

Stages of Play

0-6 Months (Solitary Play)



- Puts objects in mouth
- Touches with hands
- Looks at adults closely
- Solitary play with rattles, shakers, banging objects
- Limited to no interaction with other children

Birth to 3 months

- Primarily for sensory stimulation
- Rattles, crib ornaments, bells, colorful pictures, musical toys, mobiles

3-6 months

- With primitive grasping: toys for grasping, squeezing, feeling, and mouthing, soft blocks, teething toys

6-12 Months (Solitary Play)



- Exploration through mouthing
- Exploration through hands touching objects
- Looks at and imitates adults
- Copy movements (i.e. dropping objects)
- Likes simple games like peek a boo
- Explores toys alone
- Picture books with color
- Stacking toys
- Nesting toys

- Sponges for water play
- Mirrors, toy telephones
- Toys that react to child's play

12-18 Months (Solitary Play)

- Trial and error play (i.e. banging toys together to figure out sound)
- Plays with grownups and notices other children
- Plays alone and talks alone
- Repeats actions and play that he enjoys
- Push toys
- Pull toys
- Balls to throw
- Plain and interlocking blocks
- Simple puzzles with large and easy to handle pieces
- Form boards
- Peg boards
- Stacking toys,
- Riding toys with wheels and low to ground

18 Months-2 years (Solitary Play)



- Explores objects with mouth
- Trial and error learning
- Imitates other children and adults
- Watches other children play but does not join them
- Prefers playing with adults and self
- Repetitive play with placing blocks into and out of box
- Scribbles on many pages
- Toys for sand box and water play (i.e. shovels, spoons, pails)
- Story books,
- blocks of many sizes
- Dolls
- Stuff animals
- Puppets
- Miniature life toys

2-3 years old

Spectator Play 2-2.5 years

Parallel Play 2.5-3 years

- Uses symbols with play (i.e. a stick as a sword)
- Begins to use reasoning skills
- Begins to play alongside other children
- Will copy adults and other children
- Imaginative play is used more than real play (yells at dolls)
- Will use language more effectively
- Large muscle skills developing, but still using small muscle groups
- Need to demonstrate independence
- Very energetic and enthusiastic
- Pull and push toys
- Large muscle play objects (i.e. swing sets, toys to ride)
- Sensory play materials such as play dough, finger paint water play, books, blocks, dolls, stuffed animals
- Open and shut objects
- Simple shape sorter



3 years old (Associate Play)

- Recognizes shapes, letters, colors
- Will play co-operatively with others and take turns
- Ask more questions Why? How?
- Shows more reasoning
- More imaginative play such as dress up and cooking
- Solves puzzles by using trial and error and thinking.
- Expands fantasy life, with unrealistic fears
- Fascination with adult roles
- Better able to adapt to peers than 2y/o
- Stubborn, negative
- Props for imaginative play (i.e. classroom, clothes)
- Puzzles
- Simple board games
- Mini life toys
- Art materials that allow for sense of accomplishment (i.e. paint brushes, pens, crayons)



4 years old (Associate Play)

- Interacts with others with play
- May be fleeting cooperation in-between play tasks
- Creates and develops friendships
- Chooses preferences to play with some children and not others
- Plays normally with mixed sex groups
- Secure, self-confident
- Requires adult attention and approval
- Shows off
- Takes risks
- Able to plan tasks, but the results are accidental
- Cutting, pasting, sewing, imaginative block building
- Tricycles, big wheels
- Materials for painting, coloring, drawing, woodworking, sewing, stringing beads
- Books with themes that expand past child's imagination



5 years old (Cooperative Play)

- Uses and understands symbols with writing and reading
- Early signs of logical thinking
- Understands and uses reason related to experiences
- Starts to understand simple rules
- Takes turns, plays cooperatively
- Enjoys tabletop activities
- Stable predictable, reliable
- Less self-centered
- Relaxed, friendly
- Willing to share
- Cooperates with peers
- Realistic, practical, responsible
- Cut/paste and artistic activities with models

- Simple card and table or board games with few rules and the outcomes are based on chance, not strategy.
- Elaborate props for dramatic playing



6-8 years old (Cooperative Play)

- Plays well with others
- Play is more complicated
- Supportive of other children with play
- At primary school age-play is with single sex groups
- More gross motor play
- More complex fine motor play
- Prefers and enjoys playing with small groups
- Makes up own games with rules
- Prefers and enjoys children of same sex
- Enjoys using rules and understanding
- Rough Play
- Playground equipment for more gross motor play: monkey bars, climbing ropes, swings
- Swimming with inner tubes and goggles
- Smaller diameter balls
- Frisbees
- Roller skates, ice skates
- Jump roping
- Camping and sporting equipment
- Smaller sized interlocking blocks
- Puzzles
- Actions figures with complex accessories
- Jewelry making
- Sewing model sets, board and card games
- Computer or electronic games

Adolescence (Cooperative Play)



- Continue with leisure, crafts and hobbies
- Greater participation in recreation and sports
- Engagement in theater, fantasy games, and video games
- Teamwork and cooperation develop
- Begins to hang out with friends

Reference:

Case-Smith's Occupational Therapy for Children and Adolescents by Jane Clifford O'Brien, Heather Kuhaneck