



PLAY PROJECT TECHNIQUES

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

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 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. 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' (on a separate document).

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:



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- 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:



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- 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 “Wooooooom” 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.



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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 pregnant 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.



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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 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 hand shake is 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.



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- 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, mamma!” 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 would 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:



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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:



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- 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 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.
 - Salt shakers 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)



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

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

Examples:

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



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- 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 and 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.



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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:



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- 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’: “Whyyyyy!”)
- 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 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)



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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.



PLAY PROJECT TECHNIQUES

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.



PLAY PROJECT TECHNIQUES

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.



PLAY PROJECT TECHNIQUES

- 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 PROJECT TECHNIQUES

- 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.’