



"It is paradoxical that many educators and parents still differentiate between a time for learning and a time for play without seeing the vital connection between them."

-Leo F. Buscaglia

Child-Led Play

What, Why, and How of Child-Led Play

What is it?

Play is how children learn about their environment and about the world. Child-led play is following a child's interests and allowing them to lead.

Instead of having *your* own play agenda, you enter the child's world of play.

Child-led play communicates:

"I see *you*. Your thoughts and ideas are *valued*."

Why do it?

When you follow a child's lead in play, you establish yourself as a true play partner. You are not the director of play. The outcome: an authentic relationship built on connection, NOT compliance.

At any NLA Stage, ***trust*** must be built before language models will be accepted by a child.

Child-led play increases learning outcomes:
Intrinsic Motivation!

References:

Sensory Integration and the Child by Dr. Jean Ayres
Uniquely Human by Dr. Barry Prizant
Make Play ROCK Series published by The Hanen Centre

Handout Created By:
Arnold, K. and Zachos, A.



How to Do Child-Led Play Therapy

Know the child's play and sensory preferences:

Books, light up toys, blocks, trains?
Putty, climbing, swinging, music?

Provide Space to Move

Movement:

- helps our brain come "online"
- imprints learning experiences
- often facilitates vocalization in non-speaking children

Facilitate play to increase interaction and trust!

Don't sabotage
and withhold.

Suggestion:

Old Items 1 New Item

Have two familiar items available during your session. This is where knowing the child's preferences comes in handy!

Select 1 new item to have available increase play flexibility.

Do NOT have a plan!

Honor ALL Types of Play Honor Gestalt Thinking

Play looks different for every child. When you honor a child's play you increase connection and trust. We are going to line up trains today?

Let's do it together!

Gestalt Language Processors are whole to part thinkers. During play, remember this. Respect that some toys need to remain as a whole and some pretend play isn't to be broken down.

Declarative Language



Imperative Language



Make observations about the child's environment and play!

Decreasing questions and directives reduces stress that comes from expectation of performance.

Imperative language can put a child in "question/answer mode" or signal they need to wait for a prompt which decreases spontaneous, naturally flowing language.

Be OK with Silence

For in these quiet moments we:

- become better observers
- reduce expectations and stress
- provide time to process language models
- reduce auditory input leading to better regulation
- provide "brain space" for creative play and praxis
- allow time for the child to initiate and express what is on THEIR mind!