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• *Working together for children with disabilities*

• INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES AND PROFESSIONALS

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Teamwork and Child's Play

By Ann Gruenberg, PhD, Professor, Early
Childhood Education

Eastern Connecticut State University



*This article is translated into Spanish
on page 2. Ver la versión española de
este artículo en la página 2.*

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Introduction

The play of young children provides wonderful opportunities for fun, spontaneity, and social interactions with peers and others. Children around the world engage in play, and over many years, the importance of child's play has been recognized by parents and professionals.

As inclusive options for young children with developmental challenges increase, the opportunities for play have continued to become more accessible. The participation of children with challenges has improved the quality of life for children with disabilities while also creating valuable opportunities for positive development in a range of natural environments, from home to classroom.

Though a playful spirit is, for most children, as natural as breathing, there are times when children need support to play. There are many roles and functions that families and professionals (or the "team") may use to support the healthy play of children with challenges. They may use scaffolding strategies, which are techniques that allow the parent or professional to model the desired activity for the child. Gradually they shift the responsibility to the child while gently providing supports that the child needs until he can accomplish the goal on his own. For example, they might invite a child to watch them play. As the child becomes more comfortable, they demonstrate how to play with the materials or toys. They then

encourage the child to play along with them. These strategies, along with guidance, encouragement, and adaptations, can help to meet specific goals of play for most children.

Children with Developmental Challenges

Sometimes, before children have been officially identified as eligible for special services, family members or others may notice differences in the child's play behavior. Such differences might include difficulty initiating play with others, difficulty maintaining play, limited use of play themes, or difficulty reading "cues" of others. Some children may also be easily over-stimulated, with a low threshold for impulse control and/or aggression. When children have delays in language, the quality of their play and other social interactions can be compromised, at times contributing to challenging behavior or withdrawal.

Children may or may not have received Birth to Three and/or early childhood special education services. Those who have been eligible for these services sometimes have conditions such as Autism Spectrum Disorder, which affects social interaction, communication, and sensory processing. Others may have language delays or developmental delays, which can affect children's initial ability to express themselves, "make-believe" or pretend regarding what is imagined rather than what is tangible.

What you can do:

- Notice what seems to work well with your child.... What does this look like?
- Notice if there are situations that seem to set your child off.... What does your child do? How does your child react?

Strategies to Match Children's Needs

There are strategies that can be helpful to use once families and professionals have a sense of the child's strengths and needs. These strategies include:

- Modeling language such as a simple narration of what the child is doing;
- Providing props that expand on or extend children's interests, such as a stove for a cooking activity;
- Using social stories, such as a story about going to a restaurant that prepares the child for what happens in a real restaurant;
- Structuring experiences, such as reducing stimulation;
- Integrating relevant themes into activities.

Strategies may also include informal interaction or modeling pro-social interactions. Sometimes peers are encouraged to provide support, such as two children playing together at the same activity. When more than one person, family member or professional, is involved, communication is essential so that everyone is working together for the benefit of the child. Optimally, the teamwork will identify positive outcomes or objectives for children. For example, parents and professionals can work

together to use consistent prompts to encourage a child to use two or three word phrases to communicate during play.

What you can do:

- Relate to the child on his or her level.
- Play on the floor.
- Notice what he or she is doing and respond—Pick up on his or her “cues.”
- Use toys the child especially likes.
- Expand on a child's interests, building on what they do already.
- Use your facial expressions, tone of voice, and physical closeness to relate to child.
- Support a child's engagement by playing with him or her.
- Provide opportunities for a child to play with others.
- Have fun!

In general, the principles in the Joint Position Statement on Inclusion published by the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) Council for Exceptional Children and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) are relevant as we discuss enhancing opportunities for play. The principles of access, participation, and supports can be directly applied to the play of young children who are at risk or who have disabilities.

The team's ability to provide supports to children who need them can greatly enhance their healthy development. Play offers a wonderful forum for development. Planned strategies can help make play fun and successful.



Training Calendar

Please visit www.ctserc.org for a listing of all early childhood activities or to register for any of the following workshops:

11/4/2009

Influencing Behavioral Growth in Preschoolers: The “Big” Picture
Michael J. Weiss, PhD

11/14/2009

Introduction to Autism for Early Childhood Teachers and Administrators
Susan G. Izeman, PhD

11/19 & 11/20/ 2009

Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS) Clinical Training
Jennifer Endre Olson, PsyD

12/3/2009

Building Communication Skills Using Pivotal Response Techniques and Interactive Language Supports
John Burke, PhD & Janie Dyment, MA, MS

12/10 & 12/11/2009

Program Development for Young Children with ASD Using the SCERTS Assessment Process
Amy Laurent, EdM, OTR/L

El trabajo en equipo y el juego de los niños

Por Ann Gruenberg, Ph D
Profesora, Early Childhood Education
Eastern Connecticut State University

Introducción

En los niños pequeños el juego proporciona oportunidades maravillosas de diversión, espontaneidad e interacción con sus compañeros y otros. En todo el mundo es natural que los niños jueguen, y por muchos años padres y profesionales han reconocido la importancia del juego infantil.

Según han aumentado las opciones para niños con problemas de desarrollo, se han ido haciendo más accesibles sus oportunidades de jugar. La participación en los juegos de los niños con problemas ha mejorado la calidad de vida para niños con incapacidades y creado oportunidades valiosas para un desarrollo positivo en ambiente natural, desde el hogar a las aulas.

Aunque para la mayoría de los niños un espíritu juguetón es tan natural como respirar, hay ocasiones en que los niños necesitan un empuje y apoyo para jugar. Hay muchos papeles a representar y funciones que la familia y los profesionales en el "equipo" pueden utilizar para apoyar el juego beneficioso de los niños con problemas. Pueden utilizar estrategias de "andamio" que son técnicas que permiten al padre o profesional ser modelo de la actividad que se desea para el niño. Gradualmente pasan la responsabilidad al niño brindándole apoyo hasta que pueda realizar la actividad por sí mismo. Por ejemplo pueden invitar al niño a que los mire jugar. Cuando el niño se siente más cómodo le muestran cómo jugar con los materiales o juguetes. Entonces lo animan a

jugar con ellos. Estas estrategias, así como el guiarlos, animarlos y hacer adaptaciones, pueden ayudarlos al alcanzar metas específicas de juego para la mayoría de los niños.

Niños con problemas de desarrollo.

A veces antes de que un niño haya sido identificado oficialmente como elegible para servicios especiales, los miembros de la familia y otras personas pueden notar diferencias en su comportamiento al jugar. Ejemplos de diferencias pueden ser dificultad en iniciar el juego con otros, dificultad en seguir jugando, uso limitado de temas de juego, o dificultad en interpretar las señales de los demás. Algunos niños con un umbral bajo para el control de sus impulsos o agresión pueden también ser fácilmente estimulados en exceso.

Cuando los niños tienen retraso en el lenguaje, la calidad del juego y otras interacciones sociales pueden afectarse, a veces contribuyendo al comportamiento problemático o al retraimiento.

Los niños pueden o no haber recibido servicios de Birth to Three o de early childhood special education. Los que han sido elegibles para esos servicios pueden presentar cuadros tales como el espectro del autismo que afecta la interacción social, la comunicación, y el proceso senso-

rial. Otros pueden tener retraso en el lenguaje o el desarrollo que pueden afectar su habilidad inicial para expresarse, simular o aceptar como real lo que se imaginan más bien que lo tangible.

Lo que se puede hacer:

- Prestar atención a lo que parece funcionar con el niño... ¿A qué se parece esto?
- Notar si hay situaciones que parezcan provocar al niño... ¿Qué hace el niño? ¿Cómo reacciona?



Estrategias para satisfacer las necesidades de los niños.

Hay estrategias que pueden ser útiles una vez que las familias y profesionales tengan un sentido de la fortaleza y necesidades del niño. Entre estas estrategias se cuentan:

- Articular como modelo – para que el niño lo observe – una narración simple de lo que hace el niño;

- Utilizar sostenes físicos para ampliar o extender intereses del niño, como una cocina para la correspondiente actividad;
- Utilizar historias de la vida cotidiana, como la de ir a un restaurante, que preparen al niño para actividades de la vida real,
- Estructurar experiencias tales como reducir la estimulación,
- Integrar temas relevantes en las actividades.

Las estrategias pueden también incluir interacción informal o actuar como modelo de interacciones sociales. Algunas veces los compañeros se animan a dar apoyo, como cuando dos niños juegan juntos en la misma actividad. Cuando más de una persona, miembro de la familia o profesional, participa, la comunicación es esencial que todos trabajen juntos para beneficio del niño. Óptimamente, el trabajo en equipo identifica objetivos o resultados positivos para los niños. Por ejemplo, padres y profesionales pueden

trabajar juntos para inducir al niño a usar frases de dos o tres palabras para comunicarse cuando jueguen.

Lo que se puede hacer:

- Situarse al nivel del niño al relacionarse.
- Jugar en el suelo.
- Fijarse en lo que hace el niño y responder—aprovechar cuando da pie para proseguir la comunicación
- Utilizar los juguetes que más le gusten al niño.
- Ampliar los intereses del niño, partir de lo que ya hace.
- Usar expresiones faciales, tono de voz y proximidad física para comunicarse con el niño.
- Apoyar al niño jugando con él.
- Buscar oportunidades para que su niño juegue con otros.
- ¡Diviértase!

En general los principios descritos en el Joint Position Statement on Inclusion (Exposición conjunta sobre la inclusión), publicado por la Division for Early Childhood (DEC) for Exceptional Children (División para la tierna infancia para niños excepcionales) y la National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (Asociación Nacional para la educación de niños pequeños), son relevantes cuando tratamos de cómo mejorar las oportunidades para jugar. Los principios de acceso, participación, y apoyo pueden aplicarse directamente al juego de los niños tiernos en riesgo de tener o que tienen incapacidades.

La habilidad del equipo de proporcionar apoyo a los niños que lo necesiten puede mejorar notablemente su desarrollo beneficioso. El juego ofrece un foro maravilloso de desarrollo. La estrategia planificada puede ayudar a que el juego sea divertido y fructífero.



Providers' Perspective

Child's Play

By Mark A. Greenstein, MD
ICC Chairperson

There is an odd tension in the way we look at play. We use the term "child's play" to indicate that something is easy, but we also hear the common quote "Play is the work of childhood," that this is the "job" that children have. Is there an answer? Probably not. Play, like beauty, seems to be in the eye of the beholder, or the researcher. Play can be the way children practice social skills and language and roles, but it also has at its center the idea of enjoyment, of pleasure in whatever activity the child is pursuing.

So when it comes to children who do not seem to be using play to learn, what are we to do? How do you teach enjoyment? Or can you? Can you teach children to enjoy a certain flavor? Or can you just present them opportunities to taste things and to learn to make choices over time, based on who they are?

As I have noted before, so much of what we do with the young children in early intervention is to try to teach them things that other children may learn more on their own. We provide more opportunities and we strengthen their skills so that they can engage in activities that they may enjoy. We hope that with

this, families can build their own and their child's opportunities for enjoyment and for learning. Play is a developmental skill; it grows along with a child's understanding and abilities... and it is something we are all learning more about, both in general and for each child. I must admit, I think I know what play is when I see it, but I am not certain that I do. Play requires feeling as well as thinking so that play is not just in the mind, or in the actions, but also in the heart, in the enjoyment, perhaps in a smile. Thinking about it, I believe that giving anyone an increased capacity for joy, for play, is a worthy goal.



Early Childhood Special Education Update

By Maria Synodi, Coordinator
Early Childhood Special Education

Welcome to the school year 2009-2010!

So, what's new? Well, here are a few tidbits to keep in mind this year:

- The Together We Will (TWW) Conference, which is co-funded by Early Childhood Special Education and the Birth to Three System, will be held on April 9, 2010 at the Crowne Plaza in Cromwell, CT. The topic of this year's conference is Assessment: It's More Than a Tool. Remember to save the date and plan accordingly.
- The Early Childhood Outcome (ECO) requirement, which is the federal requirement to collect and report children's progress data, will be included in the State Performance Plan submitted on February 2, 2010 to the US Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). This is the first official reporting of the state's data on children's progress. The data reported will represent the 2008-09 school year and will serve as the state's baseline of performance in this area. Because a state's baseline data is available, states will also be required to establish future numerical targets. The baseline data and targets will also apply to the performance of school districts. School districts are reminded to be diligent about collecting and reporting children's entry and exit information for all children with an IEP in the preschool grade. Training and technical assistance for the ECO



requirement is available through each of the Regional Educational Service Centers (RESCs). A list of training and technical assistance consultants for ECO can be found on the Early Childhood Special Education web site at: <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sdelcwp/view.asp?a=2626&q=320750#ECO>

- The Birth to Three System has revised its policies and procedures as they apply to children who will shortly be turning age three. Children who are referred to the Birth to Three System and who are within 45-calendar days of their third birthday will be referred to the child's responsible school district. School districts are reminded that they are obligated to conduct their Child Find responsibilities, specifically the activities of identification, location and evaluation for these children as well as for those children who are referred by other referral sources.
- Evaluation Timelines is another area for which the state is collecting and reporting information in the State Performance Plan and Annual Performance Report on an annual basis. Evaluation time-

line data measures the time taken between the referral of a child and the development of an individualized educational program (IEP), if appropriate, to identify whether districts exceed the state timeline for the completion of Child Find activities. School districts are reminded that children who are referred by the Birth to Three System will be included in this data.

- Annual professional development, including training and technical assistance, is funded by Early Childhood Special Education and/or the Birth to Three System through the State Education Resource Center (SERC). Annually, SERC produces an Early Childhood Menu Book of professional development opportunities, and posts it on their website, www.ctserc.org. These training and technical assistance opportunities are available to professionals and parents. Also, this year, SERC will be piloting an online registration system. School districts and families are reminded of this resource and the training and technical assistance available.



Parent Tips on Play

Make time for active and quiet play.

Provide various learning experiences for your child. Children learn through their five senses (hearing, seeing, tasting, touching, and smelling).

Show how materials and toys can be used in more than one way.

Notice your child's signals about when s/he has had enough activity. Young children need to calm down and rest, mentally and physically.

Limit your child's use of television and computer time.

Put your child's artwork on display in your home.

Read stories together and encourage your child to talk about the stories.

Make regular visits to the library.

Provide opportunities to count, group and sort objects and materials.

Participate in art and music experiences.

See a play. Visit a museum. Find free events in the newspaper.

Encourage pretend and make believe play.

Provide time for outdoor physical activity including running, climbing, hopping, and ball playing.

Have fun!



Birth to Three Update

By Linda Goodman, Director
Birth to Three System

The state budget for this fiscal year requires the Birth to Three System to make two changes. First, the annual maximum that health insurance plans have to pay for Birth to Three services was doubled and is now \$6400 per year. (In separate legislation, autism behavioral services will now also have to be covered by insurance companies up to \$50,000 per year starting 1/1/10.) Second, the fees paid by families with incomes of \$45,000 or more have been raised by 60%.

Both the Birth to Three insurance coverage and the fees paid by families are required documents submitted with the annual application for federal funding for Birth to Three services. We typically receive about \$4m per year from the U.S. Department of Education and this year we've received an additional \$4.5m in funds from the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act of

2009. One of the requirements for that application is that any changes to those required documents be posted publicly for 60 days, that public comment be allowed for at least 30 days, and that a public hearing be held.

These changes (and some other technical changes to the Birth to Three regulations) are posted on www.birth23.org under "What's New." Also posted is the notice that explains how to make public comment. In addition, there will be a public hearing held on Thursday November 12, 2009 from 2 PM to 4 PM and from 5 PM to 8 PM in Room 2C of the Legislative Office Building, 300 Capitol Avenue in Hartford. Sign up sheets will be available an hour before each session.

A big thank you to everyone who submitted and helped collect our annual family survey data this past spring. The results by program, as well as other information about our programs, will be posted on the Birth to Three website (www.birth23.org).



BIRTH through 5 news

Information for Families and Professionals is published periodically by the University of Connecticut Cooperative Extension System in collaboration with the Connecticut Birth to Three System, the Connecticut State Department of Education and the Newsletter Advisory Board. We welcome readers' comments and contributions related to the special needs of infants, toddlers, preschoolers and their families. Please mail correspondence to the editor at 67 Stony Hill Road, Bethel, CT 06801.

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Resources

Websites

The websites listed here are not endorsed or warranted in any way by the University of Connecticut Cooperative Extension System or by the Birth to 5 News advisory board. As with all information obtained from any source, websites should be used with caution. Not all information found on the internet is valid, useful, or accurate, and one should not accept information as fact just because it appears on a website. Because so much information exists in such large quantities ranging in accuracy, reliability, and value, there is no one authority who approves the content before it is made public. It is your responsibility to evaluate this information and to determine whether it suits your needs. Selecting sources that offer author's name, author's title or position,

author's organizational affiliation, date of page creation or version, and author's contact information helps with assessing the significance and reliability of information.

Boundless Playgrounds:

<http://www.boundlessplaygrounds.org/>

Hands on Fun with Homemade Play Materials:

http://www.babyzone.com/toddler_preschooler_fun/crafts/article/homemade-play-materials

Toy Play in Infancy and Early Childhood: Normal Development and Special Considerations for Children with Disabilities:

<http://idea.uoregon.edu/~ncite/documents/techrep/tech11-2.html>

Center on the Social Emotional Foundations of Early Learning:

<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel/www.html>



This newsletter is available in English and Spanish. Visit the Birth to Three website at www.birth23.org and click on Publications, or the Department of Education website at www.sde.ct.gov, then click on the Early Childhood link.

Este boletín está disponible en inglés y en español. Visite el sitio del Sistema para Infantes a Tres Años en www.birth23.org y pulse a Publicaciones o el del Departamento de Educación en www.sde.ct.gov. Pulse entonces el enlace 'Early Childhood' (primera infancia).

Books

Bronson, Martha, NAEYC Book: *The Right Stuff for Children Birth to Eight: Selecting Play Materials to Support Development*

Linder, T., *Transdisciplinary Play Based Assessment/Intervention 2nd Edition*. Baltimore, MD (2008): Paul H. Brookes.

McWilliam, R. & Casey, A. *Engagement of Every Child in the Preschool Classroom*. Baltimore, MD (2008): Paul H. Brookes.

Saracho, Olivia W., and Spodek, Bernard (editors), *Multiple Perspectives on Play*

Scarlett, George, *Children's Play*

Sheridan, M., Foley, G., & Radlinski, S., *The Supportive Play Model*. NY (1996): Teachers College Press.

Sheriden, Mary D., *Play in Early Childhood: Birth To Age Six*

Trawick-Smith, J., *Early Childhood Development: A Multicultural Perspective*. Upper Saddle River, NJ (2010): Pearson.

Widerstrom, A., *Achieving Learning Goals Through Play*. Baltimore, MD (2005): Paul H. Brookes.

Articles

DEC/NAEYC (2009). *Early Childhood Inclusion: A Joint Position Statement of The Division For Early Childhood (DEC) and The National Association for The Education of Young Children (NAEYC)*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, FPG Child Development Institute.

NAEYC article – *Play Modifications for Children with Disabilities*: http://journal.naeyc.org/btj/200305/PlayModifications_Sandall_1.pdf

NAEYC article – *Helping Babies Play*: http://journal.naeyc.org/btj/200305/HelpingBabies_Sawyers.pdf

National PTA article – *Rethinking Children's Play*: <http://fun.familyeducation.com/outdoor-games/play/35262.html>

