Supporting Your Child’s Development Through Play

Play Skills and activities: Parents Pack

Play Is Important

Play is the first, and perhaps the most important way, to help your child learn. All children learn through play and exploration. Children with Down syndrome learn in the same way as other children but often benefit from more support for their play.

This booklet provides ideas for a range of idea for games you can play with your child at home to encourage and promote development.
Fine Motor skills

Children develop their hand and finger strength through a variety of fine motor activities. This helps to develop hand-eye coordination and manipulation skills. These are important pre-writing skills and also encourage your child to explore and be creative.

Shaving foam fun

Spray shaving foam/gel onto a smooth surface or tray. Encourage your child to touch the foam. Rub between your/their fingers or spread it out over the tray and trace designs. It is also fun to rub it onto cheeks and nose and look into the mirror. You may also wish to feel and explore cooked spaghetti, jelly, and a cornflower/water mix.

Activities for early years

• Encourage your baby to weight bear on their arms and hands e.g. Tummy Time
• Encourage your baby to reach up when they are lying on their back
• Provide a supportive sitting position so your baby can concentrate on exploring with their hands
• Provide toys that your baby can hold and pass between hands
• Provide cause and effect toys
• Encourage your child to point at pictures or poke their finger into playdough
• Ensure that when your child is holding an object that their thumb is tucked around the toy and not into their palm

Lucky dip

Fill a shoebox with dry sand. Hide some small toys in the sand, such as cars, bricks, animals etc. dip your hand into the sand and feel for and find a toy, then name it. Ask your child to have a go. You can swap the sand for dried pasta etc.

Colouring fun

Give your child a lot of experience scribbling and drawing. Explore different methods such as crayons, colouring pencils, finger paints and brushes. Even painting with water onto old newspaper can be fun.

Dough

Play dough so easily available in many shapes however it can sometimes be too stiff it your child has a weak grip. You can make a soft dough by mixing flour and water and encourage your child to press, squeeze, and roll and pinch the dough. Use an old pencil to make patterns. Find other pressers such as a Duplo brock or egg cup.
Fine Motor skills – Developing the Pincer Grip

Your child’s hand control will develop through play. At first they grab with the whole hand (palmer grasp) which, with time and practice, is refined to a pincer grip. There are many fun activities in order to develop this skill.

Next stage activities to develop fine motor skills:
• Provide toys that come apart and fit together again
• Provide toys that can be posted or fitted into slots e.g. posting boxes, shape sorters
• Encourage a three fingered grasp (thumb and first two fingers) by playing with smaller toys e.g. peg boards or wooden blocks to stack.
• Introduce crayons and chalks; you may be able to buy triangular or special shaped markers
• Use daily activities that encourage your child to hold something in the palm of their hand e.g. liquid soap into hand before washing
• Do action songs and rhymes together
• Do pouring activities in the bathtub or kitchen with water or dry food
• Do activities where your child pushes and pulls, works against gravity and has to exert some force e.g. climbing, pushing open doors, pushing a toy, helping to wash a car with a sponge

Sorting

You will need three bowls and a collection of 2 sets of objects (e.g. marbles and Lego bricks or grapes and strawberry’s. Mix the objects into the bowl and then encourage your child to sort them out into separate bowls. As your child becomes more confident choose smaller objects such as pennies and buttons or raisins and cherries. You may want to progress from one object from the right hand and one for the left.

Threading

Your child can practice threading beads onto a lace. You can easily make your own lace by carefully sticking a cocktail stick to a piece of string. Then tread dry penne pasta to make a necklace. Why not paint it afterwards.

Pegging

Practise pegging clothes pegs around a box. At first your child may only be able to pull off the pegs. With time and practice they will get better a putting them on. You may wish to progress onto a peg line.
Gross motor skills

Gross motor skills develop the large muscles the body that enable walking, kicking, sitting upright, lifting and throwing a ball. A child’s gross motor skills depend on both muscle tone and strength. You can help to develop core strength in your child by playing in a variety of different places and positions.

Sitting

Sitting on the floor and reaching, pointing and stretching will develop core stability and balance. This is a great place to sing and practice action rhymes. Or try rolling a ball back and forth. This will encourage your child to lean out and reach and then come back to an upright position.

Tummy Time

Laying on your tummy is a great place to do puzzles, look at books, and play with small world figure, like the farm. This is good for building upper arm and shoulder strength.

Outside Play

Outside play is a great opportunity to experience different surfaces. Stepping from a smooth, firm paving onto soft, uneven grass can be a challenge for a young child who is learning to move independently. Allow your child to build up movement skills by exploring lots of different environments.

Obstacle course

Why not build an obstacle course with small books for your child to step over and soft cushions for your child to step on. You may wish to draw chalk lines on the pavement for your child to follow, and pretend they are walking on a tight rope.

Animal movements

Get onto the ground and pretend to slither like a snake, creep like a cat, hop like a frog, roar like a lion etc. When your child becomes familiar with the movements take it in turns to call out and move like an animal.
Interactive Play Skills

Play is an important part of children's learning and development. Children learn all kinds of skills through play: how things work, how to interact and share with other children, how to play with different types of toys and enter a world of imagination. Play enables children to test things out safely, to learn about emotions and talk.

Promoting Conceptual Understanding

Cause and effect toys and games are a great way of helping your child understand the impact they can have on their surrounding environment.

- Provide a wide variety of experiences of different objects and toys with many effects and ensure the toys and objects respond easily to a light touch.
- Provide books with lift up flaps or windows to peek through.
- Provide toys that pop up, have push or slide buttons that light up and make interesting sounds.
- Use bubbles, water pistols and other water based activities.
- Provide simple wind-up toys, which are motivating and fun.

Puzzles

Do a simple jigsaw puzzle with your child, if you don't have any puzzles you can make your own by cutting up a picture from a magazine into 4 to 6 pieces, can your child put them back together to make the picture?

Make your own car

Turn a cardboard box into a car – draw on wheels or stick on paper places, use silver foil for headlights, put a cushion inside to make a seat- now where shall your child go on their adventure? Who will they take with them?

Treasure box

You and your child could make up a treasure box along a theme. You could get some pots and pans, pretend food and some soft toys and get ready for a picnic or get some old jewellery, an eye patch and a treasure map and go off on a pirate adventure.

Shopping

Keep old packaging such as egg boxes, cereal packages, juice bottles, tissue boxes etc. your child can make their own shop and sell things to other people. Try toy shops or clothes shops, talk about what they might need and where they might get it from.
Social interaction skills

We communicate and interact with each other in different ways. Learning the skills of social interactions is an important part of play. Children need to learn when to talk and when to listen, how to take turns, how to share and how to wait.

Get Down to Their Level

Conversations with a child are easier if you are on the same level. It might mean sitting or lying on the floor to talk and play.

One at a Time

Rolling a ball back and forth is a simple way to practice turn taking. As you roll the ball, say “mummy’s turn” and as your child pushes it back, say his name (“Jack’s turn”). Once he is pointing or speaking, have him point to himself and say “me” or his own name.

Talk about what is happening

Watch a TV programme together and talk about it afterwards. When they are playing, comment on what they are doing. Wait for children to talk first then expand on what they have to say.

Get Down to Their Level

Conversations with a child are easier if you are on the same level. It might mean sitting or lying on the floor to talk and play.

One at a Time

Rolling a ball back and forth is a simple way to practice turn taking. As you roll the ball, say “mummy’s turn” and as your child pushes it back, say his name (“Jack’s turn”). Once he is pointing or speaking, have him point to himself and say “me” or his own name.

Talk about what is happening

Watch a TV programme together and talk about it afterwards. When they are playing, comment on what they are doing. Wait for children to talk first then expand on what they have to say.

Get Down to Their Level

Conversations with a child are easier if you are on the same level. It might mean sitting or lying on the floor to talk and play.

One at a Time

Rolling a ball back and forth is a simple way to practice turn taking. As you roll the ball, say “mummy’s turn” and as your child pushes it back, say his name (“Jack’s turn”). Once he is pointing or speaking, have him point to himself and say “me” or his own name.

Talk about what is happening

Watch a TV programme together and talk about it afterwards. When they are playing, comment on what they are doing. Wait for children to talk first then expand on what they have to say.

Get Down to Their Level

Conversations with a child are easier if you are on the same level. It might mean sitting or lying on the floor to talk and play.

One at a Time

Rolling a ball back and forth is a simple way to practice turn taking. As you roll the ball, say “mummy’s turn” and as your child pushes it back, say his name (“Jack’s turn”). Once he is pointing or speaking, have him point to himself and say “me” or his own name.

Talk about what is happening

Watch a TV programme together and talk about it afterwards. When they are playing, comment on what they are doing. Wait for children to talk first then expand on what they have to say.

Get Down to Their Level

Conversations with a child are easier if you are on the same level. It might mean sitting or lying on the floor to talk and play.

One at a Time

Rolling a ball back and forth is a simple way to practice turn taking. As you roll the ball, say “mummy’s turn” and as your child pushes it back, say his name (“Jack’s turn”). Once he is pointing or speaking, have him point to himself and say “me” or his own name.

Talk about what is happening

Watch a TV programme together and talk about it afterwards. When they are playing, comment on what they are doing. Wait for children to talk first then expand on what they have to say.

Get Down to Their Level

Conversations with a child are easier if you are on the same level. It might mean sitting or lying on the floor to talk and play.

One at a Time

Rolling a ball back and forth is a simple way to practice turn taking. As you roll the ball, say “mummy’s turn” and as your child pushes it back, say his name (“Jack’s turn”). Once he is pointing or speaking, have him point to himself and say “me” or his own name.

Talk about what is happening

Watch a TV programme together and talk about it afterwards. When they are playing, comment on what they are doing. Wait for children to talk first then expand on what they have to say.

Get Down to Their Level

Conversations with a child are easier if you are on the same level. It might mean sitting or lying on the floor to talk and play.

One at a Time

Rolling a ball back and forth is a simple way to practice turn taking. As you roll the ball, say “mummy’s turn” and as your child pushes it back, say his name (“Jack’s turn”). Once he is pointing or speaking, have him point to himself and say “me” or his own name.

Talk about what is happening

Watch a TV programme together and talk about it afterwards. When they are playing, comment on what they are doing. Wait for children to talk first then expand on what they have to say.

Get Down to Their Level

Conversations with a child are easier if you are on the same level. It might mean sitting or lying on the floor to talk and play.

One at a Time

Rolling a ball back and forth is a simple way to practice turn taking. As you roll the ball, say “mummy’s turn” and as your child pushes it back, say his name (“Jack’s turn”). Once he is pointing or speaking, have him point to himself and say “me” or his own name.

Talk about what is happening

Watch a TV programme together and talk about it afterwards. When they are playing, comment on what they are doing. Wait for children to talk first then expand on what they have to say.

Get Down to Their Level

Conversations with a child are easier if you are on the same level. It might mean sitting or lying on the floor to talk and play.

One at a Time

Rolling a ball back and forth is a simple way to practice turn taking. As you roll the ball, say “mummy’s turn” and as your child pushes it back, say his name (“Jack’s turn”). Once he is pointing or speaking, have him point to himself and say “me” or his own name.

Talk about what is happening

Watch a TV programme together and talk about it afterwards. When they are playing, comment on what they are doing. Wait for children to talk first then expand on what they have to say.

Get Down to Their Level

Conversations with a child are easier if you are on the same level. It might mean sitting or lying on the floor to talk and play.

One at a Time

Rolling a ball back and forth is a simple way to practice turn taking. As you roll the ball, say “mummy’s turn” and as your child pushes it back, say his name (“Jack’s turn”). Once he is pointing or speaking, have him point to himself and say “me” or his own name.

Talk about what is happening

Watch a TV programme together and talk about it afterwards. When they are playing, comment on what they are doing. Wait for children to talk first then expand on what they have to say.

Get Down to Their Level

Conversations with a child are easier if you are on the same level. It might mean sitting or lying on the floor to talk and play.

One at a Time

Rolling a ball back and forth is a simple way to practice turn taking. As you roll the ball, say “mummy’s turn” and as your child pushes it back, say his name (“Jack’s turn”). Once he is pointing or speaking, have him point to himself and say “me” or his own name.

Talk about what is happening

Watch a TV programme together and talk about it afterwards. When they are playing, comment on what they are doing. Wait for children to talk first then expand on what they have to say.

Get Down to Their Level

Conversations with a child are easier if you are on the same level. It might mean sitting or lying on the floor to talk and play.

One at a Time

Rolling a ball back and forth is a simple way to practice turn taking. As you roll the ball, say “mummy’s turn” and as your child pushes it back, say his name (“Jack’s turn”). Once he is pointing or speaking, have him point to himself and say “me” or his own name.

Talk about what is happening

Watch a TV programme together and talk about it afterwards. When they are playing, comment on what they are doing. Wait for children to talk first then expand on what they have to say.

Get Down to Their Level

Conversations with a child are easier if you are on the same level. It might mean sitting or lying on the floor to talk and play.

One at a Time

Rolling a ball back and forth is a simple way to practice turn taking. As you roll the ball, say “mummy’s turn” and as your child pushes it back, say his name (“Jack’s turn”). Once he is pointing or speaking, have him point to himself and say “me” or his own name.

Talk about what is happening

Watch a TV programme together and talk about it afterwards. When they are playing, comment on what they are doing. Wait for children to talk first then expand on what they have to say.
**Listening skills**

Listening is an essential skill for talking and learning. Sometimes children need a bit of quiet time to help them tune into talking and listening, rather than the noises going on around them.

**Attention and listening with your baby**

Encourage your baby to interact with you in the early months by being lively and responsive. Repeat things more often than you usually do. Games like peek-a-boo help, because they naturally build repetition into play and they are fun.

Encourage your child to develop 'shared attention', where you both focus your attention on the same thing, like shaking a rattle, or (later) looking at a picture book together.

Imitate your child's actions and sounds. This is a good way to get communication going, and can turn into a fun game as well as holding a child's attention and encouraging them to learn by imitation.

Take advantage of your child's strength as a visual learner by using pictures, signs, print and other visual cues to support what you say.

**Where is that noise?**

Get a toy or play music on a phone. Hide the music object somewhere in the room – can your child find it?

**Listening treasure box**

Collect lots of things that make a noise such as:
- Crinkly paper
- Nosie making toys
- Pots and pans
- Musical instruments
- Books with noise buttons

Explore! Listen and talk about them

**Go games – wait for “go”**

Build a tower of bricks. Your child waits for you to say “go” before knocking them down.
- Have a race “ready steady go”...
- Push a car to each other “ready steady go”...
- Dance around “ready steady go”...
- Roll the ball “ready steady go”...

**Spot the mistake**

Sing a simple song or rhyme, but make a mistake – can the child spot the mistake?

- Incy wincy spider climbing up a … tree (should be a spout)
- The wheels on the… train (should be bus)
- Twinkle twinkle little… hat (should be star)
Understanding and Comprehension Skills

Understanding is key to talking and listening. Children need to understand what single words mean and when they are joined together into sentences. Adults play an important role in answering the questions children ask and in checking out whether or not children understand.

Shopping games

Set up a pretend shop – they can be toys or real items from the cupboards. Ask your child to go and buy…

- The bread
- The beans and milk
- The apple, cheese and yogurt

Begin by asking for one item, when your child can do this easily ask for two, then three etc.

Posty

Make a post box out of an old cardboard box, with a hole cut in it. Your child can be a “posty” – have 4 or 5 toys to choose from. Ask them to collect different “parcels” for posting.

“Can you post the Spot book?”
“Can you post the jigsaw?”

Instruction time

Children need to wait for you to say “go”. When you do they can run around. But must stop when you say “stop” and clap your hands. Play in different ways by having children listen to an instruction, such as “hop around and stop when I clap” or “jump on the spot and stop when I bang on the drum”.

Puppets

Do what I say: use any puppet or even an old sock. The puppets give a simple instruction for your child to follow;

- Go and touch the chair
- Jump up and down
- Find something you can eat
- Touch your head and rub your tummy
Problem solving skills

When a young child is completing a visual game, such as a shape sorter or a puzzle board, they have to practice lots of skills. They have to look at lots of shapes and spaces and they have to figure out what goes where? We can help by presenting the problem in simple steps:

1. Work in a space where there are no other distractions such as TV.
2. Allow your child to explore the toy for a short time.
3. Model the activity by slowly inserting each piece, taking time to describe the pieces.
4. Allow your child to complete the last piece. Give them time to turn the piece themselves before giving hand over hand help.
5. Next time allow them to complete the last two pieces.
6. Repeat over time until they can complete the whole activity.

Patterns

1. When following patterns in threading, stacking or pegging games you can help by setting out only the pieces needed.
2. Arrange them in the order needed.
3. Encourage your child to look first, then to choose the first piece needed.
4. Then look and choose the next piece needed.
5. Then look and choose the next piece until the task is completed.
6. When your child can manage those easily set out the pieces needed but not in order, asking them to look and choose.

Problem solving in the home

Your child can also practise the skills of looking and sorting out problems around the home. Ask them to help set the table. First show an example and then give them the pieces to do it themselves. You could also ask them to sort the cutlery into knife, fork and spoon areas. Ask them to line up shoes in matching pairs.
Object and picture games

**Picture Recognition**

Gather pictures of familiar objects e.g. teddy, cup, plate, spoon, ball. Show the child a single picture and name it e.g. teddy.

Take the child’s hand and point to the picture as you repeat the word. Then ask the child “where is teddy?" This will take some practice until the child is able to do this by himself. Repeat this with a number of different pictures until the child becomes familiar with the game. Advance this by placing two pictures in front of them and asking “where is teddy?” Repeat with a picture in a different position and then with three or more pictures.

**Object matching**

Gather sets of familiar objects e.g. two teddies, two cups, two plates and a box for putting objects in. Place one object from each set into a box and keep the remaining objects separate. Show the child one of the objects which is not in the box and name it e.g. “here is teddy.” Show the child the box of objects and say “can you find me another teddy?”. If the child can do this give them lots of praise, if not reduce the number of items in the box and try again. Activities should start with a small number of objects and increase as the child becomes more familiar with the task.

**Objects to Picture Matching**

Take two pictures e.g. ball and teddy and place them on the table in front of the child. Name the pictures and get the child to point to them as you name them. Give the child one of the objects e.g. ball and ask him to put on top the picture of the ball saying, “put the ball with the ball”.

Do the same with the other objects. Gradually increase the numbers of pictures and objects.
Self-help skills

As children grow we expect them to be more independent and to do more things for themselves. As parents it is important to allow your child to try and do things independently and to keep them practising until they master the skills. Allow enough time, give plenty of encouragement and be positive. Self-help skills can become a part of your daily routine and here are some handy hints to make them fun.

Dressing skills

When teaching dressing skills always allow plenty of time so find a time when you are not in a rush. Children usually learn to take off their socks first, often starting with socks and shoes. When learning we need to start the procedure such as unfastening the button and pulling trousers down to the ankles. Allow your child to pull them up over their feet. Next time go to the knees, then ankles and finally allowing the child to step in independently. Playing dressing up with larger clothes is a great way to practice these skills.

Feeding skills

Children will have lots of fun learning skills with a tea set or you can use small household cups, bowls, jugs and cutlery.

- Fill a bowl with rice and allow them to spoon this into another bowl
- Practise pouring water from a tea pot of a plastic jug into a cup. Spilling is a part of learning.
- Practise cutting soft fruit like a banana
- Practise spreading soft butter on bread
- Have a tea party and use lots of language like please and thank you, full and empty, more and all done.
- Practise tidying up and cleaning skills
- Allow your child to help wash up at the sink and to dry plastic cups and plates.