



PARENT

GUIDE





PLAY Project Consultant Name:

PLAY Project Consultant Phone Number:

PLAY Project Consultant Email Address:

**Welcome to The PLAY Project
Online Course Voucher Code:**

The PLAY Project's Parent Guide

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Forward

Richard Solomon MD
Founder of The PLAY Project



"When you do what the child loves, the child will love being with you!"

A warm welcome to The PLAY Project's autism intensive early intervention program! We use the symbol of the train in our logo because we know that your child is on a developmental track through the landscape of life. We invite you to get on board and take this train to your child's potential.

As the conductor of this train, **the most important thing I can say to the parents who have a child with autism is to accept your child exactly where he or she is developmentally**, be with them, join them in the things they enjoy, and have fun on this ride together on *their* terms.

What I'm asking I know is not easy. It means, temporarily, giving up your ideas and expectations but not your hopes! By joining your child, you are helping them reach the potential that is within them. Some children are slow movers, some medium movers, and some fast movers but they are all movers down this track!

Soon enough they will enjoy your company, join your rough house and sensory play ideas and after that, if you are a persistent PLAYer, they will understand routines by name and start to have single words. Then comes pretend and more words. Your child is on the track to their destinations, the basic foundations of social connection, which are: sharing attention, staying engaged, and interacting in a back-and-forth fashion.

If you provide about 2 hours per day of engaging intervention in short 15–20-minute sessions and throughout daily routines, your child WILL make progress, WILL talk, WILL become more socially functional, and, if your child has the potential, they WILL become imaginative, emotionally more complex, and progressively more successful at home, in school, with their peers, and in life as they get older. These are the stations, so to speak, of your child's potential.

Our program is based on research, but more than that, it is based on thousands of parents and children who have used our principles, methods, techniques, and activities. *Learn the model!* I can tell you based on over 25 years of watching children make progress that your child has tremendous potential. Your child's brain can change, making new connections as they become more connected to people and social reality. I have seen it over and over.

I encourage you to **BELIEVE in yourselves and your child**. You can make a real long-term difference in your child's development with The PLAY Project IF you do the work. Our beautiful children will love to move down the track of life to reach their destination—the potential that is within them.

Welcome Aboard The PLAY Project train!



Dr. Rick

All Aboard

How to Use this Guide

If you have a child recently diagnosed with autism, or if you're worried about 'red flags' for autism, and you are searching for guidance and information, The PLAY Project is here to help.

PLAY Project Consultants

Through home, clinic/office, or TelePLAY (video conferencing) visits, trained and certified **PLAY Project Consultants**¹ provide a 15-minute video and written feedback to help you learn how to engage your child in a way that helps them move up developmentally to improve their social interactions and abilities. Importantly, your PLAY Project Consultant will help you every step of the way. In The PLAY Project, we re-evaluate and adjust your child's PLAY Plan after each visit.

Children with autism want to keep the world the same. This tendency towards repetition and isolation too often deprives them of the opportunity to develop to their full potential. Through PLAY, however, many children can gain the language and social skills necessary to become highly functional in society if their families, and the professionals who work with them, know how to find the potential within each child.

The 7 Circles of PLAY

Most importantly, PLAY helps your child change what he or she loves—from wanting to be in their own world, to loving to be with people. Your PLAY Project Consultant will coach you & the child's other caregivers (grandparents, nannies, even older siblings) to implement the **7 Circles of The PLAY Project**—PLAY principles, methods, techniques and activities—throughout the day.

**The PLAY Project will EMPOWER you
to build a strong and supportive relationship with your child.**

Research

The PLAY Project (PLAY) is an evidence-based, intensive, early intervention program for any child who has problems communicating and relating, especially the child with autism (See PLAY Resource section).

¹ Note: If you are NOT in a PLAY Project program and do not have a consultant, see the chapter called: 'How to Work With My PLAY Project Consultant' (page 9), 'What If I Don't Have A PLAY Project Consultant?'

The PLAY Project's Program Goals & Objectives

As Dr. Rick stated in his forward, we use the symbol of the train in our logo because we know that your child is on a developmental track through the landscape of life. We invite you to get on board and take this train to your child's potential by achieving the following **PLAY Project Program Goals**:

- **List and briefly describe each of the 7 Circles of The PLAY Project** (page 11). The 7 Circles summarize the “secret sauce” of The PLAY Project. Becoming familiar with them is a key to your success.
- **List the 4 PLAY Project's Principles and 5 Methods** (pages 13-14), which, along with Circles of Communication, are the most important elements of PLAY.
- **Define a “Circle of Communication”** (page 14-15) and explain why it is so important to have longer and more back and forth (ping pong) interactions with your child.
- **List your child's Comfort Zone activities** (page 29) i.e., what the child loves to do when you let them do whatever they want to do.
- **List the 6 Functional Developmental Levels (of Greenspan and Weider) and describe your child's developmental profile** (starting on page 17). By understanding your child's development, you will play at the ‘right’ level (not too high and not too low).
- **Be familiar with the 7 Sensory/Motor domains and describe your child's Sensory/Motor Profile** (page 29) to understand which sensory and physical activities are fun or not fun.
- **Give examples of 3 techniques** (starting on page 34) that you can use while PLAYing with your child.
- **Give examples of 3 activities** (starting on page 51) that would be fun to play *together*.

Overview of the Parent Guide ‘Stations’

The Parent Guide ‘Stations’ mark your progress toward your destination of a complete approach to helping your child become more social.

- The first 3 stations will help families get on board and oriented
- The next seven stations along the PLAY Project track focus on the **7 Circles of The PLAY Project** approach which is the main part of the journey.
- At the last 2 stations you will learn about ways to refine your skills and help your child if they begin to misbehave on this train trip! Misbehavior is a good thing! *Misbehavior is a sign of developmental progress.*
- Finally, we have also included **resources**, a **glossary** that defines important terms, and key **references** about the research of our evidence-based approach.


Make sure to have FUN together during your journey on The PLAY Project Train!






A Family's Journey


Receiving a diagnosis of autism for a child is experienced in different ways by families. Some parents feel validated to finally have a name for what is going on with their child. Other parents are completely stunned, and some may even question the validity of the diagnosis. Many parents experience feelings in stages commonly associated with the grieving process.




Denial: While some parents find that receiving a diagnosis gives them answers to their concerns about their child's delayed development, other parents may go through periods of disbelief about the diagnosis. It can be especially sad and isolating for the accepting parent when the other parent or extended family are in denial. Because early intervention is key to the success of treatment for autism, it is critical to begin treatment even if you have doubts.



Anger: Anger is a natural part of the grieving process. You may mis-direct your anger at those closest to you, your spouse, child, extended family, and even yourself. It is important to try to remember that you're angry at the circumstances, not your loved ones. You may even feel resentful toward parents of typically developing children or angry that you will have a different family life than you planned.



Sadness: Many parents mourn some of the hopes and dreams that they had for their child. There may be times you feel extreme sadness, fear and isolation. It is common for parents to feel a sense of guilt that they may have done something to cause their child's autism. Autism is a complex neuro-biological disorder. Seeking out support for yourself is crucial to being able to effectively meet the needs of your child. Support can often be found through community agencies and autism support groups but reaching out to your family and friends is important too. Autism Speaks has a wonderful [Resource Guide](#) by each state that parents can refer to.



Acceptance: Ultimately, accepting your child for who they are, in their entirety, is the best thing that you can do for your child and your family. Your child needs you to understand them and learn how to help them reach their full potential. Accepting your child for exactly who they are and where they are at developmentally is the fastest way to help them reach their full potential. Parents often report that their favorite thing about The PLAY Project is that they have gotten to know their child better and they have learned a new way to interact with their child on a daily basis.



Caden has grown and come out of his shell so much since starting The PLAY Project (PLAY). There used to be zero engagement during play, but now we experience many circles of communication during our play sessions! **PLAY is the perfect fit for our family.** PLAY allows us to get closer to our son and enter his world, which are the most beautiful moments I could ever dream of. He has come so far in just a few months with PLAY. Thank you, PLAY, for helping my wife and I understand our son's world better!

DAWN T.

Welcome to Holland

by Emily Perl Kingsley

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I am often asked to describe the experience of raising a child with a disability - to try to help people who have not shared that unique experience to understand it, to imagine how it would feel. It's like this.....

When you're going to have a baby, it's like planning a fabulous vacation trip - to Italy. You buy a bunch of guidebooks and make your wonderful plans. The Coliseum. The Michelangelo David. The gondolas in Venice. You may learn some handy phrases in Italian. It's all very exciting.

After months of eager anticipation, the day finally arrives. You pack your bags and off you go. Several hours later, the plane lands. The flight attendant comes in and says, "Welcome to Holland."

"Holland?!?" you say. "What do you mean Holland?? I signed up for Italy! I'm supposed to be in Italy. All my life I've dreamed of going to Italy."

But there's been a change in the flight plan. They've landed in Holland and there you must stay.

The important thing is that they haven't taken you to a horrible, disgusting, filthy place, full of pestilence, famine and disease. It's just a different place.

So, you must go out and buy new guide books. And you must learn a whole new language. And you will meet a whole new group of people you would never have met.

It's just a different place. It's slower paced than Italy, less flashy than Italy. But after you've been there for a while and you catch your breath, you look around.... and you begin to notice that Holland has windmills....and Holland has tulips. Holland even has Rembrandts.

But everyone you know is busy coming and going from Italy... and they're all bragging about what a wonderful time they had there. And for the rest of your life, you will say "Yes, that's where I was supposed to go. That's what I had planned."

And the pain of that will never, ever, ever, ever go away... because the loss of that dream is a very significant loss.

But... if you spend your life mourning the fact that you didn't get to Italy, you may never be free to enjoy the very special, the very lovely things ... about Holland.

Working with your PLAY Project Consultant (PPC)

Your PLAY Project Consultant (PPC) is here to support you and coach you in the 7 Circles of The PLAY Project (see page 11). Playing with your child sounds easy but, when it comes to playing with children who have autism, it may not be. In the PLAY Project, *we take play seriously!*

How Are PLAY Project Consultants Trained? The training to become a PLAY Project Consultant is intensive and extensive.

- First, a professional must apply and meet both educational and experiential qualifications.
- Next, they then participate in an **Intensive Workshop** to learn the basics of The PLAY Project.
- Third, they take the PLAY Project Implementation training and must take and pass **exams**.
- Only then can PPCs begin coaching families in PLAY while under **supervision** by experienced PLAY supervisors for a period of 12-18 months.
- As a result of this training, PPCs deliver high quality research-based services.

What If I Don't Have A PLAY Project Consultant? This guide can still empower you. You can learn to accurately profile your child and learn how to use The PLAY Project model by following along in this guide. You can even video record yourself, playing with your child, and watch it back to see if you are following the methods and principles of PLAY. *If you are interested in finding a PPC near you or a Tele-PLAY Provider, please refer to playproject.org for more information.* We hope that you will combine your expertise about your child with the information provided to make the most of every interaction!

Our approach is systematic and based on solid research. After decades of working with families, we learned that almost all our PLAY parents can learn our approach and help their child make progress.

The Effectiveness of PLAY. Our approach is very systematic and based on solid research. After decades of working with families, we have learned that almost all our PLAY parents can learn our approach and help their child make progress. We also know that PLAY is very much a joint effort between parents and professionals. **This is what you can expect while working with your PPC:**



Assessment & Planning: The first thing your PPC will do is get to know you and your child. Some assessments may be completed to help your PPC get to know your child and family better but not all of them do assessments, depending on their services and programs. Many children already have had a variety of assessments. Sharing information with your PPC about previous assessments or completing new assessments with your PPC will inform treatment planning and allow the PPC to best meet the needs of your family. After the initial assessment, we develop a PLAY Plan to understand your child's unique profile and help you develop an action plan.



PLAY Visits, Scheduling, & Putting in the Time

- The PLAY Project can be implemented in a **variety of settings** based on your schedule. PLAY can be successfully done in schools, clinics, and at home.

- The schedule and timing of visits can also vary from once monthly for 3 hours to 1 hour weekly or bi-monthly visits. We try to be flexible. The frequency of visits per month is less important to outcomes than the intensity and quantity of time that parents USE the model in their daily life.
- **We ask that you try to put in 2 total hours of engaging, playful time throughout the day.** Most parents tell us that they do not count hours after a while; they play and interact *all* the time!
- Every adult who spends a lot of time with the child should be included in a PLAY visit and get videotaped. Usually this means the mom and dad but can also include the grandparents or nanny.

Coaching, Modeling, and Feedback

During your visits with your PPC, you will be **coached** to PLAY with your child using The PLAY Project approach. The PPC will take a 10-minute video of you PLAYing with your child, while they are **coaching you from behind the camera**. You will also have an opportunity to hold the camera and take a 5-minute video of your PPC PLAYing and **modeling the PLAY approach** with your child. Your PPC will talk to you about what they are thinking even as they PLAY. We call this **coaching from in front of the camera**.

Many parents report feeling nervous about the **videotaping**, at first. They also tell us that they quickly forget that the camera is on and just enjoy the visits. Video feedback is a powerful tool. By reviewing the footage, PPCs and parents can observe what is working and not working for each individual child.

“At first, I was nervous to be on camera, but I quickly forgot I was being recorded because I was focused on PLAYing!”



At the end of every visit, parents receive a **Visit Suggestion Report (VSR)**. The VSR is a brief “cheat sheet” to help parents remember key points from the visit. Be sure to ask for clarification if there is anything on the VSR that you don’t understand or would like more guidance about.

A **Video Review Form (VRF)**, sent to you every month, reviews the video footage taken during the visit, gives you suggestions for PLAYing and lays out a plan of action to help your child move up in their development. The VRF will help you to understand **your child’s unique profile** and guide you towards the **techniques** and **activities** that you should focus on with your child. Remember, **the all-important methods of The PLAY Project always stay the same!**

“Your job is to watch the 15-minute video, read the report, and put in the time PLAYing with your child by following the guidelines given to you by your PPC.” - Dr. Rick



“Communication is key. Always communicate with your PPC if you have any questions or concerns. Once you watch the video and read the VRF, reach out to your consultant if you need more clarification or feel stuck.”



The 7 Circles of The PLAY Project

Get ready to have fun with your child! In this section of The PLAY Project Parent Guide, we will introduce you to our mission and vision and the all-important 7 Circles of the PLAY Project.

The PLAY Project's Mission

ALL parents will be supported in developing a joyous relationship with their children with autism spectrum disorders in a way that will help each child reach his/her full potential.

The PLAY Project's Vision

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

**The PLAY Project trains child development experts to coach parents to help their child reach their full potential through play!
Your PLAY Project Consultant is here to help you learn the 7 Circles of The PLAY Project.**



Circle 1: Ready, Set, PLAY! An Introduction to Principles and Methods To begin, the PLAY Project Consultant (PPC) introduces the family to the 4 principles and 5 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.

Circle 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.

Circle 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.

Circle 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.

Circle 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.

Circle 6: Visit Review: Video and Written Feedback 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.

Circle 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.

As we move on down the track, we will explore each of the 7 Circles in turn. All aboard for **Station 3: Destination PLAY!**



Destination PLAY!

Circle 1: The Play Project Principles & Methods

At this station, we go into more depth in Circle 1 and describe the 4 Principles and 5 Methods of The PLAY Project. These are the most important ideas to help you arrive at your ultimate destination—your child’s full potential!

The 4 PLAY Principles

- 1. Fun with People.** Children on the autism spectrum often isolate and engage in repetitive behaviors that make interaction challenging. Becoming your child’s favorite play partner will happen by doing what your child LOVES to do! Pay close attention to your child’s *affect*, or feeling life, when they play. If they are having fun WITH YOU, they will learn to seek you out for more. *Progress in The PLAY Project will change what your child loves to do!*
- 2. Put in The Time.** How much intervention matters! We ask our parents to PLAY (engage with their child using PLAY techniques) for about 2 hours each day. It is unrealistic to PLAY for 2 hours in a row and it is most effective when PLAY is broken into 15-20-minute chunks of time, especially in the beginning. The goal is to make PLAY part of EVERY interaction with your child. Use PLAY during your all-daily activities such as getting dressed and having meals.



“Make every interaction a good interaction!”

- 3. Accurately Profile the Child.** Understanding the unique way your child sees the world (see Circle 2 below) will help you help them in the best way. Your child’s profile has three parts:
 - **Comfort Zone:** What your child does when you let them do whatever they want or when they go into ‘their own little world’. These are repetitive behaviors/interests that they use to isolate themselves.
 - **Sensory Motor Profile:** How your child experiences the world around them through their senses (visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, vestibular, and proprioceptive) including which sensations they most like and those they don’t.
 - **Functional Developmental Levels (FDL):** This refers to the developmental ladder, as described by Stanley Greenspan MD, that *all* children must climb to be socially functional. It is important to understand the FDL milestones at each level and how to help your child build a strong foundation at early developmental levels to support their growth. We will give you a list of the FDLs and their milestones in Circle 2’s FDL Thumbnails section on page 17.

4. **PLAY at the Right Level.** Once you understand and implement the PLAY Principles and Methods and are able to accurately profile your child, you will be more likely to PLAY at the level your child needs to foster growth and will be more likely to stay engaged with you. If you are PLAYing at too high a level or too low a level, you will lose your child back to their isolated world. What's most important is that you join your child in right way by using PLAY Methods.

Circle 1: The 5 PLAY Project Methods

1. **Read the Child's Cues & Intent.** You are a detective discovering clues about what your child is feeling and thinking. By watching closely, you can see what your child is paying **attention** to, so you learn what their true **intention** is. What is their idea? (See the 1-2-3 Checklist in PLAY Resources section).
2. **Slow the Pace of Play, Observing and Waiting for the Child's Idea.** It takes time to watch your child closely to understand *their* intent/idea. Children with autism will not walk up to you and say, "Mom, dad, you know what I'm thinking?" So, we recommend going slow in order to discover important clues about your child's idea/intention. Then, when you understand what they really want, engage him or her in a way that your child will find fun and/or interesting.
3. **Follow the Child's Lead, Responding to What the Child Wants.** Once you understand what your child's intention/idea is, you can join them by following their lead/idea/intention in PLAY. By watching where your child's **attention** is, you can join their ideas/**their intention** as the guide to engagement. (Note: **Activities are usually the parents' ideas** and it is okay to have your own ideas for playing; just make sure your idea is FUN!) ALWAYS GO FOR FUN!



4. **Open & Close 'Circles' of Communication.** Once you have carefully watched for your child's cues to tell you what their true intention is, and you have followed their lead/idea to join them, you will be

working on engagement and relating. **Method 4 is the most important because it has to do with social interaction.** In The PLAY Project we are always focusing on what we call 'the interactional process', a fancy name for the back and forth of interaction. Normally we don't think about interacting but in PLAY you must! The interactional process is made up of 'opening' and 'closing' circles of communication as described below. A small gesture or a glance can be a clue to your child's idea/intent. In every exchange with your child, an important goal is to have more and more full circles of communication!

What is a Circle of Communication (COC)? The back-and-forth process of communication. Opening a circle means *initiating* an interaction. Closing a circle means *responding* to another person. We refer to this process as the 'ping-pong' of relationships. A COC can be as simple as you handing a toy to your child (opening a circle) and your child taking it (closing a circle). The goal of all communication is meaningful back and forth flow.

Why are COCs important? COCs are the basis of relationships. This back-and-forth process of initiating and responding can be measured by counting how many circles are opened and closed in a row. This interactional process is voluntary, meaning that one cannot force another to respond, therefore, it is important to keep track of a) who is opening the circles, b) whether or not the other person is responding, and c) how long the 'ping-pong' effect lasts. Circles of Communication become a critical lens to view your interactions with your child through. Keep this in mind ALWAYS...How can I get more CIRCLES? How can I get my child to *open* CIRCLES. CIRCLES...CIRCLES...CIRCLES!

5. Build on The Child's Interests Once we better understand our child's ideas and establish engagement and communication, we can add our own ideas slowly to challenge the child. It is important to continue to follow their lead and watch where their attention is, but we can help them PLAY better by using the PLAY techniques and activities (See Circle 3 below). Be careful not to ask a lot of questions or teach skills. The child *will* make progress through play!

Understanding the Functional Developmental Levels (FDL)

All children go through the same sequence of functional development. Kids on the autism spectrum get stuck at certain levels or may have gaps in their foundation. When this happens, they lack the strong base to build their next set of skills. It's like a tower of blocks that are not stacked very well. It is important for parents to learn about development and note what levels their child shows strengths and struggles. Children are never at just one level, but rather usually show skills within a range of 2-3 levels. Some kids show skills at higher functional developmental levels (FDL) but can have "holes" (weaknesses) at the lower levels.

In The PLAY Project, your PLAY Consultant is always assessing the child's functional developmental levels (FDL). When a child drops down a level, it is important to drop down with them and play at their present level. This can be a frustrating process for parents who want to play with their child at their highest potential. When a parent plays at a level that is too high for a child, though, in that moment, they will not be able to get productive engagement with a child and can cause a child to disconnect or get upset. By PLAYing at the just right level, we fill the holes and strengthen overall functioning.



**“When the child goes down, go down.
When the child goes up, go up.”**



Circle 2: Understanding Your Child's Profile

FDL Thumbnails: A Quick Summary

Here's a list of the 6 FDLs of Greenspan followed by the 'Thumbnails' (short descriptions of the FDLs) and then complete descriptions of each FDL:

Greenspan's 6 Functional Developmental Levels:

1. Self-Regulation and Shared Attention
2. Engagement & Relationships
3. Simple Two-way Communication & Purposefulness
4. Complex Two-way Communication, Social Problem-Solving & Sense of Self
5. Shared Meanings & Symbolic Play
6. Emotional Thinking, Logic & Sense of Reality

FDL 1: Self-Regulation & Shared Attention

First Learned Between Birth and 3 months

- Can remain calm and regulated enough to share attention with people
- Can sustain brief episodes of interaction
- Child is 'with us'
- 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 (Page 32)

FDL 2: Engagement & Relationships

First Learned Between 2 and 7 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
- Use Rabbit Hole Techniques (Page 32)

FDL 3: Simple Two-Way Communication & Purposefulness

First Learned Between 3 and 10 months

- Opening and closing of 6-10 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 will not leave you alone!)

- Purposefulness
- 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

FDL 4: Complex Two-way Communication, Social Problem Solving & Sense of Self

First Learned Between 9 and 18 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
- 'Little stories': 'gets' meaningful sequences
- Simple pretend: phone to ear, bottle to baby's mouth

FDL 5: Shared Meanings & Symbolic Play

Skills Begin 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 one-two step commands
- Greetings emerging
- Compliance
 - It is not following their lead to follow their lead

FDL 6: Emotional Thinking, Logic & Sense of Reality

Skills Begin Between 36 and 48 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

Functional Developmental Levels: A Complete Description

FDL 1 - Self-Regulation and Shared Attention

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 (the child is not 'with us'), 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 Parents and Caregivers:

- Harness all available senses (i.e., touch, sound, sight, etc.), as well as motor capacities, to help child stay calm and regulated to draw child into shared attention.
- Involve the child in enjoyable interactions that involve looking (look and examine faces), hearing (focus on voices), touch (pleasurable tickles, stroking or sharing an object or toy) and movement.
- Increase the interactive circles of communication and sustain shared attention as the child develops.
- Use constructive and playfully obstructive strategies with affect cues to stretch the child's capacity for shared attention

Examples of Progress in FDL 1:

- The child is calmed by being held, talked to, touched, looked at, and interacted with. Is starting to be able to calm down. Remains calm for 2 or more minutes at a time.
- The child shows more interest in the world. Focuses on sights and sounds for three or more seconds.
- The child holds his head upright; follows objects with eyes; and responds to sounds.
- Makes eye contact.
- The child is able to stay connected with people while playing a game that she enjoys.
- The child is able to calm himself down after getting overly excited (such as during rough housing).
- A child who tends to be passive will be able to motivate themselves to pay attention and join in with others and sustain interest.
- The child will begin to be able to tolerate transition to a new activity, which may not have been his choice.
- The child has sleeping and eating patterns that are becoming more regulated.

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.

*note when the above goals are being met consistently



FDL 2 - Engagement and Relationships

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 Parents and Caregivers:

- Woo (entice) the child into engaging you with pleasure and delight. An example of this is when a child smiles, focuses on faces, moves arms or legs to the rhythm of caregiver's voice, vocalizes in response to caregiver's cadences, turns or reaches toward care giver.
- Encourage growth of intimacy and caring – notice the gleam in the child's eye when the child interacts with you along with a sense of falling in love.
- As the child develops, deepen the relationship to include the full range of feelings such as assertiveness, anger or sadness. Notice that these feelings can be incorporated into the quality and stability of the child's engagement (e.g., does he/she withdraw or become aimless when under stress, does she stay connected when angry or scared?)
- Emphasize the importance of relationships constantly in order to help the child develop a sense of security, intimacy, caring and empathy for others. Relationships also provide the foundation to encourage progress in related areas where the child must work really hard to develop motor planning, language acquisition, and a positive attitude toward all learning.

Examples of Progress in FDL 2:

- The child responds to simple overtures and shows curiosity and assertive interest (e.g., by watching the parents face closely).
- The child will happily or willingly stay engaged with peers and adults for long periods of time.

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 interactions.

*note when the above goals are being met consistently

FDL 3 - Simple Two-Way Communication and Purposefulness

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 Parents and Caregivers:

- Follow the child's lead and challenge him to communicate with you through the exchange of gestures and emotional signals about his affects (interests, needs, or intentions) and respond to your affective signals in a back-and-forth reciprocal pattern.
- Encourage communication. Use affect cues (signals) to woo and wait for the child's purposeful social gestures (facial expressions, making sounds, reaching, pointing, throwing, movement, etc.) to express his desires, objections or other feelings.
- Encourage the flow of continuous communication by opening and closing circles. A circle is **opened** when the child shows interest initiates a behavior, e.g., the child looks at a toy, and the parent or caregiver **follows the child's lead** by picking up the toy and showing it to the child. The child **closes** the circle by reaching for the toy, while **acknowledging** (looking at) the parent, nodding with a smile, etc.
- Encourage communication by building on the child's interests, initiative, and purposeful behavior. Challenge him to do things to you, help him achieve his goal, and later build obstacles to add steps and increase the number of circles.

Examples of Progress in FDL 3:

- The child is beginning to have their own ideas. You begin to have a sense of the child's personality.

- The child shows desires by pointing, reaching, making sounds to get something or to be picked up.
- The child purposefully creeps or crawls; comprehends and initiates different sounds; and discriminates between people.
- The child engages in back-and-forth interaction, gestures. (Ping-pong).
- The child acts with purpose and intention. (Reaches up to be picked up).
- Older children will be able to open and close circles with adults and peers even when they are feeling a variety of different strong emotions.

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 the adult's response to their 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 the number of purposeful interactions using imitation.
5. The child will increase the number of purposeful interactions using simple gestures, such as reaching, taking, pulling, or pointing.
6. The child will increase number of purposeful interactions across a 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.

*note when the above goals are being met consistently.



FDL 4 - Complex Two-way Interaction, Social Problem-Solving & Sense of Self

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 the 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 Parents and Caregivers:

- Become an interactive partner with your child as she learns to use a continuous flow of gestures with you to pursue her interests and wishes and to meet her needs.
- Combine affect cues with action (be animated and show affect through tone of voice and facial expressions) while creating interactions. Your goal is to help your child learn to open and close multiple circles of communication. This begins by using a dialogue without words through subtle facial expressions, a gleam in the eye, and other emotional signals or gestures, to a dialogue with problem solving words.
- Support the child in opening and closing 20 to 30+ back and forth circles of communication. For example, the child takes the parent by the hand, walks her to the door, point that she wants to go out, and perhaps vocalize a sound or word to further the caregiver's understanding of his intentions.
- Expand the conversation with your child by asking where he wants to go, what he needs, who else will come, what they will get, what else and where else, etc. These conversations are necessary for negotiating the most important emotional needs of life, e.g., being close to others, exploring and being assertive, limiting aggression, negotiating safety, etc.
- Increase interactive range of affects and emotions when solving problems (e.g., feed hungry baby, bandage hurt knee, fix broken truck, chase away hungry wolf, etc.).
- Encourage different emotional patterns, e.g., dependency, assertiveness, pleasure, etc., organized into integrated, problem solving affective interactions. Look out for child polarizing and being dominated by one or another feeling state (organized aggression and impulsivity, organized clinging, needy or dependent behavior, organized fearful patterns).

Examples of Progress in FDL 4:

- The child imitates motor actions (throws ball to mom, pop beads). Can imitate pretend play (feeds the baby but imitates only the motor action without the symbolic act of pretending to be parent).
- The child follows a few one-step directions, uses objects functionally, delayed searching (looks persistently for bottle).
- The child begins to understand others' emotions (happy, sad, fearful) by reading words/intonation (Yuck), facial expressions, gestures
- When feeling different emotions, the child can remain engaged, and interactive (when the child gets upset because his brother has his toy, he stays connected and communicating, instead of becoming self-absorbed or having a tantrum.)

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.

*note when the above goals are being met consistently

FDL 5 - Shared Meanings & Symbolic Play

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: do not do that).

Goals for Parents and Caregivers:

- Encourage the child to relate sensations, gestures, and behaviors to the world of ideas that have meanings which can be shared with others in pretend play and

drama. Whether the animals are fighting, the dolls are hugging, or there is a tea party, ideas (symbols) are guiding this play.

- Enter the child's ideas through his make-believe world as a character in his drama using words and actions together. Let child initiate the play idea and through interaction (dramatization in roles), elaborate with expanding themes and range of emotions (closeness, assertiveness, fear, anger, jealousy, aggression, etc.) which child can explore and express safely.
- Encourage action words instead of acting out to convey intent and feelings. When feelings and impulses are elevated to the level of ideas they can be expressed through words and play instead of acting out (e.g., child does not have to hit his friend, but can say, "I'm mad.").
- Engage in long conversations with your child to communicate interests, feelings, desires, and objections throughout the day.
- Promote symbolic play to provide the distance from real life and immediacy of needs to differentiating self from others through different roles, feelings, and actions (child pretends to be a mommy comforting the frustrated baby who broke his toy).

Examples of Progress in FDL 5:

- The child gains the ability to use ideas (words) to convey feelings and intentions ("More juice?" "No open!" "Kiss baby")
 - The child imitates familiar pretend actions, such as hugging or feeding a doll. But now the child views herself as the doll's mommy. Increasingly the child develops symbolic play skills to understand complex feelings (Dolls go to bed, hug, or fight).
- Symbolic play begins to have emotional themes, closeness, assertiveness, fear, anger, (Feeding the doll: doll tells you it does not like pink ice cream; Pretends to go to the park: doll is afraid of slide.)
- The child involves you in his play, i.e., he is not exclusively playing by himself.
- The child jumps, runs, scribbles, comprehends simple designs.
- The child throws ball, draws a line, or reproduces a simple design.

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.

*note when the above goals are being met consistently

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

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 Parents and Caregivers:

- Challenge your child to connect her ideas together by seeking her opinion, enjoying her debates, and negotiating for things she wants using logical reasons. Begins with logical conversation involving at least two give and takes: "Time for school." "I don't want to." "Why?" "I feel sick now."
- Encourage your child to engage in pretend play with both peers and adults where the story or drama "makes sense" with a beginning, middle and end where elements in the drama logically fit together.
- Promote the use of pretend play, words, and/or visual symbols to elaborate a partially planned pretend drama (theme or idea is identified in advance), or engage in logical conversation dealing with causal, spatial, and/or temporal relationships between themes.
- Challenge your child to create connections between differentiated feeling states, e.g., "I feel happy when you are proud of me!" Identify relationship (contingency) between feelings, thoughts and actions.

- Expand identification and differentiation of more and more subtle feeling states, e.g., lonely, sad, disappointed, annoyed, frustrated, etc.

Examples of Progress in FDL 6:

- Creates logical bridges between ideas (Can hold a simple, logical conversation involving at least two exchanges: "Time for school." "I don't want to." "Why?" "I feel sick." Or, alternatively "because there is a fierce dinosaur at school.")
- Is able to engage in pretend play with another person where the story or drama makes sense (the bears are going to visit the grandmother and then have a big lunch).
- Pretend play, words, and/or visual symbols convey two or more logically connected, emotional ideas ("Hit bad guy because he did bad thing." "Hug nice dolly.")
- Interactive pretend play with both peers and adults where there are a number of elements or elements in the drama that logically fit together. Whereas in Stage 5 a child might dress up a doll, then seeing a crayon, scribble, then, seeing a drum, pretend to be a drummer, a child at Stage 6 connects the pieces. (She might have the drummer play for the dressed-up little girl and use the crayon to make invitations for the performance. Or, the doll might have a tea party, call friends to invite them, prepare refreshments, set the table, and determine the seating pattern.)
- Child skips, hops, copies cross, can recall four or more numbers or words, asks and answers "why" questions, classifies and quantifies objects, recalls recent past.
- Child takes turns with a toy, copies circle, uses full sentences and answers "what, where, who and doing" type questions, has a sense of quantity (big/little) emerging.

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.
- *note when the above goals are being met consistently

Understanding Your Child's Comfort Zone and Sensory Motor Profile

Comfort Zone: Your child's comfort zone is what they would do if left to themselves or when they appear to tune out from the world. Some common comfort zone activities include lining things up, spinning toys in front of eyes, and perseverative interests like trains or dinosaurs. Your child will have their own special comfort zones, so pay attention to what they are. In The PLAY Project, we do not always "banish" children from their comfort zones but rather learn to join them. Remember, the key is to improve the interactional process. This can be challenging for parents and there are times when limits must be set on comfort zone activities because they completely block interaction and can lead to the child becoming 'stuck' in their Comfort Zone.

The Sensory Motor Profile (SMP): SMP refers to the unique way that a child experiences the world through the **7 primary senses** and through movement. Determining a child's SMP is the next step toward discovering a child's complete profile. It is not enough to simply *play at the right FDL*; one must also understand how the child's SMP impacts his ability to interact, problem- solve, play, and participate in activities of daily living. Once you understand how your child receives and processes the information from the world around them, you will gain valuable insight into which sensory experiences are fun and engaging and which one are not. Connecting with your child around their preferred sensory modes is one of the best ways to engage with your child to help them make progress.

The 7 Senses: There are 7 primary senses that nearly all people are born with. These include visual, auditory, gustatory (taste), olfactory (smell), tactile (touch), proprioceptive (joint movement), and vestibular (movement in space). However, the way in which children and adults experience each of these 7 senses varies greatly from person to person. It is important to understand *how* a child processes and interprets information through each of the 7 senses as difficulty with any of the senses can greatly impact a child's ability to move through each level of development. Below are brief descriptions of each of the 7 senses.

- **Visual** - a child's ability to process & interpret the sights around them
- **Auditory** - a child's ability to process & interpret the sounds around them
- **Gustatory** - a child's ability to process & interpret tastes (e.g., food/drink)

- **Olfactory** - a child's ability to process & interpret smells
- **Tactile** - a child's ability to process & interpret touch (i.e., the feeling of objects, etc.)
- **Proprioceptive** - a child's ability to process & interpret input through their muscles & joints
- **Vestibular** - a child's ability to process & interpret where they are located in space

Difficulty with Sensory Processing: When a child struggles to process, appropriately interpret, and/or respond to sensory input, he may be showing signs of **Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD)**. SPD is a complex neurological condition that results in missed or poor connections between the brain (central nervous system) and peripheral nervous system (body). When this occurs, children may exhibit symptoms in various ways. For example, some children may demonstrate clumsiness, whereas others demonstrate strong aversions to certain smells or sounds. It is not uncommon for children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) to demonstrate symptoms of SPD. Sometimes, these symptoms can simply appear to be "bad" behaviors (i.e., screaming or running away); however, in many cases, the behavior (i.e., response) can be traced back to sensory input.

The Subtypes of SPD: Below are several different ways to describe the symptoms of SPD. In PLAY, we focus primarily on sensory over- responsive (over-reactive), sensory under-responsive (under-reactive), sensory seeking, and motor planning/dyspraxia.

- **Sensory over-responsive** - the child may demonstrate an exaggerated or heightened response to sensory input.
- **Sensory under-responsive** - the child may not respond or may demonstrate a delayed or slower than average response to sensory input.
- **Sensory seeking** - the child may seek excessive stimulation and/or movement without contentment or satisfaction.
- **Postural disorder** - a child who demonstrates difficulty with postural control to the extent that it affects his ability to stand, sit, or participate to complete various motor tasks.
- **Dyspraxia** - a child who demonstrates decreased motor planning skills (i.e., difficulty with ideation, sequencing, and coordination of fine and gross motor movements).
- **Sensory discrimination disorder** - a child who struggles to accurately interpret the subtle characteristics of various stimuli (i.e., sounds, sights, sensations, etc.)

Often, it is difficult to determine how a child is interpreting input through one or more of the **7 primary senses**. When this happens, it is helpful to try and isolate each sense in order to determine how a child reacts to variability. Here is an example:

- If you notice that your child flinches or puts his hands over his ears whenever people clap next to him, it is safe to assume that he may be overreacting to sound or to the sight of hands moving rapidly.
- If you notice that your child responds in a similar way to other loud, unexpected noises, it is likely that he is reacting to the auditory input. This child may therefore be

over-responsive (aka over-reactive) to auditory input, which means that you, therapists, teachers, etc. should be mindful of the amount, frequency, and duration of auditory input that your child is exposed to.

Motor Planning: Motor planning (praxis) involves 3 parts:

- 1) **Ideation** - the ability to come up with an idea/an intention
 - 2) **Motor planning** - the way the brain organizes and sequences motor actions
 - 3) **Execution** - the ability to perform (execute) motor actions
- The 3 senses involved in motor planning include the tactile, proprioceptive, and vestibular sense. These senses allow the child to respond to the sensory information around them (e.g., the sound of their mother's voice). If a child is experiencing difficulty in any of these 3 senses, they may have difficulty responding appropriately to sounds, sights, smells, etc. This is because the tactile, proprioceptive, and vestibular senses are the movement-based senses, which means that they allow the child to react by coordinating their intentions with the needed motor actions (e.g., turning her head, smiling, and looking at her mom).

Many children on the autism spectrum benefit from occupational therapy (OT) services. This may be a component of the services that your child is receiving from the early intervention or school system, but many children require additional OT services from rehabilitation services in the community.

Understanding your child's functional developmental levels and their sensory motor profile allows you to best select the PLAY Project techniques and activities to help your child thrive. It is so powerful to understand your child through this lens and helps you to address other concerns, such as sleep or behavior patterns as well.



Circle 3: PLAY Techniques & Activities

Making PLAY More Fun!

Now that you have a better understanding of your child's Comfort Zone, FDLs and SMP, you can use one or more of our 44 PLAY Project **techniques** designed for your child's profile. PLAY Project techniques help parents answer the question: *"How can I make my play more fun and varied."*

- First, we introduce the **Rabbit Hole Techniques** designed to help you engage the child who is hard to engage.
- Then, comes the list of **44 PLAY Techniques** that will help you be more creative and resourceful in your PLAY.
- After that, we have '**PLAY Activities**' listed by the child's functional developmental levels.

Warning! Techniques are rarely used alone but are combined with other techniques, PLAY Project methods, and/or PLAY activities to create fun engagement that has a 'flowing' quality to it. Remember PLAY Methods: always 'wait,' 'read the child's cues,' 'follow the child's lead,' and 'think circles' to get more and more fun *interactions*, with the *child* leading as much as possible. Now go PLAY!

The Rabbit Hole Techniques are for children who get 'stuck' in their Comfort Zones. All the other techniques are divided into those that are used for the lower FDLs 1-4 and those for higher FDLs 4-6.

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 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: The gentlest way to start engaging your child is simply be with the child in their space nearby (i.e., sit next to or quietly observe). You don't have to do anything right away. Observe your child to see exactly what he or she is 'intending' (i.e., what is his/her idea). Follow method 1: Read the child's cues.

2. Narrate: The next gentlest way to join your child is to 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 and don't ask questions.*** 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 (See Station 7: Behavior—The Good, The Bad, & The Ugly).

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. By helping you are engaging and getting circles.

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). Imitating usually leads the child to notice what you are doing which gets shared attention, engagement, and circles.

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. *What are 10 ways you can vary the play?* Be creative and fun!

6. Change the Sensory Mode: If the child is in the 'visual' mode—lining cars up in a row, run the cars up his arm, which changes the activity into the 'tactile' mode. **Keep in mind the child's primary/preferred sensory modality (i.e., visual, tactile, auditory, etc.)*

PLAY Techniques for Children at FDLs 1-4

(See below for full definitions, descriptions, and examples)

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| 1. Being With | 11. Rewarding and Reinforcing |
| 2. Sensory Motor Play | 12. Expectant Waiting |
| 3. Making Behaviors Purposeful | 13. Sense of Humor, Suspense, and Surprise |
| 4. Taffy Pulling | 14. Going for Fun |
| 5. Theme and Variation | 15. Big, Little, & Micro Circles |
| 6. Salient Language | 16. Labeling |
| 7. Onomatopoeia | 17. Add a Word |
| 8. Rhythm and Music | 18. Asked and Answered |
| 9. Playful Obstruction | 19. Sequences/" Little Stories" |
| 10. Making Them Work | 20. One and Two Step Commands |
| | 21. Problem-solving |

PLAY Techniques for Children at FDLs 4-6

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Imitative Pretend Play | 12. Finishing Up/Completing Tasks |
| 2. Pretend Play: Everything Come Alive (FDL 4) | 13. Essays and Summarizing (FDL 6) |
| 3. Pretend Play: One Thematic (FDL 5) | 14. Practicing Pronouns |
| 4. Pretend Play: Two Thematic (FDLs high level 5 and FDL 6) | 15. Outings |
| 5. Multiple Circles of Communication/Continuous Flow | 16. Mirroring-Reflecting/Labeling: Feelings |
| 6. Speaking 'to' and Speaking 'for' the Child | 17. Modeling Empathy |
| 7. Appropriate Language | 18. Negotiating the Relationship (FDL 5 & 6) |
| 8. Time Concepts | 19. Over Dramatizing |
| 9. Simple "WH-type" Questions: What, Where, and Who | 20. Three-way Modeling: Model, Rehearse, Expect |
| 10. More Complex "WH-type" Questions: Why and When | 21. Social Stories |
| 11. Using Natural Consequences to Motivate | 22. Metacognitive Strategies/Reflective Thinking |
| | 23. Theory of Mind |

PLAY Techniques with Examples for Functional Developmental Levels 1-4

To Improve 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.
- Give the child what they want.
 - Turn the water off and on together.
 - Hand them Legos, trains, or books to line up.
- Do not command, direct, or teach.
- See 'Rabbit Hole Techniques' (Page 32).

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.
- Rhythm: clap on the back with rhythm, sing and dance.
- Movement: dance, horsey back rides, bed play.
- Proprioception: shake the arms in a rhythm to the ABC song, jump on a bed.
- Vestibular: put a child on a spinning chair, spin them after saying "go" and stop them while saying "stop."

3. Making Behaviors Purposeful

Definition: When the child performs a behavior, the adult treats it as if it were purposeful (even though it may not be!).

Purpose: To cause the child to see a connection between their behavior and its function and/or meaning.

Examples:

- When they open and close doors, get on the other side of the door. Say "Hello!" when they open the door and "Goodbye!" when they close it even though they may just be opening and closing the door.
- When they build blocks, say "Oh, you're making a tower!" (they may not understand the words, but they will often understand your tone of voice).
- When they pour water, turn it into a "pouring game" by offering different containers.

- When they line up toys give them an appropriate sound (Say “woof” for a dog toy, or “choo-choo” for a train).

4. 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.
 - S-t-r-e-t-c-h it out.
- Play dumb for a couple of circles (back and forth interactions) and ask the child what they would like to do.
 - S-t-r-e-t-c-h it out.
- 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.
- After they have the toy, for example a train, spin each wheel and make a different funny sound for each wheel and make the face-to-face engagement last.
 - S-t-r-e-t-c-h it out.

5. Theme and 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!”
- Pretend your hands are spiders climbing up the door and make silly noises.
- Bonk your head into the door and fall “asleep.”
- See the handout: “Twenty things to do with a train.”

6. 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....”
- Repeat key words: “Do you want MORE?”
- Use *opposites* (a great form of salient language!): turn the light OFF vs turn the light ON, OPEN the door vs CLOSE the door.

7. Onomatopoeia

Definition: Using sounds that sound like what they mean.

Purpose: To help the child understand language and create fun, sound-based interactions.

Examples:

- “Vroom”—it sounds like a car. Make the “vroom” sound when playing with cars.
- Make a high voice when you say “Up” and a deep voice when you say “Down.”
- Animal sounds are onomatopoeic: buzz, bark-bark, sssnake.
- Make all kinds of sounds to match with what you are doing.
 - If you are holding the child like an airplane in your arms, say “Wooooooooom” as you fly around.
 - If you’re giving a horsey back ride, make a galloping sound.

8. Rhythm and Music

Definition: Using your words in a rhythmic and musical way to engage the child.

Purpose: To help the child understand the meaning of words and make play more enjoyable.

Examples:

- Use the music of “London Bridge” to announce events/activities: “Now it’s time to go outside, go outside, go outside. Now it’s time to go outside, my fair [child’s name].”
- Sing children’s songs like “Ring Around the Rosy” or “Row, Row, Row Your Boat.”
- “Capture” child in your lap and move their arms up and down while rhythmically counting “1-2-3.”
- Sing “Old MacDonald” and drum gently on the child’s back to the rhythm.

9. 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.
- Move the trains out of line by “accident.”
- See ‘Making Them Work’ below.

10. Making Them Work

Definition: When the caregiver requires the child to do more to get what they want.

Purpose: To cause interactions to last longer and increase circles (back-and-forth interactions) and to help the child problem-solve.

Examples:

- When you think they can do something, expect them to do it using voice, facial gestures, and expectant pauses.

- Wait for the child to look at you before you give them what they want e.g., to hold something in your hand tight until they look at you and *then* let it go.
- Play dumb and make them show or tell you what they want.
- Expect them to use their words and wait: “Tell me what you want. . .”

11. Rewarding and Reinforcing

Definition: When the caregiver provides a physical reward (deep pressure), an external reward (food) or verbal praise (“Way to go!”) in response to the child’s achievement in a way that is fun.

Purpose: To reward the child’s behavior so the child associates the behavior with a pleasurable outcome and is encouraged to do the behavior again.

Examples:

- Verbally praise their accomplishments.
 - Ex. “Way to go! Woo you!”
- When they initiate a response (open a circle), reward them with a rub, a tickle, or rough housing.
- Give immediate rewards for accomplishments, such as rewarding the child with sensory motor/rough house play when they use their words.

12. Expectant Waiting

Definition: Waiting with the expectation that the child will respond and do something on their own.

Purpose: To increase initiation by hoping the child will open circles of communication (initiate).

Examples:

- When the child wants another train to put in a row, hold the trains in your hand and wait expectantly for them to look at you to give it to them.
- When you are doing a fun activity (ex. swinging the child in a blanket), wait expectantly for them to gesture for more.
 - Go slow and don’t just ‘entertain’ them.
- See #9 ‘Playful Obstruction’ and #10 ‘Making Them Work.’

13. Sense of Humor, Suspense, and Surprise

Definition: Using a sense of humor, suspense, and surprise to create a fun expectation for the child.

Purpose: To heighten the child’s engagement and make interactions fun.

Examples:

- Play chase/I’m going to get you.
 - Be dramatic (not too scary!), say “I’m. . .gonna. . .get. . .you!”
- Raise your hand up high in a claw shape and say, “Here comes the claw. Here comes the claw!” Then quickly bring your ‘claw’ down into their belly.
- Have the child push your nose to make a sudden loud sound.
- Pretend to be asleep and then suddenly wake up as the child comes near.
- Capture them in your prison and let them get away.

- Use mock anger: “Hey you give that back; you took my toy!”

14. Going for Fun

Definition: Finding ways to increase the fun of an interaction. Ask yourself, “What would be fun for my child in this situation?” Wait for answers to naturally come to you.

Purpose: To insert yourself into the child’s play in a way that is fun increases the likelihood of the child wanting to do that interaction again with you. This technique also increases the positive connection between people.

Examples:

- Be silly!
 - Make a sudden unexpected silly sound.
- Be slapstick!
 - Bump your head and say “ouch!” in a loud voice.
- Be surprising!
 - Do something unexpected that would be fun.
 - If the child is playing with a train put the train on your head.
- Be dramatic!
 - Be sad and cry or be happy and dance around the room and make a fool of yourself!

15. Big, Little, and Micro Circles/ ‘Think Circles!’

Definition: Interactions are made up of circles (initiating and responding) which can range in type from obvious to subtle. Big circles are easier and obvious. Little circles, like making eye contact, are more difficult and subtler. Micro circles, like smirking or joking with your eyes, are the most difficult to perceive and interpret.

Purpose: To increase the number *and subtlety* of back-and-forth interactions. Caregivers must think about the circular process as they interact. ‘Think circles!’

Examples:

- A handshake is a big circle. Eye contact is a little circle. Smiling at the person with your eyes and extending the handshake to make it last a little longer are micro circles.
- Big Circles: when you say: “I’m gonna get you!” and the child runs.
- Little Circles: when you chase and capture the child in your arms and say: “You want a tickle?” and the child indicates “yes” either verbally, by looking at you, or with body language.
- Micro Circles: when you raise your hand to tickle and say slowly (as your hand starts coming down) so that the child connects with each word: “I’m.....gonna.....tickle.... you.... here....it.... comes.... now!” (then tickle with a sudden and final movement).
- See also #13 ‘Suspense and Surprise.’

16. Labeling

Definition: Using words to name objects or actions.

Purpose: To connect words to things and build language capacity.

Examples:

- Name objects, animals, or people in a book.

- “Oh look, there’s Clifford, the big red dog!”
- “Goat. Sheep. Cow. Old MacDonald!”
- Name actions in a book: the doggy is eating.
- Name body parts.

17. Add a Word

Definition: When the caregiver adds one more word to an utterance.

Purpose: To help the child add length to their sentences and expand their language.

Examples:

- When the child gives you one word, give them two back.
 - Child: “Go,” Caregiver: “Go out?”
 - Child: “Up!” Caregiver: “Up, momma!” or “Go up!”
- Imagine what the child would say if they could talk in longer sentences and think of what the next word could or would be.
- Eventually you will add several words: “Momma go out, please.”

18. Asked and Answered

Definition: When the caregiver begins an interaction by asking a question and then answering that question or saying a word in the form of a question, then saying the word in the form of an answer.

Purpose: To model language for the child and help the child expand his/her language abilities.

Examples:

- If the child wants a cookie, you will say “Oh, you want a cookie?” (asked) then as you hand the cookie over, you say “Cookie!” (answered).
- You should stretch out/emphasize the sound of the ‘answer’ word.
- “You want to go out?’ ‘Let’s go out.”

19. Sequences/ “Little Stories”

Definition: Creating 2-4 step ‘sequence of events’ that the child finds enjoyable.

Purpose: To have fun with a child doing game-like activities. Sequences of actions that are connected also help the child understand cause and effect. They have the quality of a ‘little story.’

Examples:

The simplest sequence is two steps, also known as cause and effect.

- (2 step) Children love up and down and open and close sequences.
- (2 step) Push a button and make a noise.
- (3 step) Fill and dump is fun but add a step by using your voice: “Uh oh here it comes!”
- (4 step) Turn on a faucet (1). Make a water sound: “Swoosh!” (2). Turn off the water (3). and say “Off!” (4).
- Here’s a fun ‘Door Sequence.’
 - First, open the door and play simple peek-a-boo: hello/goodbye.
 - Then knock on the door and wait, then pop your head in and say “Peek-a-boo!”
 - Then knock on the door and say “Where’s _____ (child’s name)?” then play peek-a-boo.

- Then knock on the door and say “Where’s _____ (child’s name)?” then play peek-a-boo and then reach for child and give them a tickle, then close the door.
- Caregivers can break almost any action into a sequence of actions including daily activities like brushing teeth, taking a bath, or getting shoes on.
 - Tooth brushing for example has multiple steps i.e., getting out the toothbrush (“Now where is that toothbrush? Here it is! Now where is that toothpaste? Here it is! Here comes the toothpaste...” you put the toothpaste on the brush, then say “Yay! It’s on!”).

20. One and Two Step Commands

Definition: One and two step commands include: “get, give, bring,” “go get and give,” “bring X to me”, “go in the kitchen and get a glass”, etc. One and two step commands connect language to actions in time.

Purpose: To establish language about *actions* as meaningful. This marks a major milestone in the child’s ability to comprehend words.

Examples:

- Ask the child to get an object in the room without pointing.
 - If that doesn’t work, use pointing from a distance.
 - If that doesn’t work, get close to the object and point.
 - If necessary, give the object to the child and *then* ask him/her to give it to you.
- Ask the child to give you something then change your mind and ask them to give it to someone else.
- Ask them to get their shoes and ask for different feet (“No not that foot, the other foot!”).
- Have them get the ball and give it to a sibling/Daddy.
- Ask the child to get an object in *different* room (2 step command).

21. Problem-solving

Definition: Creating a situation where the child must figure out what to do.

Purpose: To help the child come up with new ideas and problem solve.

Examples:

- The child wants something to eat. You *wait expectantly*, play dumb (using ‘Making Them Work’) and they take your hand and guide you to the pantry to point to what they want.
- You say, “Time to go bye-bye,” you wait, they get up and bring their shoes to you.
- They are lining up trains, you hold a train in your hand, wait, and they look at you and reach their hand out for the train.
- See #9 ‘Playful Obstruction’ and #10 ‘Making Them Work.’

PLAY Techniques with Examples for Functional Developmental Levels 4-6

To Improve Complex Two-way Communication, Shared Meanings & Emotional Thinking

Even for the children who are functioning at higher levels, techniques are rarely used alone but are combined with other PLAY techniques, methods, and/or activities to create fun engagement that has a 'flowing' quality to it. Remember to always 'wait,' 'read the child's cues,' 'follow the child's lead,' and 'think circles' to get more and more fun interactions, with the *child* leading as much as possible. Now go PLAY!

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:

- Feed a baby doll with a bottle.
- Make a car sound when the car goes.
- Put animals around a little table and give them a sip of pretend tea.
- Use slapstick with the dolls.
 - Have them fall and say "OUCH!!"
- 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.
 - Saltshakers can say, "Here I come. Shake me!!"
 - Make a glass of milk waddle along the table like a person and say "Hi! Would you drink me?" or "No! No, don't drink me!"
- Make any object "come alive."

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 kinds 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 which is ‘Two Thematic Play’ (see below).
- Sword fight (not yet ‘Good Guys and Bad Guys’—that would be ‘Two Thematic Play’).
- “I’m a monster and I’m going to get you” (a one thematic pretend form of ‘chase’).
- Take little dolls for a ride in a bus.

4. Pretend Play: Two Thematic (FDLs high level 5 and FDL 6)

Definition: ‘Two Thematic Pretend Play’ creates a story with two connected ideas that can involve such things as role-playing and make believe.

Purpose: To promote imagination, creativity, problem solving and high-level play with others.

Examples:

- Pretend to be a doctor:
 - There’s a knock on the door.
 - The patient (who can be the child with ASD or the other person) says, “Doctor, I’m sick. I need help.”
 - The doctor says, “I will help you.”
 - The scenario can evolve to getting a temperature or being afraid of shots.
- Tea party with stuffed animals or dolls, where you and the child talk to each of the animals/dolls and asks them what they would like to eat or drink.
- Play ‘Good Guys and Bad Guys.’
 - “I’m going to get you bad guys and put you in jail.”
 - *Note* here two ideas: bad guys and jail.
 - You can give reasons why bad guys are bad (because they do bad things like steal money).
 - This scenario can involve chase, capture, escape, etc. - make it fun.

5. Multiple Circles of Communication/Continuous Flow

Definition: A continuous flow of many (aim for 20-30) back-and-forth interactions/circles that are ‘balanced’ i.e., where each person takes turns *leading* the interaction in a give-and-take spontaneous fashion.

Purpose: To solidify FDLs 1 through 4 and prepare the child for mature social interactions.

Examples:

- At first your child may mostly *close* circles (i.e., respond to you) in response to you. So, wait! Encourage them to act and open a new circle. Then ‘think circles,’ keep it going, and try to get a back and forth ‘flow’ where there is no breaking off (fragmenting) of the interaction.
- Whatever you are doing, get one more back and forth interaction, then another - keep the flow going.
- Use natural motivations like getting ready for a bath.
 - Make them do everything (turn on the light, turn on the water, etc.).
 - Keep ‘thinking circles’ and get 10-20 circles of interaction as you get ready for a bath.

6. 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:

- Getting ready to go in the car:
 - Speaking TO: "Come on buddy. Let's get your shoes and get ready to go."
 - Child understands and says, "Go?"
 - You, now speaking FOR the child, "That's right buddy. Go. Go bye-bye."
 - Child says, "Go bye-bye."
 - You (speaking FOR) say, "Yeah buddy, go bye-bye. Go car."
 - Child says, "Go car. Go bye-bye."
 - You (speaking TO) say, "Yep, let's go bye-bye in the car."
- 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."
- See:
 - #20 'Three Way Modeling.'
 - #7 'Appropriate Language.'
 - #17 on FDLs 1-4 'Add a Word.'
- 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."

7. Appropriate Language

Definition: Talking in natural tones and rhythms and full sentences i.e., NOT baby talking or dumbing down language.

Purpose: To expose children to completely normal language and help the child generalize from simpler forms of language (see Salient Language) to more complex language. *Appropriate Language* also increases the quality of interactions and imparts both symbolic and emotional meaning.

(Warning: Don't make your language too difficult for the child to understand!)

Examples:

- Instead of saying "Go outside?" say, "Hey buddy, let's get ready. It's time to go outside."
- Instead of saying "Eat?" say, "What would you like to eat?" Then you can offer choices, "Let's see. I've got some yogurt or how about a banana?"
- Instead of saying "Go to park? Go swing?" say "I have a great idea. Let's go to the park and go on the swings!" Then you can simplify to 'Salient Language'. "Go to the park? Swing?"

8. Time Concepts

Definition: The use of schedules and calendars to help the child with autism understand time.

Purpose: To structure time and create a beginning sense of the reality of time. Structuring time also provides predictability and orderliness which is very reassuring for children with autism.

Examples:

- Work with calendars, schedules, clocks, or seasons in the context of everyday life.
- Use words like “yesterday, tomorrow, today, later” connected to real life events.
 - “LATER we are getting ice cream.”
- See #10 ‘More Complex WH-type questions.’

9. Simple “WH-type” Questions: What, Where, and Who

Definition: Simple WH questions include ‘what,’ ‘where,’ and ‘who.’ These are more typical of children at FDL 5.

Purpose: To help with making *symbolic* progress (connecting words to reality) at the higher functional developmental levels.

Examples:

- You point to a picture of an animal and ask: “What is this?” and the child says, “Doggy.”
- You show a picture of a family member and ask: “Who is this?” and child says, “Grandma.”
- You ask, “Where are your shoes?” and the child gets them.
- More advanced ‘What’ questions are called ‘open ended’ questions, like: “What do you want to eat?” and “Where do you want to go?”
 - Even more advanced would be: “What do you think?”
- *Note:* Speech/Language Pathologists (SLPs) help with these language skills.

10. More Complex “WH-type” Questions: Why and When

Definition: Complex WH-type questions include ‘why,’ and ‘when’ (and ‘how’). These are capacities more typical of children at FDL 6.

Purpose: To help children advance their abstract language capacities.

Examples:

- The ability to ask and answer ‘why’ questions comes later than the ability to understand the *meaning* of ‘why’ questions. For example, ‘why’ questions start out to connect two ideas logically e.g. “We can’t go outside *because* it’s raining, and we’ll get all wet.”
- At first the child will not ask, “Why can’t we go outside?” (They might use a ‘whining why’: “Whyyyyyy!”)
- They will not *answer* the question “Why can’t *you* go outside?” but they will understand that when it’s raining, they will get wet.
- The important point here is to help them make logical connections between two ideas.
 - The doggy is sad BECAUSE he bumped his head.
- My test of FDL 6 is to ask, “What do you do when you are hungry/thirsty/sleepy?” and if they can answer, then they are at FDL 6.
- Same thing with ‘when’ questions. ‘When’ implies time. The ability to recall the immediate past i.e. “What did you eat for lunch?” means that the child has a sense of time as real.

- It helps to have a sequence of pictures or schedules, such as when doing an outing
 - First, we do this, then we do that.
 - Use 'First/then': first we'll stop at the store, then we'll get ice cream.

11. Using Natural Consequences to Motivate

Definition: Using reasons/explanations and consequences for why things are done or why things should be done.

Purpose: To strengthen abstract understanding and help the child reason through actions, feelings, and consequences.

Examples:

- "If you want to go outside you have to get dressed and you have to eat breakfast."
- "You have to eat your food if you want to be strong like a superhero."
- "It's time to go to sleep so you won't be tired."
- "If you share with your brother, he will share with you."
- "If you don't want your sister to play with your toy then you should put it away."

12. Finishing Up/Completing Tasks

Definition: Not allowing the child to ignore or avoid but encouraging/insisting that they finish what they have started.

Purpose: Promoting functioning at higher levels that fosters compliance.

Examples:

- When you call their name make sure that they respond... don't let them ignore you!
- Make them say things the "right way."
- Make demands for accuracy and compliance.
- Once they start something, encourage them to complete the task e.g., building a Lego model, cleaning up, getting ready for bed, etc.

13. Essays and Summarizing (FDL 6)

Definition: Connecting sentences in a meaningful way to create longer units of communication i.e., paragraphs.

Purpose: To promote more complex language, especially in more verbal children who can string sentences together.

Examples:

- When reading a book, ask more than yes/no or labeling questions.
 - Instead ask: "What is happening here?" "What else?" "Tell me 3 things you see going on."
- As the child progresses, he/she should be able to give you a short summary of what the story is about.
- Eventually expect the child to tell you about their day or a recent experience.
- See #15 'Outings.'

14. Practicing Pronouns

Definition: Helping children with autism work on distinguishing between I/you, her/him, she/he, they/them etc.

Purpose: To help children learn to use pronouns correctly.

Note: The appropriate use of pronouns is very difficult for children with autism (and foreign language learners!) and often must be taught. Refer to a good Speech/Language Pathologist (SLP). Still, using pronouns clearly and repeatedly in pretend play and daily life can be very helpful for the children.

Examples:

- Start with receptive language: “Give it to me/her/him” or “You take it.”
- Speak for the child: “I have it.”
- Use puppet play with pronouns:
 - You: “Here puppet, YOU take it.”
 - Puppet: “I don’t want it. YOU take it.”
 - You: “Oh no, no, no, YOU take or give it to HIM (another stuffed animal).”
 - You can do the same with ‘MINE’ and ‘YOURS.’

15. Outings

Definition: Going places that are educational and informative.

Purpose: To consolidate a child’s symbolic understanding of time, events, objects, places, and activities, as well as the difference between real and pretend.

Examples:

- Outings are a three-step process that involve:
 - Reading/learning about going somewhere (the zoo, a farm, a construction site).
 - Going on the outing.
 - Talking about it afterwards.

16. 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!”
 - “You want to keep watching your TV show. You don’t want to stop,” or more simply, “No dinner mommy! Watch TV!”
- A child is very angry that his brother took his toy. Say: “That’s my toy! Leave my toy alone!”
- Other examples:

- “Weeee, that was fun!”
- “You didn’t like that.”
- “Stop it Mommy, please!”
- It may seem like an encouragement to be disrespectful, but it is not.
- It’s important for the child to be able to talk back appropriately, even if angrily (See #18 ‘Negotiating the Relationship’).

17. 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:

- First, model empathy for the child (see #16 ‘Mirror/Reflect/Label Feelings’).
 - “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.
- Pretend to be sad, mad, happy, or scared when playing with a puppet.
- Show your feelings by using clear facial expressions and then say how you feel in simple language.
 - “You may not hit mommy. That makes me mad and sad.”
- Incorporate feelings into simple and complex pretend play (see above).
- Books are full of feelings of others, so do a lot of reading.

18. Negotiating the Relationship (FDL 5 & 6)

Definition: Making sure that the child with autism acknowledges relationships in the form of greetings, manners, and transitions.

Purpose: To foster social skills.

Examples:

- Be aware of boundaries of your relationship and help children be aware of them too especially comings, goings, and transitions.
- Don’t let them break off an interaction without at least acknowledging it: “Hey, where are you going?”
 - If someone walked away from you suddenly without saying anything, you would think it was weird!
 - Expect the child to say, “all done” or “no more play” (or you say it for them).
- Previewing and reviewing what you are going to do and/or what you just did helps children understand relationships.
 - “First let’s play trains, then we can play chase, and THEN we can sword fight!”
 - “We played trains, we chased, and we fought with swords. That was fun to do together!”

- Also called “huddling;” to make plans.
 - “Okay, you be the good guy and I’ll be the bad guy and you put me in jail!”
 - “How should we play good guys and bad guys?”

19. Over Dramatizing

Definition: Being dramatic about feelings and actions to emphasize the meaning.

Purpose: To help understand feelings and situations.

Examples:

- Make your face show the feelings that you have.
- Use big gestures or a more dramatic voice to make your point.
- Be dramatic:
 - Pretend to cry when the child won’t listen: “All I wanted was for you to clean up your toys (boo-hoo) and you won’t do it!”
 - Or when the child will not do something, whine: “Please, please, I NEED help!!”

20. Three-way Modeling: Model, Rehearse, Expect

Definition: When people repeat an activity with each other to model the behavior.

Purpose: To help children imitate and understand the nature of an activity; to rehearse activities and set expectations; to demonstrate complex social skills that are on the verge of being learned.

Examples:

- Throwing the ball in a game of catch:
 - Model: Pass the ball around the circle with two other people. “Here Daddy, catch!”
 - Rehearse: Daddy says: “Here Mommy, catch.” Mommy says, “Here Jacob, catch.”
- Expect: Daddy holds out his hands to catch and Jacob throws the ball to Daddy. Success!
 - “Expect” means expecting the child to do the skill in question in a real-life situation.
- This can be done with puppets, dolls, and or toy characters too.
 - When learning “Hi” and “Goodbye,” the doll would use the greetings, then the parents would do the same, and the child would be expected to use it as well.

21. Social Stories™

Definition: Social Stories™ were developed by Carol Gray. These are simple and descriptive forms of thinking that help the child cope with many aspects of their lives.

Purpose: To help the child develop more mature ways of thinking and feeling about the world. They can address children’s fears, needs, desires, behaviors, feelings, and can help children cope more quickly with difficulties than other methods.

Examples:

- ‘Turn off the TV’ Social Story (this story can be used with pictures that depict each line):
 - When I am watching TV, I hate to stop!
 - It makes me mad when my mom says, “Time for dinner. Turn off the TV.’
 - But if I turn off the TV and go to dinner I can come back and watch my show.
 - If I yell and scream the TV will be turned off anyway.
 - If I have a tantrum, I will not be able to watch TV after dinner.
 - I’m not happy about it, but I’ll turn off TV and go to dinner.

- Go to Carol Grey's website: <https://carolgraysocialstories.com/>

22. Metacognitive Strategies/Reflective Thinking

Definition: Using words to talk about one's thoughts regarding a stressful situation, a new idea, a strong feeling, or unusual set of circumstances.

Purpose: To develop higher order thinking skills; to help the child be more self-aware; to address stresses, excitement, overwhelming feelings, etc.

Examples:

- "What should we play today?"
- "What should happen next in our pretend story?"
- "You know, when you have a temper tantrum, you never get what you want. How else could we deal with your upsets?"
- "You look a little worried. What are you thinking about?"
- "How should we handle your sister? She's always in your space."

23. Theory of Mind

Definition: When a person or a puppet represents what they are thinking to the child.

Purpose: To help the child understand that others have their own thoughts.

Examples:

- Share your mind with the child:
 - "Hmmm. I wonder what we can do for fun today. I know. Let's go to the park!"
 - Daddy: "I'm feeling sad. Mommy is away working, and I miss her."
 - "I think our little dog is hungry. Are you hungry Fido? (Fido wags his tail). See, he's wagging his tail. He IS hungry. Should we give him something to eat?"
- Play the game: "I spy with my little eye." e.g. "I spy with my little eye something red! Can you guess what it is?"
- Have puppets say what they are thinking and feeling.
 - Have the puppet say "I sure would like some ice cream. I'm sad because I can't have ice cream." He has a temper tantrum.
- See #17 'Empathy.'
- See #16 'Mirror-Reflect/Label Feelings.'



Circle 3: PLAY Activities

When we are successful in engaging children with autism in a way that is fun, their activities will progress naturally. Over time they will want to be with people (and you!) more than things. They will move from sensory play to sequences to pretend.

Activities Evolve by Functional Developmental Level

Levels 1 & 2 Sensory Cause & Effect	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Deep pressure, running, jumping• Lining up or visually 'stimming'• Tickle/light touch• Open/close, up/down
Levels 3 & 4 Sequences Simple Pretend	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chase, peek-a-boo• Songs - Ring Around the Rosy• Feed a baby, crashing cars• Wrestling
Levels 5 & 6 1 & 2 Theme Pretend Play	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dress up, tea party• Sword fight, good guys vs bad guys• Real hide and seek• Games - Duck, Duck, Goose• Role playing doctor, teacher, etc.

By understanding your child's, Comfort Zone, FDLs and SMP, you are able to select appropriate **techniques** and **activities** that will help your child move up in their functional development. **Techniques and activities are NOT selected by chronological age but rather by FDL.**

Remember—and this is important—methods are more important than techniques or activities. Activities are OUR ideas. Parents are allowed to have their own ideas—in the form of activities—but your activity ideas must be fun and engaging.

Still, the **child's ideas are the best ideas**. So, always pay close attention to what your child's **intentions** are during play (See the 1-2-3 Checklist on page 67. Your child may like stacking blocks but if you try to build a house (your idea/activity) with him when what he really wants is to see the stacked blocks go up higher or hear the click that stacking them makes, you will be missing an opportunity for some great interaction. Be a detective, understand what your child likes, and **go for the fun!**

Activities by FDL

Level 1: Self-Regulation & Shared Attention

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

NOTE: some activities may be appropriate for more than one level

Activities:

Sensory motor play

- Give big hugs or deep pressure on different parts of their body
- Massage with or without lotion
- Gently squeeze fingers/toes, head
- Gently shake arm/leg/hands/feet
- Dance while holding the child
- Swing the child in a blanket
- Give a horsey back ride or let the child ride on your shoulders
- Gently tickle the child's arms, back, belly, etc. (be careful with too much tickling)
- Sing as you play
- Raise the child up in the air and fly them around in a circle
- Use music to calm or arouse the child
- Play with playdough or putty
- Make funny, silly sounds
- Make faces to capture the child's attention
- Gently and rhythmically pound on the back

Level 2: Engagement & Relationship

Goal: To engage with the child and keep engagement going

Activities:

- Play peek-a-boo with your hands
- Sing to the child and pause for his/her engagement
- Label what the child is doing. Use rhythm in your voice
- Cuddle with the child. Hug and stop. Hug and stop.
- Dance and spin
- Tickle child
- Turn water on and off
- Turn light on and off
- Let them feel rice and beans in a tub
- Playdough
- Swing child in blanket or by arms and legs
- Use toys or mirrors to capture child's interest
- Horsy back rides
- Flying the child up in the air on your legs while you lie on your back
- 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 Communication & Purposefulness

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

Activities:

- Balloon play (i.e., hitting a balloon back and forth or blowing one and letting it fly around the room, etc.)
- Label body parts and wait for the child's direction ("What's next?")
- Swing or pull child in blanket
- Use blanket as parachute
- 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
- Dance together
- Jump together
- Obstructive play: block the child during repetitive play or play keep-away
- Stack blocks and knock them over
- Jack-in-the-Box
- Feed pretend food to a big mouth puppet
- Play with toys that wind up and go, such as cars, airplanes, helicopters, etc.
- Play with squirt guns or water balloons
- Play peek-a-boo around a blanket or behind a door
- Use motivating activities (e.g., snack time or going outside) to encourage initiation and gestural communication
- Blow bubbles and wait for the child to ask for more
- Begin to sing a song and then wait for the child to finish

Level 4: Complex Two-way Communication, Social Problem Solving & Sense of Self

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

Activities:

- 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 "Don't Wake Up Daddy!"
- Finger paint
- Ask the child to point to various body parts on his/her body and on play partner's body
- Introduce animal/car sounds
- Ask child to repeat sounds
- Pretend to talk on the phone (e.g., "Hello, who is there?")
- Do puzzles and playing with shapes and colors that have meaning to the child - keep it playful!
- Play simple hide-and-seek behind a blanket or furniture
- Look at books, talk about objects on the page
- Ask simple what/where questions
- Push trains/cars around a track
- Tug-o-war

- “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: Shared Meanings & Symbolic Play

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

Activities:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Races with simple rules • Play red-light green light • Play catch • Color together and talk about what you are coloring • Puppet play (i.e., making puppets talk and interact on a symbolic level) • Use mock anger, pretend crying, pretend to be afraid, etc. • Set the table with pretend food • Wash a pretend animal • Change a doll’s diaper and put it to bed • Have a tea party • Act out simple stories • Hide-and-seek • Bean bag toss | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catch/tackle football • Kick soccer ball • Sword fight • Crocodile Dentist • Don't Break the Ice • Don't Spill the Beans • Build a house/building of blocks • Make a puppet burp • Pretend to fall and say "ow!" • Simple Simon Says • Play dress-up based on familiar characters or animals • Simple Follow the Leader • Play board games (less than two rules) • Ask open ended questions • Encourage peer play/semi-structured play dates |
|--|--|

Level 6: Emotional Thinking, Logic & Sense of Reality)

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:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • iSpy • Role play with puppets/stuffed animals • Play doctor • Tell knock-knock jokes • Play tag • Hot potato • Musical chairs • Duck-duck goose • Guessing games • Play house | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go on a pretend picnic • Go on a pretend adventure • Go on treasure hunts • Go on scavenger hunts • Complete complex obstacle courses • Play charades with various emotions and actions • Read and analyze stories/books • Talk about movies and character roles • Have the child tell stories |
|--|--|

- Tic-tac-toe
- Sports with rules
- Candyland
- Chutes and Ladders
- Go Fish
- Bingo
- Memory
- Guess Who?
- Ask advanced why, when and how questions
- Take quizzes/complete complex puzzles/play trivia
- Discuss weekend plans/trips
- Talk about friends
- Discuss similarities between people, objects and places
- Talk about likes and dislikes
- Discuss how plants grow in nature
- Discuss where water comes from
- Talk about how things (refrigerators, washers) work
- Simon Says
- Talk about why eating, drinking, sleeping is important
- Introduce moral dilemmas
- Give examples of conflict, rejection, sarcasm, deception, etc.
- Discuss how/why perspectives differ
- Model/practice sympathy vs empathy vs apathy and how they apply to various situations
- Encourage unstructured play times with peers, siblings and older/younger children





Moving Down the Track—Coming Home (Circles 4-7)

You're almost home! Now that you've been to the stations on how to do the PLAY Project—principles, methods, techniques, and activities—it's time to bring it all home. In this station we will briefly cover the last 4 Circles of the 7 Circles of PLAY—Circle 4: Family Guidance, Circle 5: Engagement (Putting in the time), Circle 6: Reviewing the PLAY Plan and Video, and Circle 7: Changing the Plan as Your Child Progresses.

Circle 4: Family Guidance The PLAY Project recognizes that PARENTS ARE THE EXPERTS ON THEIR CHILD. Nobody knows your child better than you do. But, if you are participating in PLAY, your PLAY Project Consultant (PPC) brings expertise to you in the form of knowledge about intervention including profiling your child's functional development (rather than chronological age) and how your child responds to the world through their senses. Your PPC will enhance your expertise to help you best support their development.

Developmental progress takes time, and some children make progress faster than other children, just like neurotypical children. If you are working with a PPC, you will be coached to PLAY with your child using the Principles and Methods of The PLAY Project. You will be video recorded, your PPC will model techniques for you and you will receive written feedback. If you are feeling stuck, the following guidance is helpful for ALL parents, working with a PPC or learning to PLAY on your own:

1. Your Feelings. Let's take an honest look at your own feeling life and how you are coping with the life's stresses. Parenting a child with special needs sometimes requires super-human energy and patience. Even kiddos that appear to be in their own world will often pick up the subtle cues of their parents' emotional state. Ask for support from those around you or seek support through community resources.

2. Your Knowledge. Share your knowledge about your child and what you are doing at home, with teachers, babysitters, grandparents and anyone else that spends time with your child. Imagine if every person that interacted with your child understood his FDLs/SMP and used techniques/methods to make every interaction enriching. Your child could be receiving intervention though every, single interaction of their day!

3. Your Playfulness. The desire and instinct to "teach" our children is natural. The PLAY Project isn't about teaching. It is far more important that your child be able to have a fun relationship with you and others than learning to count or identify colors. This idea of focusing on the **interactional process** and NOT teaching goes against everything we have been taught about what being a good parent means. Parents have to retrain themselves to nurture a different skill set of how to enter a relationship, stay engaged and initiate back & forth meaningful communication. Language and academic progress can & will develop once a child has reached certain functional developmental milestones.

4. Your PLAY Skills. PLAYing at the right level can be riddled with emotion for parents. When your 4-year-old wants to spin the wheels of the train and you want the train to go on an adventure through tunnels and across the river, it can be painful for both of you. The PLAY Project teaches parents that if you join your child, where they are (at the right level) and by doing what they love (their interests, not yours), you will be able to woo them into an interaction that is mutually fulfilling and developmentally appropriate. Parents are often not comfortable playing with their child's "autistic interests". We encourage the focus to be on increasing circles of communication by joining the child. If your child likes to spin, then pick them up and spin. If your child likes to hum, then sing songs and hum with them. GO FOR THE CIRCLES! GO FOR THE FUN!

Circle 5: Engagement **Quantity counts.** In The PLAY Project, we ask parents to intentionally use the model for at least **2 hours every day, broken into smaller chunks of time.** Many parents think they are putting in the required time by doing daily routines with their child throughout the day. And they are IF they are playing while doing the routines. There is a difference between going about daily routines and PLAYing.

- When you are PLAYing with your child, you are **engaging your child** using the methods and techniques of The PLAY Project.
- You are **following your child's lead** and PLAYing with the interactional process in mind of **increasing the circles of communication.** You are making interactions count! From sunup to sundown, every daily task can be used to increase 'circles of communication' (i.e., reciprocal interactions) and enhance growth.
- Often parents beginning **PLAY will write down their PLAY time** to be sure they are meeting the need of intentional interaction. After a while, you will find that using PLAY strategies is just the way you are with your child; making every interaction a good interaction Eventually you will be delivering intervention to your child ALL OF THE TIME!



"Make every interaction a good interaction!"

Circle 6: Reviewing The PLAY Plan and Video *Video technology is an amazing learning tool!* In The PLAY Project, the PPC video records 15 minutes of your play and writes a report, called the VRF (Video Review Form), that analyzes the "interactional process" i.e., how you interact, from the visit.

**PLEASE REVIEW THE VIDEO AND VRF. IT WILL HELP YOU TO BE A GREAT PLAYER
AND WILL HELP YOUR CHILD TO MOVE UP THE DEVELOPMENTAL LADDER**

When parents watch the video, they get to study themselves. While you are watching, ASK YOURSELVES, 'am I . . .

- PLAYing at the right pace?
- Following the child's lead?

- PLAY at the right FDL?
- Using techniques that are effective?
- Engaging and getting circles?
- PLAYing a way that is fun?

Remember to always think about CIRCLES! You can even use the 1-2-3 Checklist Page 67 as your guide! This is a powerful tool that parents can use with and without the support from a Certified PLAY Project Consultant.

Circle 7: Change & Growth Evaluate, learn, grow then re-evaluate. The circles of The PLAY Project reinforce the need to constantly assess your child and make adjustments. Many things can impact how a child is functioning on any given day. Kids function differently at school than at home, illness can play a role as well as family stressors. **As your child makes gains, by understanding their unique profile, you can begin to challenge them with higher level skills.** The key is to be certain they are well regulated, engaged and having fun. Take micro baby steps and watch carefully to see how your child responds. Remember, children with autism or red flags for autism like to keep the world the same. If we get stuck in the “sameness” with them, we are not allowing for the growth we so desperately want. Make a point to review the FDL goals provided by your PLAY Consultant every month and to stay focused on PLAYing in a strategic direction to help your child reach their full potential.





Behavior Issues

The Good, The Bad, And The Ugly



“Misbehavior is the immature expression of a legitimate feeling.”

ALL behavior is a communication. Some behavior communicates a message (like tantrumming to show you what they want) while some behavior is the outward expression of a child’s internal processing (like shutting down when there is too much noise at a party). When your child has a meltdown, it is important to look at the situation with your new understanding of their sensory motor profile. Is your child over-stimulated by the sounds or sights around them? Some children are irritated by the buzzing of overhead florescent lights or the smell in a building that you may not even notice. Are they in an unfamiliar place without a transition plan? Knowing that children with autism feel safe with a predictable routine, preparing children for changes to that daily rhythm can make a huge difference in their success. So, when your child is acting out, ask yourself if they are communicating an internal struggle or making an intentional choice to test limits.

Use this guidance (and see www.playproject.org online courses for more info on behavior issues in children with ASD) to work with your child more effectively around their behavior. It is a sign of progress for a child on the autism spectrum when he begins ‘testing’ the boundaries of his relationships. Parents can recognize this as a very positive trend in the child’s social and emotional development. How we deal with this “testing” can be tricky, but it’s very important. The process is much easier and clearer when you realize that there are ‘good, bad, and the ugly’ behaviors!

Good: Good behavior means following the rules for kind, helpful, friendly, and more mature social behavior (i.e., the reasons for the rules). We want to reinforce good behavior, because we want more of it. When we see our child behaving in ways that are welcomed, enjoyable, pleasing, etc. we want to remember to offer a kind comment or touch, “Good job sweetie. You make Mommy smile when you ask for help so clearly.” “Wow! Let me give you a pat on the back for thinking of that on your own.” In children who are at risk for developmental issues, good is not just behaving and complying with the rules, but it most importantly includes being in relationships. Anything that demonstrates connection we want to reinforce (coming up with ideas and sharing them, commenting to us, inviting us to play, eye contact etc.). ***Remember to frequently notice and reinforce your child’s good behaviors.***

Bad: Bad behavior is breaking the rules. Rules are determined by the parents. Most families have about a dozen important rules that help the family members get along (i.e., no aggression or meanness), help with daily functions (i.e., take a bath, go to bed on time, eat with the family) and participate in the world (i.e., get up and go to school). Whatever you (the parents) determine to be a rule is a rule.



Dr. Rick's 'Top 3 Rules' are:

1. No aggression (hitting, biting, kicking, being mean, etc.).
2. No throwing or breaking things out of anger.
3. No ignoring (when I talk to you please acknowledge me and I will do the same with you) .

As parents you will come up with the rules you feel are necessary and the battles you want to pick or are willing to wage. The important thing is that once you make something a rule, it has to be dealt with consistently. So, when your child breaks a rule, he gets consequences that are meaningful (he doesn't like the consequences and will be less likely to break the rules as a result of them). Consequences need to be Just and Appropriate to the "crime."

The purpose is NOT to punish, but to discipline and communicate clearly that an important family rule has been broken. Discipline means teaching and you are teaching your child the rules, the reasons for the rules, and the consequences of not following the rules. The consequences need to be administered logically (a rule was crossed) NOT out of anger or other emotional response. Usually, small consequences given immediately and often are more effective than big consequences handed out after multiple offenses. Consequences for hitting and throwing are typically a time out. "Because you broke the rule, I want you to sit on that chair for 3 minutes." Consequences are effective because the child doesn't like it. When putting limits on children's behavior you will always see what is called an extinction peak. Before a child will comply, the child's behavior will escalate in an attempt to test the resolve of the rule maker. As long as the consequences are consistent and meaningful, the child will learn that bad behavior is not tolerated, and the Rule will be accepted and followed by the child (with about 80% dependability).

Ugly: Ugly behavior is neither good nor bad. Most of the time it is trying to get what the child wants by acting out including whining, yelling, tantrumming, and/or pestering. "If I whine and cry my parents will let me have my binky even though I am only supposed to have it at night." "If I whine and cry, I can get ice cream instead of eating lunch first." With ugly behavior, you want to send the message that whining and crying will *never* ever ever ever ever ever ever ever get you what you want. **So, ugly behavior gets ignored or transformed into good behavior.**

If you want to change ugly behavior into good behavior, you will have to **deal with the emotion** behind the ugly behavior first. For children on the autism spectrum, we especially want to try to redirect whining and turn it in to a dialogue. This is an important step in helping your child stay regulated across emotions like frustration and anger.

Here's a concrete example of how we might work a child's frustration around chicken nuggets. We'll call the child "Jake." Jake has just been told that he cannot have any more nuggets and he is appearing angry. We recommend that you say to Jake: "You're mad, Jake. You want some chicken nuggets." Another way to approach this is for you to echo Jake's affect with your voice while saying what he wants. In a whining voice say, "I waaaannnt soooooome chiiiiickkkkennn nuuuuuggetttts!" Sometimes this is easier for kids to process. As Jake becomes better at dealing with frustration, you can add the "you're mad" part. So ultimately, you want to transform or change ugly behavior into good behavior by helping the child **use words** instead of misbehavior. Sometimes that will be possible, other times Jake will just continue to whine. If he continues to whine, ignore him (usually he will come back still whining about what he wants, and the process begins again with you trying to redirect him to using his words).

The other thing that commonly happens when a child doesn't get what he wants is that he will escalate his behavior to the point of breaking the rules (he will throw something or hit). When that happens, he gets the consequences of bad behavior. To repeat the fundamental message: ugly behavior gets ignored. However, you want to try first to address the feelings behind the ugly behavior first. For more guidance on The Good The Bad & The Ugly as well as how to handle transitions go to The PLAY Project website's courses.

Afterword

I end this parent guide with a hope and a wish.

My hope is that your journey with The PLAY Project has helped and continues to help you have fun with your young child in a way that is changing their destination from being more self-absorbed to more interactive, from being focused on things to becoming more imaginative, and from not understanding theirs and others' feelings to becoming more emotionally connected to the world. This foundation of early social abilities will lead to both EQ (emotional intelligence) and IQ.

My wish is that you will continue to ride The PLAY Project train and use the principles, methods, techniques, and activities of PLAY as you enter the rest of your child's developmental life. If there is one fundamental lesson I have learned, it is that **there is no way around the functional developmental levels**. You cannot skip levels and you must solidly achieve the capacities at each of the levels if you want your child to function in the world. I know this because I have followed thousands of children's lives for decades into adolescence and early adulthood. I have seen the future. I have seen how progress happens. There is a clear developmental course that is profoundly affected by what families do early on.

The principles and methods of PLAY don't stop at age 6. If we can help children reach the 'turning point' of FDL 4; get to FDL 5 by age 5; delay kindergarten for a year until our children are ready at FDL 6; and work on FDL 6 to connect two ideas logically (Q: What do you do when you're thirsty? A: Drink), recall the immediate past (What did you have for breakfast today?) and understand the storyline in a book (What was that story about?), then the future is an open book, and the school experience will further promote development.

The PLAY model stands for increasingly complex functional development so that children with autism reach their *full* potential. I was originally astounded to see children with severe early diagnoses of autism graduate from high school and go on to college! Now, I have so many graduates, I am not at all surprised. I have seen these adolescents and young adults become self-aware, creative, and empathic. The potential within these children is what is astounding. So, don't stop now. Keep promoting functional development using The PLAY Project approach. Developmental progress is the rule all the way up into the 20's! I am sure that development and learning never end. Ride this train to its ultimate destination—your child's full potential.

I end this parent training manual with a ton of encouragement to keep going, keep believing in your child's developmental journey, and keep believing in *your* ability to make the difference in your child's life. **PLAY ON!**

PLAY Resources

The PLAY Project: <https://www.playproject.org/>

Online Courses: <https://playproject.org/online-courses/>

- Welcome to The PLAY Project: <https://playproject.org/project/play-project-introductory-online-course/>
- Transition Tricks: <https://playproject.org/project/transition-tricks/>
- The Good, The Bad, & The Ugly: <https://playproject.org/project/good-bad-ugly/>
- Introduction to Teaching PLAY: <https://playproject.org/project/introduction-teaching-play/>

Dr. Rick's Book "Autism: The Potential Within": <http://www.lulu.com/shop/richard-solomon-md/autism-the-potential-within-the-play-project-approach-to-helping-young-children-with-autism/paperback/product-22620946.html>

Book Chapters:

- Chapter 2 Visit 1: Part 2 After the Diagnosis: Grief, Guilt, Hope, and Action: <https://playproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Chap2GriefHopeActionRev3.13.pdf>
- Chapter 4: Diet, Biomedical Treatments, Immunizations, and Autism: <https://playproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Chap4BioMedRev3.13-1.pdf>
- Chapter 8 Visit 4: Starting the PLAY Project: <https://playproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Chapter-8-Visit-4-Starting-The-PLAY-Project.pdf>
- Chapter 6: Visit 3 Part 1 Climbing the Language Mountain: <https://playproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Chapter-6- -Visit-3-Part-1- -Climbing-the-Language-Mountain.pdf>
- Chapter 12: Kindergarten: Ready or Not, Here I Come: <https://playproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Chap12ReadyOrNot-2.pdf>

The PLAY Project YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/Uck5bMFgY-ffuOeG1NDEllqA>

The PLAY Project Research: <https://www.playproject.org/research-evidence/>

Meeples: <http://www.interveningearly.org/meet-the-meeples/>

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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?



PLAY PROJECT GLOSSARY

Affect – The feeling life of the child; what the child likes, wants or intends.

Auditory Processing – the way a child processes information that is heard; the process of decoding sounds and the meaning of words is often difficult for children with ASD i.e. they have trouble making sense of what they hear or need more time to process auditory information. Visual approaches like *PECs* are often good alternatives for children with auditory processing problems.

Circles of Communication – The back and forth process of communication. Opening a circle means *initiating* an interaction. Closing a circle means *responding* to a social overture (see reciprocal interaction). The ‘ping-pong’ of relationship.

Comfort Zone – The neuro-psychological sense of comfort that a child with autism has when they are doing what they want and like to do, especially when they are repeating activities. The comfort zone is based on the child’s abnormal neurologic system that makes the child want to keep the world the same.

Content vs. Interactional Process - The content of an interaction is the “what” of the interaction; the process of the interaction is the “how”. For example, imagine a child and parent playing catch. The content would be ‘A game of catch’; the process would be ‘tossing the ball back and forth’.

Contingent Interaction – When my interaction depends on your interaction, it is considered *contingent*. See *circles of communication*.

Cues –A cue is an observed behavior of the child that tells you whether the child is enjoying an interaction, feeling neutral about the interaction, or not enjoying the interaction.

DIR – Developmental, individual differences, and relationship-based approach developed by the child psychiatrist, Stanley Greenspan MD and pediatric psychologist Serena Weider PhD. The PLAY Project is based on the theoretical foundation of the DIR model.

Fragile X A genetic condition which affects the X-chromosome and leads to various developmental problems like intellectual disabilities and cognitive impairment.

Fragmenting—When the child breaks off interaction and does not respond contingently.

Functional Developmental Level (FDL) –The stages of development according to the *DIR* theory of Stanley Greenspan. There are nine functional developmental levels of which the first six are fully described in the PLAY Project courses.

Hypersensitivity – being overactive or oversensitive to the environment.

Hyposensitivity – being underactive or undersensitive to the environment.



PLAY PROJECT GLOSSARY

Intent – What the child wants to do as judged by the caregiver by reading the child's nonverbal (gestural) as well as verbal *cues*

Lead—The direction the child wants to go. Similar to *intent*. By following the child's 'lead', the adult engages the child in pleasurable back and forth interactions which enhance the child's *developmental functional level*.

Motor Planning – Motor means movement using muscles. Motor planning is the ability of the child to move from one activity to another or to sequence a given motor activity. Children with autism frequently have trouble with motor planning.

Parent Implemented Models—Evidence-based intervention programs that empower parents to help their child with autism. The PLAY Project is a parent implemented model that uses a developmental and relationship-based approach (PIM DRB)

PLAY Methods – There are 5 PLAY Methods: 1.) Read the child's cues to understand their 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 interaction) 5.) Build on the child's interests.

PLAY Principles – There are 4 PLAY Principles: 1.) Fun with people. 2.) Put in the time—2 hours per day broken up into 15-20 minute sessions. 3.) Accurately profile the child in terms of their Comfort Zone, Sensory Motor Profile & Functional Developmental Levels. 4.) Based on the child's profile, play at the right level.

The PLAY Project – An organization that trains pediatric professionals and child development experts to coach parents to help their young children with autism through play.

The PLAY Project 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.

The PLAY Project 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.

Proprioception –Feedback from the joint structures of the body to the brain and vice versa.

Psychological Induction—A feeling or set of feelings evoked or induced in professionals that originate in the family.

Reciprocal Interaction – Interaction that depends on the behavior on the other person. Mutual interactional processes depend on one another so that when you do something the child reacts or vice versa.

Scripting—When the child memorizes lines from a movie, video, books, or other media and then quotes the lines out loud. Scripting is a form of Comfort Zone activity that takes the child out of social contact and interaction. They are 'in their own head scripting'.



PLAY PROJECT GLOSSARY

Sensory Motor Play – The use of play that involves the senses or movement. Examples include a rough and tumble play, spinning, rocking, jumping, turning on and off lights, etc.

Sensory Motor Profile (SMP)—The unique way that a child experiences the world through the various sensory modalities and movement. Some sensory modalities are preferred and sought; some are disliked and avoided. There are nine primary modalities: proprioception (the experience of joints in motion i.e. jumping, shaking of arms/leg, etc.), spatial (the child's experience of closeness and distance), tactile (light touch/tickles and deep pressure/squeezing-pushing), vestibular (turning in space/spinning), visual, auditory (hearing/music), oral (tasting and eating), motor planning (coordination of small and large muscles and the ability to do what you intend to do), and olfactory (smell). In addition the SMP includes the way the child **reacts** to the world. **Over-reactive children** are highly sensitive to the environment and can easily be overloaded when there is too much sensory or emotional input; **under-reactive children** tend to be self absorbed and unresponsive to input and/or overtures; and some children have a **mixed reactive profile** over-reacting sometimes and being self absorbed sometimes

Sensory Integration (SI) – The process of using sensory experiences to help children understand their world. SI therapy is usually provided by occupational therapists and involves specific therapeutic techniques.

7 Circles of The PLAY Project—Defines the clinical approach of The PLAY Project in 7 Circles. Circle 1: Principles and Methods: Families learn the foundations of PLAY. Circle 2: Child Profile: Each child is individually profiled in terms of A). What they love to do (Comfort Zone Activities), B). Their sensory profile and C). Functional developmental levels. Circle 3: Techniques and Activities: Individualized suggestions give parents clear ideas of how to implement PLAY. Circle 4: Family Guidance: PLAY Consultants come to the home to coach, model, and give structured feedback based on the video analysis and visit. Circle 5: Engagement: Between visits, parents engage their child and put in the time. Circle 6: Visit Review: Between visits, the consultants send a visit review that includes written and video feedback so parents can refine their approach. Circle 7: Change and Growth: The program is adjusted as the child moves up functional developmental levels.

Vestibular – having to do with the neuro feedback to establish one's place in space

Zone of Potential Development – a term developed by Vgotsky characterizing the outer limits of the child's development. When the parents expect more than the child can understand they are in the child's *zone of potential development* when they need to be in the child's *zone of proximal development*.

Zone of Proximal Development – a term developed by Vgotsky characterized by interest, excitement and engagement typical of interactions occurring within the child's understanding. This zone is where the child learns best. They are neither bored because the interactions are too simple or repetitive nor are they confused because the interactions are too advanced (see *Zone of Potential Development*).