

Play and Social Skills

What are play and social skills



Play is voluntary engagement in self motivated activities that are normally associated with pleasure and enjoyment. Play may consist of amusing, pretend or imaginary, constructive, interpersonal (play with others) or intrapersonal (solitary play) interactions. Play is the way that children learn about the environment, their bodies and their place in the world around them.

Social skills are the skills we use everyday to interact and communicate with others. They include verbal and non-verbal communication, such as speech, gesture, facial expression and body language. A person has strong social skills if they have the knowledge of how to behave in social situations and understand both written and implied rules when communicating with others.

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Play and social skills include:

- Play skills (with peers as well as alone)
- Social Skills (with peers)
- Social Communication

Why are play and social skills important?

Play is one way by which children learn. “Free” or unstructured play in early childhood is an important way that children learn about their world. Play is also an avenue through which social skills can develop. As they grow older, children learn about societal rules by making up games with rules, as well as about winning and losing and “playing fair”. They also learn about controlling their impulses in order to do well at something and about space, negotiating and problem solving. Above all, play is needed for fun and relaxation.

Social skills are vital in enabling an individual to have and maintain positive interactions with others. Many of these skills are crucial in making and sustaining friendships. Social interactions do not always run smoothly and an individual needs to be able to implement appropriate strategies, such as conflict resolution when difficulties in interactions arise. It is also important for individuals to have ‘empathy’ (i.e. being able to put yourself into someone else’s shoes and recognise their feelings) as it allows someone to respond in an understanding and caring way to how others are feeling.

When a child has difficulties with play and social skills you may notice:

- Poor attention and concentration
- Flits from one activity to the next without actually playing with the item
- Uppends toys on the floor
- Difficulties taking turns/sharing
- Gets upset when ‘loses’ a game
- Is not aware of others and fails to read other people’s feelings based on

their verbal and non-verbal cues

- Has trouble expressing/regulating emotions
- Finds it difficult to make and maintain friendships
- Always require an adult to play with them
- Has repetitive or narrow interests in toys/play
- Prefers to play alone
- Interrupts frequently
- Is not able to maintain a topic of conversation and provides irrelevant comments during a conversation
- Speaks 'at you' in a conversation versus engaging in a two way conversation
- Does not understand consequences of their actions

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