

Play Skills II - How to Teach Play Skills

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Purpose:

- So many preschool and child care teachers are concerned about children and their lack of pretend play skills...
- Why is this happening...?
- What should we do...?
- Whose responsibility should it be...?
- When will we fit it in...?
- How would we actually teach play skills...?
- Is it worth the investment...?

RULES - ROLES - REINFORCEMENT!

- Rules for each center need to be simple, limited in number, visually supported and similar to class rules.
- Specific roles within centers help children focus their imagination and to be successful in the center.
- This means you will need to think specifically of each role that might occur within each of your centers...takes TIME!
- If you expect children to buy in to the play scenarios you are teaching you MUST REINFORCE THEM CONSTANTLY!
- I mean CONSTANTLY!!!! 😊

Getting started...

- For the first month of school each of your centers should be taught via lesson plan.
- Set up the center and think about everything you would need to teach children to do in order to play functionally and successfully in that center.
- Spend several days in each center as a teacher instructing on rules, roles, expectations, problem-solving, etc.
- Time consuming!

Use visuals to structure play...

- Use a picture play plan!
- Take a picture of each center in your classroom.
- Place two or three Velcro dots next to each picture.
- Take/print mini pictures of each child in the classroom (with Velcro mini dots on the back).
- After circle, start asking children where they want to play (I like the way you used walking feet after Circle, Janay! Where would you like to play?).

Visual Play Plan continued...

- Place their pictures next to center pictures and set timer for the first part of Center Time.
- Repeat several times during the course of Center Time so everyone gets turns at each center (child-centered/directed).
- This also allows the teacher to help drive who plays together - either pairing children with limited play skills/language with good peer models or limiting play options between children who struggle to get along which helps control behavioral incidents.
- Also helps to limit the number of children in each center cutting down on behavioral issues & increasing safety in class

Did we discuss REINFORCEMENT...?

- Reinforcement is the KEY to teaching appropriate play skills in your classroom.
- It's your job to motivate children to want to play. It's a hard sell especially for children who have unlimited access to video stimulation.
- Reinforcement must be SIMPLE!
- Reinforcement must be ARBITRARY!
- Reinforcement must be CONSTANT - at least to start with...

HOW-TO: Transportation/Cars Center

- Come up with a list of rules for the Car Center... i.e. quiet voices, careful hands & feet, stay on the rug/map, etc.
- Teach these rules and what they look like.
- Allow children to practice using these rules and reinforce them for doing so.
- Make visual reminders of the rules using Google images or some other program and post them at the center.
- Remind each child who enters the center about the rules and refer them to the corresponding rule pictures.

Transportation/Cars continued...

- Provide a rug with roads on it or laminated road maps that guide the children where to drive the cars and limits/defines the space where children can drive the vehicles.
- Provide sorting boxes for color or for types of vehicles and teach children how to categorize the cars. This is a good activity for children with slowly developing play skills

Transportation/Cars continued...

- Assign roles for this center.
- Traffic monitor uses a stop sign or a traffic light and is in charge of keeping traffic running smoothly.
- Police officer pulls people over when they go too fast.
- Come up with a list of behaviors and language the children will use when they are traffic monitors and police officers.
- Specifically teach the skills and language necessary for these roles and have an adult model the skills and language as the children play at least for the first month of school until everyone is familiar with the expectations.

HOW-TO: Block Area

- Come up with a list of rules for the Block Center... i.e. quiet voices, careful hands/feet, blocks are for building/not swinging, towers go up to our waists only, we can knock our own towers down, but not our friend's towers without permission, etc.
- Teach these rules and what they look like.
- Allow children to practice using these rules and reinforce them for doing so.
- Make visual reminders of the rules using Google images or some other program and post them at the center.

Block Area continued...

- Remind each child who enters the center about the rules and refer them to the corresponding rule pictures.
- Provide a rug or blanket so that blocks stay quiet and the area is clear/limited.
- Use yard sticks in this center with a clear mark showing how high towers can be.
- Provide sorting boxes for each type of block. This is a good activity for children with slowly developing play skills.

Block Area continued...

- Assign roles: builders, distributors (hand out the types and numbers of blocks needed/requested) & measurers (holds the stick to see how high towers are).
- Specifically teach the skills and language necessary for these roles and have an adult model the skills and language as the children play at least for the first month of school until everyone is familiar with the expectations.
- Build various structures with available blocks and take pictures.
- Laminate and post pictures in the center.
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Block Area continued...

- Help children duplicate the pictured buildings until they can build them independently.
- Teach children how to start a building contest to see how fast each team can build a building up to the height limit, etc.
- Post a picture of each type of block on the shelf so that children can clean up easily.
- Limit number of blocks in the center.

HOW-TO: Kitchen Center

- Come up with a list of rules for the Kitchen Center... i.e. quiet voices, careful hands & feet, etc. Post the rules in the center and refer the children to the picture reminders.
- Create/ buy menus for the center and teach the kids how to order food from a server and teach the server how to deliver the orders.
- Create grocery lists and teach the kids how to shop and how to put groceries away.
- Create recipes with pictures and teach kids how to make and serve a meal.

Kitchen Center continued...

- Kitchen centers need to be monitored by an adult so the children can receive guidance and help with language.
- Create a "menu" of activities for the kitchen center so when kids arrive they can decide/plan if they want to "play" restaurant, grocery shopping or meal preparation.
- Provide sorting boxes for food & kitchen implements (i.e. vegetables, fruit, forks, spoons, etc).
- Take pictures of all kitchen materials and post them on various shelves for easy clean-up.

HOW-TO: Puzzles & Games Center

- Come up with a list of rules for the Puzzle/Games Center... i.e. quiet voices, careful hands & feet, taking turns, etc. Post the rules in the center and refer the children to the picture reminders.
- Dump the pieces from two or three puzzles into a container and then guide the children in cooperating to complete the empty puzzle plates.
- Games with rules are a great way to get difficult kids to play with others because there are already rules in place.
- Go through the games in your center and create visually-supported directions for each.

Puzzles & Games Center continued...

- Avoid issues with “winners/losers” by teaching the concept of “1st winner...keep playing...2nd winner...keep playing...3rd winner”, etc. Reinforce each winner equally.
- Structure lessons on how it “feels” to win and to lose a game.
- Practice appropriate ways to express disappointment and good ways to be a “winner”.
- Take pictures of each complete puzzle so children know what they are trying to accomplish once they empty the puzzles.
- Trace around edges of each puzzle piece so children can match the puzzle piece to the traced shape in the puzzle tray.
- Provide a large bin where uncompleted puzzles can be placed at clean-up time (for completion later).

HOW-TO: Dramatic Play/Dress Up Center

- Come up with a list of rules for the Dramatic Play/Dress Up Center... i.e. quiet voices, careful hands & feet, taking turns, etc.
- Post the rules in the center and refer the children to the picture reminders.
- Provide visual guides for different outfit combinations.
- Provide a mirror.
- Provide a "camera" for children to pretend play their own photo shoots

Dramatic Play/Dress Up Center continued...

- Provide magazines so children can try to duplicate outfit combinations of their choice.
- If the center has a dramatic component (i.e. Post Office, dog groomer, etc) create roles within the center and teach the specific behaviors and language each participant will need to use in order to be successful.
- Take pictures of each role and corresponding props so the children can choose/play who they want to portray.

HOW-TO: Doll/Play House Center

- Rules - you know the drill by now ☺
- Discuss specifically how people (dolls) should treat each other.
- Talk about and teach expectations and what will happen if we (dolls) are not respectful to one another.
- Talk about and teach how we treat small children/babies and animals.
- Create visually supported lists of standard care expectations. Teach these expectations and reinforce the children who meet them.
- Create a sorting box for dolls, boys, girls, animals, furniture, etc.
- Provide labeled boxes with pictures for easy clean up.

Teaching Through Conflict In Play

- Instead of exiting a child from a center due to aggressive behavior create a conflict area in your classroom.
- Many children act out their anxiety and/or anger through play and they need the opportunity to do so.
- It's common to witness children using dolls/action figures to "fight" or in an aggressive manner.
- Accompanying a child to the conflict area might help them deal with some of these issues functionally.

Conflict In Play continued...

- The conflict area needs to be quiet, if possible, away from the main part of the center, contain perhaps a small snack or drink, some paper and crayons, a pillow for punching and some stuffed animals for cuddling.
- This alternate center should also have an emotion poster, pictures or books to help children identify the emotions they are feeling so they can talk it out using appropriate language and behavior.
- The Conflict Corner is not a punishment or a way to isolate difficult children. It is a place to calm down and learn new skills.

Last Idea: The Fix-It Center

- Once each month create a Fix-It Center.
- Ask the children to go through each center and pick out things that are broken, pieces lost, etc.
- Have the children bring these items to the Fix-It Center and participate in problem-solving regarding repair and/or discard.