities the child has ‘holes’ in FDL 1
- In their own world, not ‘with us’



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**Case Study: Comfort Zone—Sand**

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Circle 2: Comfort Zone

- Doors, drawers
- Lining up
- Flipping pages of books
- Sensory self stimulation (hum, jump, spin. . .)
- Books
- Puzzles
- Letters, numbers, colors
- You tube
- Trains
- Thomas



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The Rabbit Hole Techniques

- 1.Be with
- 2.Narrate
- 3.Help the child ‘do it better’
- 4.Imitate the child
- 5.Use Theme & Variation
- 6.Change the sensory modality



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Circle 2: Sensory Motor Profile

The unique way a child experiences the world through the various sensory modalities and movement:

- Visual Processing
- Tactile
- Auditory
- Oral
- Olfactory
- Motor Planning
- Vestibular
- Proprioceptive



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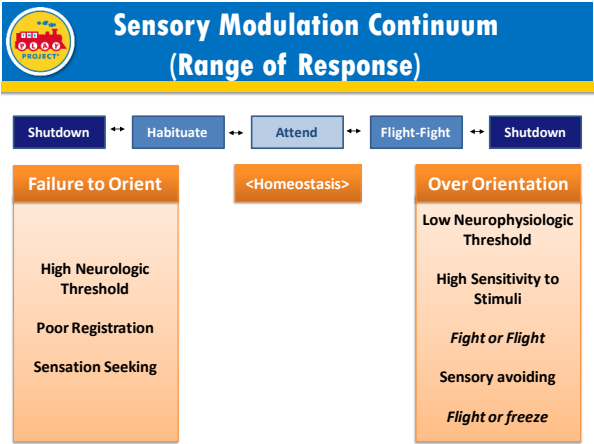
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### SMP: Self Regulation

- Self regulation: The ability (or inability!) to stay calm and attentive (i.e. regulated) during social interactions
- Sensory diet means ‘feeding’ sensory needs
- Noisy chaotic environments are overwhelming
- 3 Types of dysregulation—Lucy Miller PhD:
  - Sensory seekers
  - Over-reactive
  - Under-reactive



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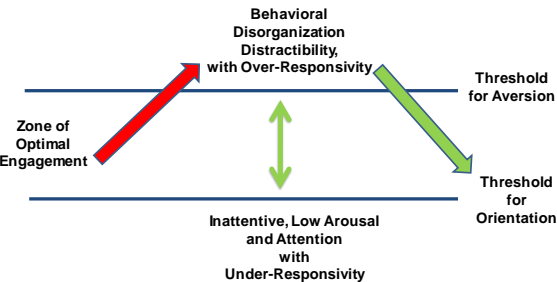
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### Zone of Optimal Engagement

Marie Anzalone, Sc.D. OTR



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Sensory Regulation

Incorporating the child’s unique sensory motor preferences into play is the key to moving the child into their “Zone of Optimal Engagement”

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Greenspan’s 6 Functional Developmental Levels

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



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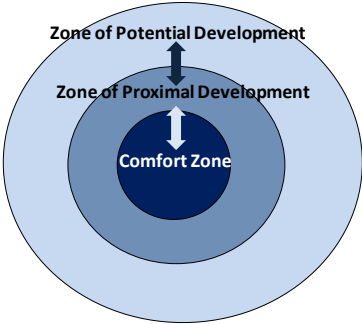
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# Zones of Development



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# Case Study: Roshun Before PLAY

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# Case Study: Roshun After 6 months

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# 7 Circles of the PLAY Project



## Circle 3: The PLAY Plan Individualized Techniques & Activities



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# Circle 3: PLAY Plan

- Techniques and activities answer the question: “What can I do to engage my child?”
- Individualized techniques and activities based on the child’s profile.
- Activities answer the question: “What would be fun for Johnny/Susie?”



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# Circle 3: Techniques

The Purpose of the Techniques:

- Provide parents and professionals with ideas for engagement
- Improve initiative & flexibility
- Increase numbers & complexity of circles of communication
- Improve ability to solve problems
- Promote fun, silly, engaging interactions!



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Circle 3: Techniques—BEAR FART!



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Circle 3: Activities

Activities are generated based on the child’s profile (FDL, SMP, & CZ). Examples:

- Rolling child up in a rug
- Swinging in a blanket
- Finger painting with shaving cream, colored glue with sparkles, etc.
- Puzzles
- Pretend: dress up, crashing cars, tea party, dolly sleeping, dinosaurs chasing a man, etc.



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Activities Evolve by Functional Developmental Level

LEVELS 1 & 2  
Sensory/Cause  
and Effect

- Gently shaking arms or legs
- Gently squeezing arms, leg, head.
- Rolling child up in a rug
- Swinging in a blanket

LEVELS 3 & 4  
Sequences/  
Simple Pretend

- Chase: “I’m gonna get you”
- Get the bubbles, balloon, etc.
- Ball play (rolling it back and forth)

LEVELS 5 & 6  
1&2 Theme  
Pretend

- Pretend: dress up, crashing cars, tea party, dolly sleeping, dinosaurs chasing a man, etc.
- Real hide and seek, not just peek a boo. Hide a doll and say “Where is the dolly?”
- Duck, duck, goose

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### Circle 4: Family Guidance

- **PLAY Consultant**
  - **Models** PLAY Techniques
  - Observes and **Coaches** PLAY Partners (Parents)
  - Provides written **Feedback** on PLAY Session



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### Case Study: Julian Part 3

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7 Circles of the PLAY Project



Circle 5:  
Engagement  
Adult & Child  
PLAY time



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Circle 5: PLAY Time Engagement  
Between Parent and Child

- Playful & fun: “When you do what the child loves, the child will love to be with you.”
- 2 hours per day, broken up into 10-20 minute PLAY sessions
- Daily routines such as meal time, bath time, and bed time should be used for interaction
- Research says completely doable for families



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7 Circles of the PLAY Project



Circle 6:  
Review  
Video & Written  
Feedback



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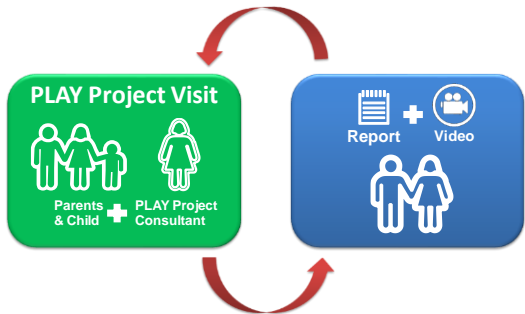
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### Circle 6: Visit Review Video & Written Feedback



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### Circle 6: Written Feedback

- Video Review
  - Observations and suggestions
- Written summary
  - Keys to the child’s case
  - Child Profile (CZ, SMP, FDL)
  - Methods
  - Techniques
  - Activities



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### 7 Circles of the PLAY Project



**Circle 7:  
Change &  
Growth**  
Revise PLAY Plan  
As child develops



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Circle 7: Change and Growth

- Reassess the child’s progress
- Modify the PLAY Plan to best meet the changing needs of the child and family



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Circle 7: PLAY Clinical Goals

- Joyful relating
- Simple and complex nonverbal gestures
- Long interactive sequences (e.g. 50+)
- “Circles” of spontaneous verbal communication
- Shared social attention (FDL 1-3)
- Symbolic language related to feelings (FDL 4-6)
- ‘With us’ continuously, not fragmented/stuck in CZ
- Socially functional & interested in others



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Case Study: Julian’s Turning Point

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### Case Study: Julian Becomes Symbolic

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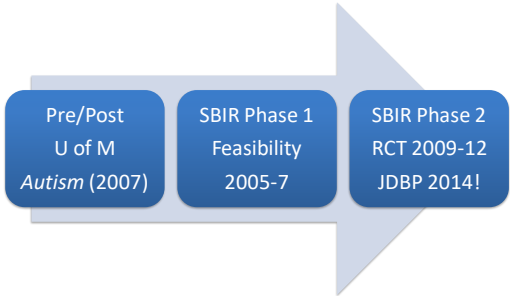
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### Research Timeline



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### PLAY Project Research

- SBIR NIMH Phase II—Awarded, Sept. 2009
- 3 Year, \$1.85 Million
- Easter Seals & Michigan State University
- RCT, multi-site, blinded study
- 5 ES sites, 60 children per year x 2 years = 120.  
Largest study of its kind in US
- Results published in *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics*  
— *J Dev Beh Pediatr.* 2014; 35(8): 475-485.

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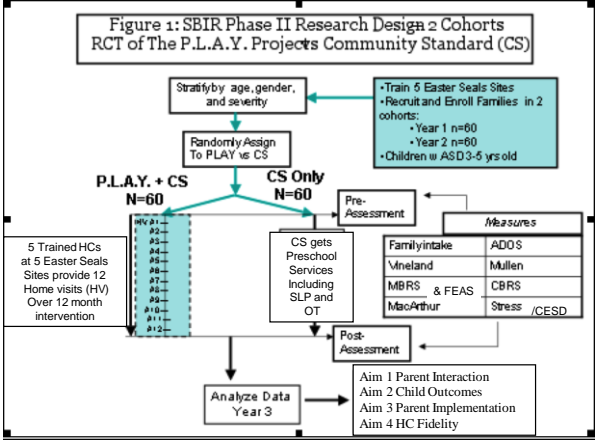
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**Model Effects**

Home Consultants Are True to the Model (AIM 4)

Parent Effectiveness Improves (AIM 1)

Parents Implement PLAY Project (AIM 3)

Child Development Improves (AIM 2)

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**Model Effects**

Home Consultants Are True to the Model (AIM 4)

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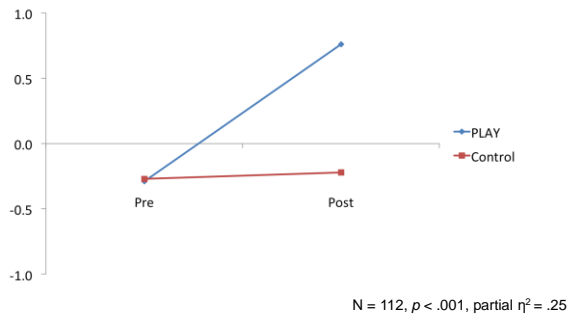
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### MBRS: Responsiveness – Total

Sensitivity, Responsiveness, Effectiveness – all sig.



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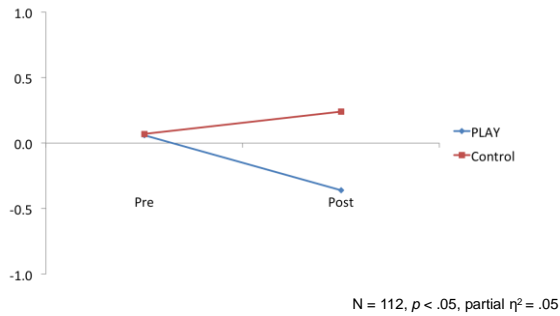
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### MBRS: Directive – Total

Directiveness – sig., Pace – not sig; both increase



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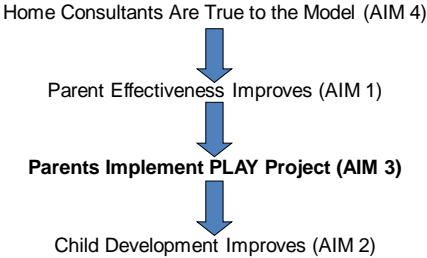
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### Model Effects



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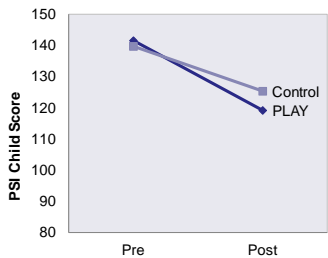
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### Aim 3 Results: Parent Stress



Time x group interaction:  $p = .15$  (ns), partial  $\eta^2 = .043$ .

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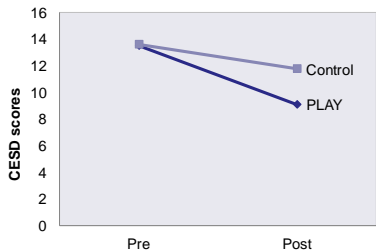
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### Aim 3 Results: Parent Depression



Time x group interaction:  $p = .24$  (ns), partial  $\eta^2 = .028$ .

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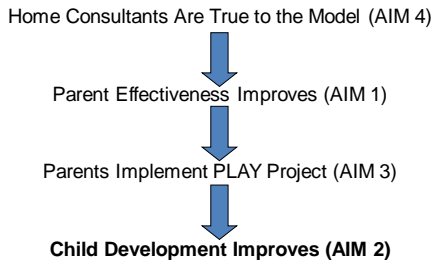
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### Model Effects



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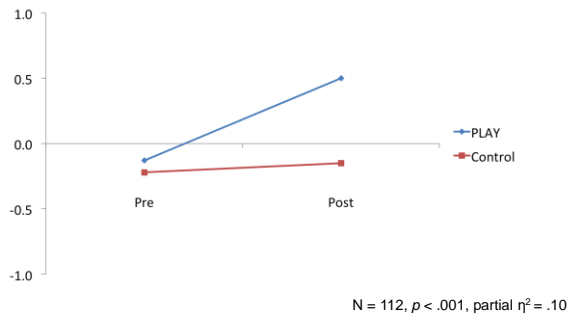
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**CBRS: Attention – Total**  
Attention to Activity (sig.), Persistence (not sig., same pattern),  
Involvement (sig.), Compliance (sig.)



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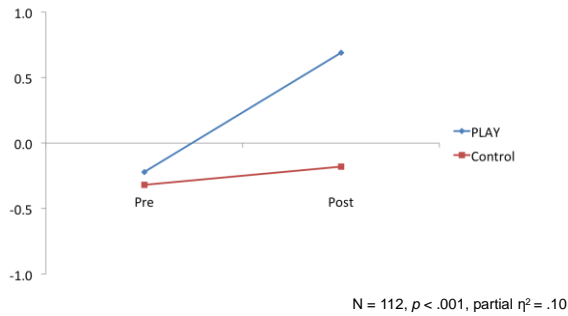
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**CBRS: Initiation – Total**  
Activity, Adult, Affect – all sig.



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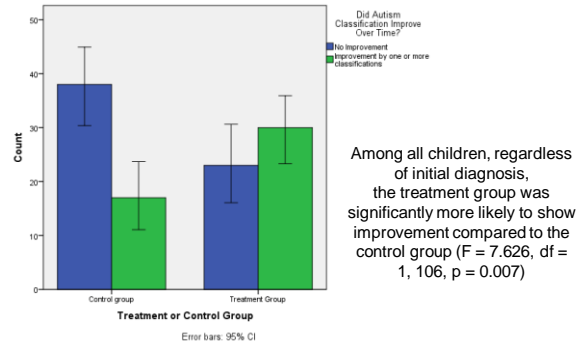
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**Research Findings**



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Research Findings

Significant improvements in:

- Caregiver/parent and child interaction
- Social interaction of children with autism
- social-emotional development of children with autism
- First study using parent implemented, developmental, relationship based model to show improvements in autism symptomology
- No increase in stress; reduction in depression

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Research: Implications

- **PLAY Project offers a replicable method**
- **Uses an efficient training and certification model**
- **Cost effective to parents and society**
- **Can be broadly and quickly disseminated**
- **Serves a growing need**
- **Gets children off of waiting lists and into services**

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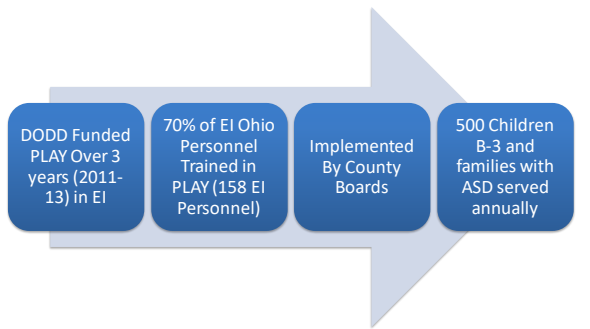
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Ohio Implementation of PLAY



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# Ohio PLAY Project Evaluation

- Ohio DODD Grant, August 2015 Family Child Learning Center, Akron Children’s Hospital
- PI: Marilyn Espe-Sherwindt and team
- 150 EI Home Consultants trained
- 70% of Counties in Ohio served
- Est. 500 children served per year in Ohio
- Very high satisfaction of HC with training
- Very high satisfaction of parents with PLAY Autism Early Intervention

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# PLAY Project in Ohio



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# CREATING A UNIQUE CHILD PROFILE: FUNCTIONAL DEVELOPMENT LEVEL, SENSORY MOTOR PROFILE, & COMFORT ZONE

## Circle 2: Child Profile Functional Development Levels (FDL)

1. Self-Regulation and Shared Attention (FDL 1)
2. Engagement (FDL 2)
3. Two-way Communication (FDL 3)
4. Complex Two-way Communication
5. Shared Meanings and Symbolic Play (FDL 5)
6. Emotional Thinking (FDL 6)

## Circle 2: Child Profile Sensory Motor Profile (SMP)

The unique way a child experiences the 7 primary senses, which include:

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

- It is important to identify how the child experiences the 7 senses and whether they are over-reactive or under-reactive to sensation.
- If a Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) is suspected, we recommend an occupational therapy evaluation.
- The child's SMP is gathered through: a parent interview, clinical observation, and assessment measures.

## Circle 2: Child Profile Comfort Zone (CZ)

- The Comfort Zone is something the child does when you let him do whatever he wants
- 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-stimming on wheels, lines, objects, etc.
  - Watching TV, videos, pressing keys on iPad, etc.
- Being stuck on the same topic: planets, trains, dinosaurs



# FUNCTIONAL DEVELOPMENTAL LEVEL THUMBNAIL DESCRIPTIONS

## FDL 1: Self-Regulation & Shared Attention

### Begins between birth & three months

- Can remain calm and regulated enough to share attention with people
- Can sustain brief episodes of interaction
- Child is 'with us'
- Responds to comforting & attention
- Turns/responds to own name often
- Regulation derailed by Comfort Zone activities (Stimming, scripting, lining up, etc. remove attention)
- When you see CZ, child has holes in FDL 1
- Use Rabbit Hole Techniques to join the child at FDL

## FDL 2: Engagement & Relating

### Begins between two & seven months

- More sustained attention = engagement
- You call to them and they look – circles begin!
- Key question: how easy is it to engage the child?
- This is the *sweat* level. The parent/professional must do the work (i.e. sweat) to keep the child engaged
- Hard to follow child's lead, but you can!
- Watch for visual activities
- Demonstrates attachment to primary caregivers
- Closes circles of communication
- Use Rabbit Hole Techniques

## FDL 3: Intentionality & Two-Way Communication

### Begins between three & ten months

- Opening and closing of 5-10 circles
- Key activities: simple cause and effect games (peek-a-boo)
- Key question: Is the child initiating?
- We want to 'create a monster' (i.e. the child won't leave you alone!)
- Purposefulness in actions
- Socially references others
- Simple imitation
- This is the *wait* level. The parent/professional must wait and see if the child will initiate (i.e. open circles)
- Beginning of understanding routines
- Beginning of first single words



# FUNCTIONAL DEVELOPMENTAL LEVEL THUMBNAIL DESCRIPTIONS

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

**Begins between nine & eighteen months**

- Opening and closing of 10-30 circles
- Solid 4 = Totally 'with us,' there is a continuous flow of interaction
- Gestural communication along with words, imitation
- 50+ words
- Follows spontaneous one step commands: get, give, bring
- Feelings are more organized
- Problem solver! Has his/her own ideas
- Requests help when needed, either gesturally or verbally
- 'Little stories': 'gets' meaningful sequences
- Able to complete task with 1-2 steps
- Simple pretend: phone to ear, bottle to baby's mouth

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

**Begins between twenty-four & thirty months**

- Classic two-year-old communication
- 1-2-word phrases
- Able to recognize & express emotions effectively
- "What," "Where," "Who," actions, yes/no
  - Not open-ended What, "Why" or "When" or pronouns
- One thematic pretend play with adults
- Able to complete task with 3+ steps
- Greetings emerging
- Shows sense of humor
- Compliance
  - It is not following their lead to follow their lead

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

**Begins between thirty-six & forty-eight months**

- Talking in short to long sentences
- Why and when questions
- Can recall the immediate past (what did you eat for breakfast?)
- Builds bridges between ideas
- Identifies own and others' feelings
- Recognizes relationship between feeling, behavior, and consequences
- Two thematic play
- Carries on simple conversations
- Peer established play
- Misbehavior as developmental accomplishment
- Two ideas connected logically



# THE 6 FUNCTIONAL DEVELOPMENTAL LEVELS (FDLS)

## FDL 1 - Self-Regulation & Shared Attention

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**Description:** This level is characterized by the child's ability to enter and sustain a state of shared attention *with another person*, while remaining focused, organized, and calm. These skills are first learned between birth and 3 months.

**Signs of difficulty within this level may include:** fleeting attention/distractibility; difficulty with self-regulation (i.e. difficulty or inability to remain calm and content); frequent periods of inattention, distress, irritability, or lethargy (i.e. low level of arousal); presence of the child's comfort zone (CZ) such as: lining up objects, flipping through books, or other repetitive and isolating behaviors.

### Goals for the Child:

1. Child will sustain shared attention with a special adult in sensorimotor interactive play using the child's preferred and pleasurable sensory and motor modalities, such as movement, looking, touching, or listening.
2. Child will regulate his sensory system in order to sustain shared attention with support.
3. Child will regulate his sensory system in order to sustain shared attention independently.
4. Child will increase shared attention by increasing interactive circles of gestural communication, resulting in a continuous flow of interactions between child and adult rather than trying to focus on a particular object or toy.
5. Child will sustain shared attention with a peer in interaction.
6. Child will sustain shared attention in a group.
7. Child will sustain shared attention independently across contexts

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Content adapted from the DIR<sup>SM</sup>: Stages in Functional Emotional and Intellectual Development and from the works of Stanley Greenspan, MD and Serena Wieder, PhD



# THE 6 FUNCTIONAL DEVELOPMENTAL LEVELS (FDLS)

## FDL 2 - Engagement and Relating

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**Description:** This level is characterized by the child's ability to form relationships and attachment and to engage another person with warmth and pleasure. Engagement is sometimes referred to as intimacy or the ability to bond with and relate to others. This skill is first learned between 2 and 7 months.

**Signs of difficulty within this level may include:** difficulty with relationships and attachment, avoidance of people, decreased desire or ability to engage with people, decreased response to adult attention or affection, distrust, and/or apathy.

### Goals for the Child:

1. The child will form relationships with special adults through pleasurable and enjoyable interactions.
2. The child will sustain engagement in reciprocal social interactions with special adults that bring pleasure and joy.
3. The child will sustain engagement in reciprocal social interactions when annoyed and protesting.
4. The child will increase sustained engagement by increasing the circles of communication.
5. The child will increase sustained engagement through a wider range of emotions, such as jealousy or fear.
6. The child will sustain engagement with a peer with adult mediation.
7. The child will sustain engagement with a peer "expert player".
8. The child will sustain engagement within group interaction

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Content adapted from the **DIR<sup>SM</sup>: Stages in Functional Emotional and Intellectual Development** and from the works of Stanley Greenspan, MD and Serena Wieder, PhD



# THE 6 FUNCTIONAL DEVELOPMENTAL LEVELS (FDLS)

## FDL 3 - Intentionality and Two-Way Communication

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**Description:** This level is characterized by the child's ability to participate in back and forth affective signaling and communication to convey intentions, interests and needs. These skills are first learned between 3 and 10 months.

**Signs of difficulty within this level may include:** difficulty with initiation and ideation, difficulty opening and closing 2-10+ circles; decreased response to a parent or caregivers overture; decreased ability to use gestures or body language to communicate (i.e. reaching, pointing, vocalizing, etc.); decreased interest in cause and effect; decreased ability or desire to interact.

### Goals for the Child:

1. The child will interact in a back-and-forth rhythm in animated exchanges using facial expressions, sounds, and other gestures.
2. The child will initiate purposeful interactions around desires (open circles) and will close circles following adult's response to her initiative.
3. The child will increase number of purposeful interactions around desires for sensorimotor activities, to go somewhere, to obtain objects, or in response to adult strategies to expand the number of circles; for example, when the adult poses obstacles, plays "dumb," or creates extra steps to reach desired goal.
4. The child will increase number of purposeful interactions using imitation.
5. The child will increase number of purposeful interactions using simple gestures, such as reaching, taking, pulling, or pointing.
6. The child will increase number of purposeful interactions across widening range of emotions, such as dependency, assertiveness, and jealousy.
7. The child will increase purposeful interactions in various processing areas, including visual-spatial, motor planning, perceptual motor, auditory processing, and language.
8. The child will sustain purposeful interactions with a peer with adult mediation.
9. The child will sustain purposeful interactions with a peer "expert player."
10. The child will initiate purposeful interaction with a peer spontaneously.
11. The child will sustain purposeful interactions within group interactions

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# THE 6 FUNCTIONAL DEVELOPMENTAL LEVELS (FDLS)

## FDL 4 - Social Problem-Solving, Mood Regulation, & Formation of Sense of Self

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**Description:** This level is characterized by the child's ability to use complex circles of communication by stringing together a series of gestures, actions and words into an elaborate problem-solving sequence of interactions which helps child develop a sense of self. These skills are first learned between 9 and 18 months.

**Signs of difficulty within this level may include:** difficulty or inability to open and close up to 20 circles of communication in a row (i.e. interactions may be brief and ideas are disconnected); decreased interest in simple cause and effect or pretend play ideas; decreased receptive and expressive communication; difficulty with motor planning, sequencing, or engaging in activities that involve 3 or more steps; difficulty following spontaneous 1-step commands; decreased problem solving skills and/or persistence.

### Goals for the Child:

1. The child will express communicative intent through gestures or words to get what he wants.
2. The child will sequence (motor plan) in order to execute an idea, such as a desire for a cookie, to pull a chair over to a cabinet, climb up, open cabinet, open container, get cookies and smile at mom.
3. The child will sequence (motor plan) in order to execute a desire; for example, in order to play with Dad, who is reading the paper on the couch, the child will climb up, bounce on Dad, and pull him onto the floor to play.

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# THE 6 FUNCTIONAL DEVELOPMENTAL LEVELS (FDLS)

## FDL 5 - Creating Symbols and Using Words and Ideas

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**Description:** This level is characterized by the child's ability to create ideas (symbols) observed in pretend play and words (phrases and sentences) to convey some emotional intention. These skills begin between 24 and 30 months.

**Signs of difficulty within this level may include:** scripted, rehearsed, or otherwise unmeaningful expressive language; disinterest in or difficulty engaging in pretend play (i.e. tea parties or monster attacks); difficulty recognizing and expressing emotions; decreased negotiation skills; lack of humor; difficulty engaging in elaborate ideas that involve multiple steps; frequent use of actions rather than words (i.e. the child hits instead of saying: *don't do that!*).

### Goals for the Child:

1. The child will initiate the use of realistic ideas in interactive imaginative play, such as by hugging the dolls.
2. The child will initiate the use of ideas using realistic verbal interactions.
3. The child will express ideas derived from her affect or intent, such as saying "Play outside!" when she wants to go outside.
4. The child will express ideas derived from her affect by combining words and reality-based actions, such as sequence of pretending to be hurt and going to the doctor to get better.
5. The child will engage in conversations to express ideas.
6. The child will elaborate on ideas through increasing verbal and symbolic play sequences, such as getting hurt in a crash, going to the doctor, being examined, and going home.
7. The child will create imaginary (not reality-based) ideas using magical thinking/powers.
8. The child will assume different roles and act as the character in role-play.
9. The child will predict how others will feel or act in certain situations.
10. The child will respond to other's feelings appropriately.
11. The child will demonstrate confidence to resolve conflicts that come up in social situations, such as waiting, trading toys, taking turns, playing together, asserting self to retrieve his toy, joining in, or defending others.
12. The child will assume multiple roles and use figures to represent characters.
13. The child will expand ideas to include a wide range of themes and feelings.

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# THE 6 FUNCTIONAL DEVELOPMENTAL LEVELS (FDLS)

## FDL 6 - Emotional Thinking, Logic, and a Sense of Reality

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**Description:** This level is characterized by the child's ability to build logical bridges or make connections between different emotional ideas. Reflection and the ability to understand another person's perspective also begin to emerge during this level. You may also notice children creating their own games, rules, and possibly toys. These skills begin between 36 and 48 months.

**Signs of difficulty within this level may include:** difficulty or inability to answer open-ended what questions, why questions or questions about time (i.e. when); difficulty recalling past events or understanding/anticipating what will happen in the future; lack of empathy; difficulty with peer relationships; decreased negotiation skills; decreased ability to explain reasons for actions, feelings, etc.

### Goals for the Child:

1. The child will close all symbolic circles in both pretend play and reality-based dialogues.
2. The child will respond to "Wh" questions, including who, what, where, when, and why.
3. The child will debate, negotiate, and make choices when deciding what to play, what to do, where to go, and who goes first.
4. The child will connect ideas in logical ways that make sense (not fragment, change topic, or become tangential).
5. The child will integrate concepts of time in ideas.
6. The child will integrate concepts of space in ideas.
7. The child will integrate concepts of quantity in ideas and problem solving.
8. The child will explain reasons for feelings and actions.
9. The child will compare and contrast ideas, preferences, and other people's views.
10. The child will give opinions, selecting appropriate dimensions for views.
11. The child will create dramas with a beginning, middle, and end.
12. The child will identify motives of other people or characters' actions and understand different points of view and feelings.
13. The child will predict feelings and actions of other characters.
14. The child will recognize complex intents, such as deception, sarcasm, and conflict.
15. The child will reflect on feelings in both pretend dramas and conversations taking place in reality.
16. The child will expand play to full range of emotional themes, including conflict, aggression, and morality.
17. The child will reach higher levels of abstraction and will be able to see details as well as the big picture (trees and the forest).
18. The child will recognize strengths and weaknesses in self and others.

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## THE 6 FUNCTIONAL DEVELOPMENTAL LEVELS (FDLS)

19. The child will expand play to full range of emotional themes, including conflict, aggression, and morality.
20. The child will reach higher levels of abstraction and will be able to see details as well as the big picture (trees and the forest).
21. The child will recognize strengths and weaknesses in self and others.

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# “RABBIT HOLE” TECHNIQUES

The “**Rabbit Hole**” is our metaphor for the self isolation caused by the perseverative, repetitive, restrictive, and stereotypical behaviors characteristically exhibited by children with autism spectrum disorders.

- When children are *in* their “rabbit hole,” it seems like they don’t want to be part of the world.
- Perseverative and stereotypical behaviors are not “bad.” They are a form of comfort that the child uses to keep their world familiar and safe. In the PLAY Project, we call these behaviors Comfort Zone (CZ) activities.
- CZ activities help the child to regulate (self-calm) in a chaotic world; however, they may become habits which keeps the child isolated (i.e. in their “rabbit hole”).
- ‘Joining’ a child in their CZ allows for engagement (FDL 2) and as engagement increases, the perseverative and repetitive behaviors naturally decrease. This is the goal of the “Rabbit Hole” Techniques!

## The 6 Rabbit Hole Techniques:

1. **Being With:** Simply be with (i.e. sit next to or quietly observe) and wait for the child to re-engage.
2. **Narrate:** Label and provide a running commentary. Focus on paying attention to what the child is doing. This means to watch and describe **out loud** what it is that he/she is doing. You may sound just like a sportscaster -- that's good! As an example, let's say he is coloring. You might follow what he's doing by saying, " ... *and now you're coloring the hat red.*" **Don't tell the child what to do.** You should just describe their actions. Also, stop paying attention if he/she starts demonstrating naughty/unwanted behaviors. If for instance, he/she starts whining, don't say, " ... *and now you're whining.*" In cases like this, ignore the bad behavior.
3. **Help him do it better:** For example, if the child is lining up cars you would begin to hand him or her additional cars to add to the line of cars or show the child new ways of using the cars.
4. **Imitate/Parallel Play:** Do something similar to what the child is doing (and see if he/she will imitate you). If the child is lining up his or her toy cars, you can begin to line up a set of cars next to them but add a slight variation (e.g., line them up facing in the opposite direction).
5. **Theme and Variation:** Do something different with the same activity. For instance, open and close a door. Sing a song while you open and close the door, hold the door closed until the child complains.
6. **Change the Sensory Mode:** If the child is " in his or own world," you can try to engage their attention with a really fun activity (e.g., bubbles or offer other sensory activities). *\*Keep in mind the child's primary/preferred sensory modality (i.e. visual, tactile, auditory, etc.)*



# SAMPLE OF PLAY PROJECT TECHNIQUES

| <b>PLAY Techniques:<br/>FDLs 1-4</b>  | <b>PLAY Techniques:<br/>FDLs 4-6</b>  |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Being With/Going for Affect</li><li>2. Sensory-motor Play</li><li>3. Taffy Pulling</li><li>4. Theme &amp; Variation</li><li>5. Salient Language</li><li>6. Playful Obstruction</li></ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Imitative Pretend Play</li><li>2. Pretend Play: Everything Come Alive</li><li>3. Pretend Play: One Thematic</li><li>4. Mirroring-Reflecting/Labeling: Feelings</li><li>5. Speaking 'to' and Speaking 'for' the Child</li><li>6. Modeling Empathy</li></ol> |

[www.playproject.org](http://www.playproject.org)



# SAMPLE OF PLAY PROJECT TECHNIQUES

## PLAY Techniques with Examples for Functional Developmental Levels 1-4

### Shared Attention/Engagement & Two-Way Communication

#### 1. Being With

Definition: Being present in the same physical space with the child and just observing.

Purpose: To help caregivers see exactly what the child is doing or intending to honor the *child's* ideas.

Examples:

- Sit near the child as they play in their Comfort Zone.
- Make comments on what they're doing: "You're jumping so high!"
- Repeat words/sounds the child makes.

#### 2. Sensory-motor play

Definition: Connecting with the child in a physically playful way through various sensory modalities.

Purpose: To physically engage the child using mostly touch, proprioceptive (deep pressure and muscular movement) and vestibular (movement in space) interactions.

Examples:

- Touch: gently squeeze each finger, rub the back, tickle, wrestle, rough house.
- Vision: blow bubbles, stack blocks, flip pages, read numbers, letters, colors.
- Sounds: hum, drum, sing.

#### 3. Taffy Pulling

Definition: Stretching out interactions to make engagement last.

Purpose: To prolong engagement and strengthen the social bond/connection between people.

Examples:

- Keep eye contact going for as long as possible by slowing down your actions.
- Play dumb for a couple of circles (back and forth interactions) and ask the child what they would like to do.
- Give them a toy and then ask for it back, then try to take it back and let them resist you.
  - Have fun 'tussling;' say "mine" and gently tease the child.
  - S-t-r-e-t-c-h it out.

#### 4. Theme & Variation

Definition: Theme and variation involve multiple ways of doing the same activity.

Purpose: To create lots of ideas for parents for when play becomes repetitive.

Examples: What are 5 ways to play with something simple like a door?

- Play peek-a-boo on the other side of the door: "Hello. Bye-bye."
- Open and close the door with a song (To 'London Bridge': "Now I'm going to close the door, close the door, close the door. . .").
- Put your hand in the door and close it (gently) and say "ouch!"



# SAMPLE OF PLAY PROJECT TECHNIQUES

## 5. **Salient Language**

Definition: Purposeful language that stands out to the child.

Purpose: To help the child understand key words by connecting words to objects, actions, and people.

Examples:

- Label each activity: “spin” for a spinning game or “open/close” for a peek-a-boo door game, etc.
- Use sequences of language: “1-2-3,” and “ready, set, GO...”
- Once familiar, wait to see if the child will finish the sequence “1-2....”

## 6. **Playful Obstruction**

Definition: When the caregiver playfully does not do what the child wants or makes the child work for something they do want.

Purpose: To make interactions last longer and get more back-and-forth reciprocal exchange (i.e. circles) and to have fun i.e. it should be playful not frustrating.

Examples:

- Get in their way so they must move you.
- Play dumb when they want something and make them open another circle (back and forth interaction).
- Close the door when they want it open.

## PLAY Techniques with Examples for Functional Developmental Levels 4-6

### Shared Meanings & Emotional Thinking

## 1. **Imitative Pretend Play**

Definition: Simple pretend where the child imitates what the caregiver models.

Purpose: To promote early symbolic imagination and imitation and complete the bridge to higher pretend and functional development at FDL 4.

Examples:

- Use slapstick with dolls.
- Build simple repetitive sequences the child can follow:
  - “Hi, I’m a car. Here I go,” then zoom the car around on the floor and in the air.
- Point to animal pictures, name the animals, then make the animal sounds.

## 2. **Pretend Play: Everything Come Alive (FDL 4)**

Definition: A form of pretend where objects are treated as alive.

Purpose: To promote pretend play and develop imagination skills.

Examples:

- Use silly voices when playing with objects to give them personalities.
- Salt shakers can say, “Here I come. Shake me!!”
- Make any object “come alive.”



# SAMPLE OF PLAY PROJECT TECHNIQUES

## 3. Pretend Play: One Thematic (FDL 5)

Definition: Pretend play that involves one idea (not yet a story with two ideas) and represents true pretend play compared to the imitative pretend play of a younger child (see 'Simple Pretend Play' above).

Purpose: To promote imagination and social capacities for playful interaction with peers and adults. Paves the way to more complex two thematic pretend play.

Examples:

- Feed a big-mouth puppet different kind of plastic foods.
  - Note: Even though you feed several foods, it's still just one theme: feed the puppet.
- Use a doctor kit to give a shot, listen to the heart with a pretend stethoscope, etc.
  - Note: The child is *not* pretending to be a doctor.
- Sword fight.

## 4. Mirroring-Reflecting/Labeling: Feelings

Definition: When the adult *mirrors and reflects* the child's feelings using a **statement** not a question.

Purpose: To help the child label and understand their own and others' feelings.

Examples:

*Note:* This technique requires being alert to feelings the child exhibits usually through their *gestures* throughout the day.

- A mirror would not ask "Are you mad?" but only states what exists: "You're mad!"
- Mirror and reflect the feeling using words that express the feeling for the child and match the intensity with your voice.
- Try to imagine what the child would say if they could tell you how they feel.
  - "You don't like that food. You're all done!"

## 5. Speaking 'to' and Speaking 'for' the Child

Definition: When the adult speaks TO the child they should talk in completely normal tones, syntax, and rhythms (not baby talk or dumbed-down language). When the adults speak FOR the child they should simplify their language and model language that the *child* would use.

Purpose: To enhance language skills. When speaking to the child you are modeling normal language; when you are speaking for the child you are helping them *expand* their language skills.

Examples:

- When the child says, "Up!" you could say "Up, Daddy."
- When the child says, "Go out!" you say (speaking FOR): "Go outside, Momma," followed by (speaking TO): "Let's go outside and have some fun."
- Note: Children develop language based on the SVO syntactic construction—Subject Verb Object. When you are helping them build sentence structure it can be either Subject Verb: "Bobby go"; it could be Verb Object: "Go (to) car?" or it could be Subject Object: "Bobby car."

## 6. Modeling Empathy

Definition: Recognizing others' feelings and appropriately responding to them with empathy.

Purpose: To promote important social skills, involving the child's ability to care for others. This also tunes children with autism into an important realm of social content.

Examples:





## SAMPLE OF PLAY PROJECT TECHNIQUES

- First, model empathy for the child: “You’re mad about that!” or “Boy, that was fun!”
- Mirror/Reflect/Label other’s feelings.
  - “Your sister is sad. What should we do to make her feel better? You took your toy back from her and she has nothing to do.”
- Draw feelings faces.



# SAMPLE OF PLAY PROJECT ACTIVITIES BY LEVEL

## Level 1: Self-Regulation & Shared Attention (calm and alert and ready for the possibility of engagement)

Goal: To help the child sustain attention and regulation (create an optimal environment while eliminating distractions)

\*some activities may be appropriate for more than one level

### Activities:

#### *Sensory motor play*

- Roll exercise ball on body
- Massage with or without lotion
- Gently squeeze fingers/toes, head
- Gently shake arm/leg/hands/feet
- Dance while holding the child
- Tickle the child's arms, back, belly, etc.
- Sing
- Make sounds
- Make faces to capture the child's attention

## Level 2: Engagement & Relating

Goal: To engage with the child and maintain continuous engagement

### Activities:

- Swing child in blanket by arms and legs
- Horsy back rides
- Flying the child up in the air
- Holding the child upside down for a brief period
- Wrestle gently
- Introduce simple 1-2 step sequences and opposites: turn a flashlight on and off, turn water on and off, hello/goodbye games, open and dramatically close a book, etc.

## Level 3: Two-Way Intentional Communication

Goal: To open and close circles with the child and to challenge the child to initiate

### Activities:

- Blow bubbles and wait for the child to ask for more
- Balloon play (i.e. hitting a balloon back and forth or blowing one up and letting it fly around the room, etc.)
- Label body parts and wait for the child's direction ("What's next?")
- Fly like an airplane and crash into a couch
- Flip the child over on a bed, crawl through a tunnel
- Wait for the child on the other side, etc.
- Play simple chase games
- Ready-set-go or 1-2-3 games
- Jack-in-the-Box
- Play with toys that wind up and go, such as cars, airplanes, helicopters, etc.
- Play peek-a-boo around a blanket or behind a door



# SAMPLE OF PLAY PROJECT ACTIVITIES BY LEVEL

## Level 4: Purposeful Problem-Solving Communication

**Goal:** To engage in long, back and forth interactions that includes meaningful communication, problem solving, simple pretend play and sequences

**Activities:**

- Ask the child to point to various body parts on his/her body and on play partner's body
- Introduce animal/car sounds
- Do puzzles and play with shapes and colors that have meaning to the child - keep it playful!
- Play opposite games with some simple pretend (e.g. lights on/off, cars in/out of garage)
- Simple puppet play (i.e. making puppets open their mouths and say, "Ahh" or "Hi!")
- Play simple hide-and-seek behind a blanket or furniture
- Look at books, talk about pictures on the page
- "Ring Around the Rosy," "Head-Shoulders-Knees-Toes," "Humpty-Dumpty," "London Bridges," etc.
- Give the child simple problems to solve (e.g. the car is stuck, the horsey has a boo-boo, the baby is hungry, etc.)

## Level 5: Creating & Elaborating Ideas

**Goal:** To encourage a better understanding of one's emotions and to increase pretend play, symbolic thinking, conversational and negotiation skills

**Activities:**

- Races with simple rules
- Play catch
- Set the table with pretend food
- Wash a pretend animal
- Change a doll's diaper and put it to bed
- Have a tea party
- Play doctor
- Hide-and-seek
- Sword fight
- Make a puppet burp
- Pretend to fall and say "ow!"

## Level 6: Building Bridges & Ideas (Logical Thinking)

**Goal:** To support the child in understanding complex emotions: concepts of time, fairness, and abstraction. 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.

**Activities:**

- Role play with puppets/stuffed animals
- Play tag
- Musical chairs
- Duck-duck goose
- Play house
- Simon Says
- Go on a pretend picnic, adventure, treasure hunt, scavenger hunt
- Complete complex obstacle courses
- Read and analyze stories/books
- Talk about likes and dislikes



# PLAY PROJECT CHECKLIST: FUNCTIONAL DEVELOPMENTAL LEVELS 1-3

This checklist is meant to serve as a guide for parents, family members, & professionals who participate in or provide PLAY Project services. The questions below provide hints and guidelines that are helpful to keep in mind when playing with a child who is functioning within the first 3 Functional Developmental Levels (FDLs). These questions are based on the PLAY Project Principles, Methods, and Techniques and encourage players to become more sensitive to the child's needs, ultimately leading to more successful PLAY sessions.

## FDL I: Self-Regulation and Shared Attention

- ☐ How is your positioning? Are you *being with* the child near them or on the floor or facing them or following them around the room?
- ☐ Are you *paying attention to the child's attention*? Where is he/she looking? What is his/her attention focused on?
- ☐ Are you *paying attention to the child's intention*? What is his/her interest right now?
- ☐ Are you able to *interpret your child's subtle cues* to understand what they want? Are you 'reading' them right?
- ☐ When your child shows his/her intention, *are you responding in a supportive way*, encouraging your child to do what they want? Can you accept your child right where he/she is at?
- ☐ *Whose play idea is it?* Yours or your child's?
- ☐ Are you using the 'Rabbit Hole Techniques'?
- ☐ Can you define 'circle' of communication? What does it mean to 'open' a circle? Close a circle? Do you know how to *count circles*?
- ☐ Are you *having fun* together?

## FDL II: Engagement & Relating

- ☐ Are you playing *at the right level*? Too high (child not getting it)? Too low (child not engaged)?
- ☐ Can you engage your child by *following his/her lead*?
- ☐ Are you enthusiastic, animated, silly, and fun? Using voice, gestures, and actions to make it fun?
- ☐ Are you in the *right sensory mode* to engage the child? You might have to change it up (i.e. avoid visually absorbing activities) to get better engagement.
- ☐ Are you getting 3-4 *circles of communication* going? Do you know how to *count circles*?
- ☐ *How long* can you keep the engagement going by being dramatic, silly, fun, sensitive to their interests (are you *sweating yet?*)?
- ☐ Are you *having fun* together?

## FDL III: Intentionality & Two-way Communication

- ☐ Are you *slowing down your pace* and *waiting* long enough to get *responses* from your child?
- ☐ Are you getting 6-10 *circles of communication* going?
- ☐ Are you 'thinking circles' as you play and going for longer chains of interactions?
- ☐ Who is *opening* the first circle? Are you waiting for *him/her* to initiate?
- ☐ Are you using Theme and Variation to be inventive with your play?
- ☐ Are you connecting words to routines and fun events? Does he/she understand routines when you refer to them? Does he/she turn to their name?
- ☐ Are you seeing any imitation yet?
- ☐ Any word-gestures yet? Like signing for 'more,' waving bye, pointing?
- ☐ Are you still *having fun* together?