



## STRENGTHENING FAMILIES THROUGH PLAY - PART TWO

### **Play is Important**

Play has many benefits. During times when we are struggling to get everything done, play can occur in short time frames and, most of all, it can be FUN!

Play...

- helps children to develop physically, emotionally and socially
- is an important way to build strong attachments
- is a natural way for children to learn a variety of different skills (e.g., developing language, problem-solving and social skills, expressing emotions)
- can happen anytime and anywhere

### **What can I do to make play effective?**

To begin, it is important to be as fully present and focused as possible; this helps to actively listen to your child. It is a time to *show affection through words and actions* (e.g. "It's fun to play with you," smiles, ruffle hair, pat on the back, gentle squeeze or hug). This is a time to practice praising, imitating, and describing your child's behaviour.

### **What should I do?**

Play can happen anytime between errands and work activities. It can occur at bath time or bedtime or while you are waiting for dinner to finish. Play can even be imaginary, or pretend play, and will look different depending on the age of your child.

*You can use any materials that you have available. **You do not need to buy special toys.***

**You can set up special times, when possible (they can be short, 5-10 minutes each time).**

**Some points to consider include:**

- Use things you already have – cardboard boxes, toilet paper rolls, broken things or things you do not use anymore
- Use creative toys – blocks, crayons and paper
- Use safe toys – large items, child-safe
- Be aware of different skill levels – e.g. larger blocks for younger children
- Have enough toys – if possible, have two of some things so you can imitate child's behaviour

### **During play:**

- Get down on the floor with your child
- Make eye contact and lean in to show interest
- Let them choose and lead the play - *Let them be the leader!*

Active listening involves “tracking” statements; this is just another way of telling the child what you see them doing. You notice and describe what they are doing. For example, if your child picks up a truck, you say something like “you have the truck.” If they smash two items (trucks, people, other things), you say something like “they are running into each other” or “they are bumping together very hard” or something similar.

You can imitate children’s behaviour by choosing a toy that is similar to theirs and doing what they are doing. Be curious; you can ask questions (e.g. “I wonder if the truck feels angry;” “How do you think the dog feels?” “I wonder what will happen next”). As you and your child feel more comfortable with this play, you can slowly model the behaviour you want them to do, without using words.

Even when we have positive intentions, many challenges can occur. It is important to *work within your own unique way and within your capacity*. Take your time and find what works for your family!

### **Tips and Suggestions**

- Be enthusiastic and really have fun; let your inner child be free
- Praise specific behaviour that you like
- Do not take any behaviour personally
- Take care of yourself

### **Resources**

- Pinterest has many suggestions
- Free colouring sheets are available at [www.owlkids.com](http://www.owlkids.com)
- 101 Fun and Free Activities that Look Good: [www.verywellfamily.com](http://www.verywellfamily.com)