



PLAY Project Techniques

PLAY Techniques with Examples for Functional Developmental Levels 1-4 Shared Attention/Engagement & Two-Way Communication

“Rabbit Hole” Techniques

The ‘Rabbit Hole’ is our metaphor for the self-isolation of CZ activities. “Joining” a child in the CZ allows for engagement (FDL 2), and as engagement increases, the perseverative and repetitive behaviors naturally decrease.

This is the goal of “Rabbit Hole” Techniques!

- **Being With:** Simply ‘be with’ (i.e., quietly observe) and wait for the child to re-engage.
- **Narrate:** Label and provide a running commentary. Focus on paying attention to what the child is doing. This means watching and describing **out loud** what it is that he/she is doing. You may sound just like a sportscaster – that’s good!
Example: The child 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.** Simply describe his/her actions. Stop paying attention if he/she starts demonstrating naughty/unwanted behaviors.
Example: She starts whining. **Don’t** say, “...and now you’re whining.” In cases like this, ignore the undesired behavior.
- **Help him do it better:** If the child is lining up cars, you would begin to hand him/her additional cars to add to the line of cars or show the child new ways of using the cars.
- **Imitate/Parallel Play:** Do something similar to what the child is doing, and see if he/she will imitate you.
Example: If the child is lining up his/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)
- **Theme and Variation:** Do something different with the same activity. Example: Open and close a door, sing a song while you open and close the door, hold the door closed until the child complains.
- **Change the Sensory Mode:** If the child is “in his or her own world” you can try to engage their attention with a really fun activity. (e.g., bubbles or offer other types of sensory activities).
**Keep in mind the child’s primary/preferred sensory modality (i.e., visual, tactile, auditory, etc.)*

Taffy Pulling—Stretch the interaction. Open and close 2 or 3 circles instead of one. Keep the interaction going

- Play dumb for a couple of circles. Ask the child what they would like to do?
- Give the train and ask for it back.
- Then try to take it back and let them resist you.
- Say “mine” i.e., gently tease the child.
- Give the train but fly it around their head first.
- After they have the train, spin each wheel
- Make a different funny sound for each wheel

Making them work—

When you think they can do something, expect them (using your voice, facial gestures, and pregnant pauses), to do it.

- Play dumb and make them show you or tell you what they want
- Expect them to use their words (“Do you want **more**? Tell me you want MORE. (Use salient language.)



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Expectant waiting—

- Waiting is a primary technique, but it must be expectant waiting. I.e., waiting for a return response
- This helps children initiate (which is the essence of Greenspan Functional Level 3).
- The key here is to make an overture and then see what the child wants to do.
- Waiting allows you to observe the child more accurately and increase circles of interaction.

Going for Fun—

- Ask yourself: “What would the child love to do with me?”
- Then wait for an answer. This is an intuitive way to play.
- You can use this technique both in the moment as you play, but also as a way of generating activities.
- Then list the activities and try them out. You’ll probably be right!

PLAY Techniques with Examples for Functional Developmental Levels 4-6

Shared Meanings & Emotional Thinking

Mirroring/Reflecting: Feelings—

- This important technique helps children understand their own feelings and put words to their feelings.
- First, be alert to all the feelings the child exhibits through his/her gestures.
- Then, label the feeling with words and gestures that express the feelings of the child. Match the intensity with your voice.
- This is called ‘mirroring’ the child’s feelings, because you act like a mirror, only reflecting back what you see.
- A mirror would not ask questions (i.e., ‘Are you mad?’) Instead use statements. (‘You’re mad!’) Imagine what the child would say if he or she could tell you how he/she is feeling.
- Example: The child is very angry that his brother took his toy. You say: “That’s my toy! “Leave my toy alone!!!”
- Other examples: “Weeee, that was fun!” or “You didn’t like that!” or “Stop it, Mommy, please!”
- It may seem that we are encouraging children to be disrespectful but we are not...
- ...It’s very important that the child be allowed to ‘talk back’ appropriately even if angrily.