




# PLAY

Children need the freedom to explore and play as their development is influenced through the exploration, thinking, problem-solving and language expression which occurs during play.

Play nourishes every aspect of children's development – it forms the foundation of intellectual, social, physical, and emotional skills. These skills support children in being ready for school and their future lives.



 Click link for parent/carer guide to play...

Click link for more play activities...

**Additional Activities**

## Top five tips:

- Show your child you're interested in what they like. Think of enjoyable activities you can do together.
- Think of times when you have seen a positive change in your child's behaviour and anything you could learn from that experience.
- Ask your child for their views and be willing to listen. This can help you to see things from their view.
- Don't give up or be too hard on yourself if things don't immediately change. Focus on small steps and achievable goals.
- Be prepared to compromise and admit you're wrong.





- Face painting using feathers
- Hand massage
- Mirrors (to make eye contact) or looking at one another through glass
- Dark tent with sensory objects
- Blanket wrapping
- Special diary of things they've done
- Sensory bottles (lava lamps etc.)
- Inviting a friend to a special party
- Making their own treasure box
- Badge making
- Bubbles
- Temporary tattoos and nail painting (with permission)
- Invisible string which will always link you together
- Making a transitional object
- Making jewellery
- "Relax Kids" books and CDs of meditation
- Drawing around the child or around their hands
- Peer massage on each other's back (children need to ask permission before they touch another)
- Memory boxes
- Looking after special objects such as a bear or a doll
- Worry dolls (Silly Billy by Anthony Browne) or worry bags (A Huge Bag of Worries by Virginia Ironside)
- Feelings tree



## Belonging

- Sharing stories and walking through a story together
- Cooking, possibly with no recipe
- Gardening
- Construction such as Lego with no instructions.
- Taking things apart e.g. old electrical items
- Painting a picture together
- Messy play e.g. gloop, shaving foam, flour, glitter, spaghetti hoops, jelly, snow (cornflour and conditioner), moon sand, sand mousse (sand, water and bubble bath) mud pies, shredded paper, saucer of milk with drops of food colouring then add washing up liquid.
- Using puppets
- Sand trays
- Small world play
- The Shape Game, doodles, consequences, modelling clay then passing it on for next person to continue.
- Feely bag
- Treasure chest.
- Building dens
- Dressing up box



## Problem Solving

- Using musical instruments to act out feelings
- Construction with a challenge in mind e.g. make something with four wheels or a tall tower
- Categorising and sorting e.g. find different things that are the same colour, different ways to get into groups
- Treasure hunt/ scavenger hunt
- Sand tray – relating it to feelings
- Talking about characters from books and exploring their emotional landscape.
- Dancing/painting to different types of music
- Puppet scenarios to address issues
- Water play with problem solving e.g. how can I move the water/fill the bucket?
- Board games or strategy games such as chess where the children have to think ahead
- Computer games with decisions to make (Scratch), CBeebies games such as build your own park in Bob the Builder land, Simple City.



# Teamwork

- Misfits (you draw the head, fold the paper, pass it on and the next person draws the next body part)
- Box game (joining dots, taking turns)
- Using blindfolds to get over different obstacles
- Sitting back to back and describing something for the other child to draw
- Simon Says
- Mirroring/shadowing activities
- Tasting things with blindfolds on and discussing preferences
- Draw around a child and then stick post it notes when they achieve something
- Den building
- DT projects as a team
- Roleplay/hot seating
- Heroes – why are these famous people like heroes?
- Junk modelling monsters – what qualities do they have?
- Post-it note game
- What if...?

# Therapeutic Play Ideas





## Nurture

“The purpose of nurturing activities is to reinforce the message that the child is worthy of care and that adults will provide care without the child having to ask. Nurturing activities help to calm and regulate an anxious child and enhance feelings of self-worth.”

- Taking care of hurts with lotion and/or sticking plasters
- Footprints or handprints with paint; requires adult to wash them later
- Help the child to relax on a bean bag and become soft and floppy. Wiggle body parts to see if they're relaxed
- Roll the child up tight in a blanket
- Place heavy pillow on child's stomach; the child has to move it only using his stomach muscles
- Draw pictures, letters or number on each others backs
- Face packs
- Feeding favourite foods with blindfolds; guess what you are eating
- Group massage in a row or circle
- Fan after an activity or use cool flannel
- Doughnut challenge; adult or peer places a doughnut over his finger. Child has to make as many bites into the doughnut as he can without making it fall off
- Arrange feathers in a child's hair; the child has to copy the same pattern in the adult's hair
- Polish fingernails
- Manicure/pedicure after soaking feet/hands in warm soapy water
- Arrange/comb hair
- Try on hats, selecting them for each other
- Describe the other person's likes and preferences
- Read each others palms
- Tell me what you will be like when you are an adult
- Using face paints make each other look as young as you can then have a “regression” party where you pretend to be babies or 5 year olds. Do appropriate play from those age groups
- Guide a blindfolded peer around an easy obstacle course



## Engagement

“The purpose of engaging activities is to connect with the child in a playful, positive way, to focus intently on the child, and to encourage him/her to enjoy new experiences. At all times it is important to attend to the level of the child’s arousal and modulate it when needed.”

- Slow motion ‘Follow The Leader’
- Hand-clapping games
- Eyes closed: guess where I touched your face with a feather
- Mirroring: face each other and copy the other’s facial expression or facial and body movements. For a very active child you can use slow motion. Take turns being the leader
- Stick a cotton ball on your nose with lotion; ask the child to blow it off
- Row, row, row your boat. Add the child’s name at the end, e.g. Jack is such a dream
- Create a special handshake – high 5, wiggle fingers, bump knuckles and use in the group
- Hide and seek; the adults make appreciative comments about the children as they look for them
- Divide into 2 teams. Have a cotton ball or crushed newspaper balls “snow fight”. Players may set up a shield e.g. a pillow behind which they hide. Add more structure for over-active children
- Do the Conga to music, copying the actions of the leader
- Make life-size body/head tracings and fill in as a collage or with positive comments from the group
- Winking games: if the leader winks her left eye the others take one step to the left
- Do a job/walk somewhere, keeping a beach ball between you
- 2 person bean bag throwing/juggling
- Peanut butter and jelly (or fish and chips). Say fish and get the child to say chips in the same way, varying tone and loudness
- Foil prints: the child makes a foil impression of a part of his body and the others have to guess which part it is
- Teach the child something he doesn’t know



## Structure

“The purpose of structuring activities is to organise and regulate the child’s experience. The adult sets limits, defines body boundaries, keeps the child safe, and helps to complete the sequence of activities.”

- Place a beanbag on your head. The child has to catch it when you tilt your head. Then swap over
- Cotton ball blow: blow a cotton ball across a blanket to someone else
- Measure the children’s heights on one of the walls
- Toilet paper bust-out: wrap the child’s legs, arms or whole body with toilet paper. On a signal the child breaks out of the wrapping
- Activities that cycle from fast to slow where the children have to wait for a signal e.g. When the adult shouts “dinosaur” the children have to run on the spot etc.
- The group have to move together underneath a turtle shell (could be a piece of sugar paper). They have to follow adult instructions
- Cotton ball hockey or football in 2 teams
- Pop bubbles with your head/your feet/your shoulders only
- The group tries to keep a bubble in the air for as long as possible
- Red light/green light: ask the children to do something e.g. run on the spot, do star jumps. With your back to the children ask them to start when you say green light. See if you can catch anyone moving when you have said red light
- Three-legged walk: obstacles can be added to make this more challenging
- The Hokey Cokey
- Zoom-erk: Sitting in a circle, the word “zoom” is passed around the circle quickly. When one person stops the action by saying “erk”, the “zoom” reverses and is sent back the way it came



## Challenge

“The purpose of challenging activities is to encourage the child to take age-appropriate risks in order to foster feelings of competence and mastery. These activities are mostly done cooperatively with the adults. Challenging activities also help the children to accept structure, engagement and nurture that they may resist in more direct forms.”

- Paper punch: hold a piece of newspaper stretched out and invite the child to punch through it. Praise his strength. Increase the challenge by adding additional layers of paper
- Balance a pillow/cushion on your head as you move around the room. How long can you balance it for? Increase the challenge by adding pillows
- Pop bubbles as quickly as possible using only one part of the body
- Keep a balloon in the air
- Balance on a stack of pillows
- Walk around balancing a beanbag on your head
- Jump to see how high you can reach and touch the wall
- Eat watermelon and then see who can spit the seeds the furthest or see how many the group can get into a container
- The group all hold hands in a circle and then tangle themselves up. Children have to give instructions to help them become untangled without breaking hands
- Have a water pistol fight or water pistol shooting contest with a target
- Feather blow: waft a feather from one end of the room to the other using a piece of card. Who can reach the other side first?

# SPECIAL TIME

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## Giving your child ten minutes of your undivided attention every day



- Try to do special time every day.
- Ask your child what they want to do for the ten minutes. Let them choose anything, within reason.
- During the ten minutes, give the child your undivided attention.
- Turn the TV off, ignore the phone, don't try to do anything else (e.g. cook the dinner, do the ironing) at the same time.
- Have a nice time with your child and use this time to give your child lots of praise.
- Give your child lots of affection during these ten minutes – give them hugs and kisses if they like that. If they don't like hugs and kisses, at least try to show some physical affection – put an arm around their shoulder or touch them on the arm a few times.
- Let the child be in charge during these ten minutes. If they want to change the rules of the game that you are playing, that is fine. If they act silly or show off, let it pass. During these ten minutes, it is all about having a relaxed time. Don't criticise your child unless they actually do something dangerous.
- Don't use this time to teach your child – there are plenty of other times for learning. These ten minutes are just about enjoying your time together.
- Try not to ask too many questions during these ten minutes. Asking questions stops your child's mind from relaxing and going with the flow. Questions are fine at any other time, but not in this special ten minutes.

# PRAISE

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Praise nurtures your child's confidence and sense of self. By using praise, you're showing your child how to think and talk positively about themselves. You're helping your child learn how to recognise when they do well and feel proud of themselves.

Make it really clear what you are giving the praise for (e.g. "Thank you for listening to my instruction")


Sound really positive when giving praise

Don't follow praise with criticism (e.g. "Well done for tidying your room, why can't you do that every day?")

Give praise when you see a behaviour you like

Give praise straight after the behaviour you liked!





“You are putting your toys away really nicely!”

“I really like it when you share your toys with Sam!”

“I’m really proud of you for going to school today!”

“Good boy for doing as you were asked first time”

“Wow, what a wonderful job you’ve done on your homework!”

“Thank you for coming in on time!”

“Well done for going upstairs in the dark!”

Being playful can be achieved by keeping the tone light and upbeat, smiling, ruffling a child's hair when walking past, playing hide'n'seek when they get in from school, or giving a quick hug for no specific reason. Praise can be positive when it is kept specific, short, low key or done with pizzazz – a pretend fanfare, whistle, or victory dance when they get their spellings right or remember to pick up their toys.

Adults should show the child that they love or like them especially when the child misbehaves. This helps to move the child from the damaging effects of shame to the healthy development of guilt. If you do lose your temper, apologise and reconnect with the child quickly afterwards.

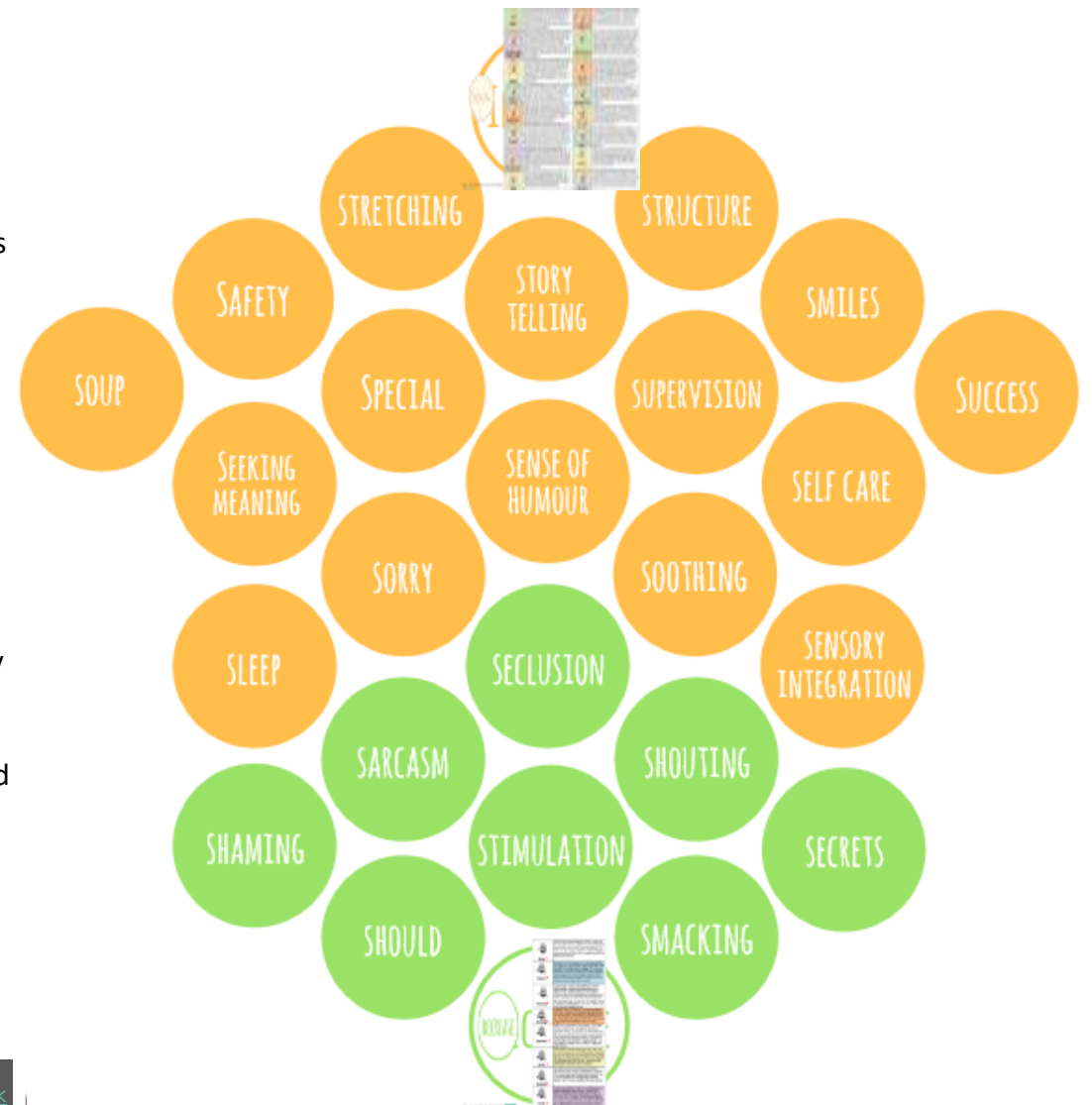
Accepting the child for who they are, not what they achieve is important for children. This does not mean that their behaviour has to be accepted! Remain calm and say something like, 'I can see you are upset about this. That doesn't mean you are allowed to hurt people.'

Being curious and wondering aloud about why the child is behaving in a certain way can be helpful. 'I wonder why you are shouting so much today', 'Isn't it amazing that you just remembered that (particular event) today,' can help a child reflect on their actions and is usually more effective in raising awareness than asking directly what's wrong. A child who has 'switched off' their feelings may not know what is bothering them, they may say something trivial, or withhold the information through lack of trust. Being curious, or making an educated guess (not assuming you know for sure), 'I'm thinking you might be worried about the spelling gala on Friday' can be an excellent way to open a discussion, in which you can listen attentively and not interrupt.

















Empathy is the most important quality we can have when working with children. To understand the child's needs we must put ourselves into the child's shoes. It is important not only to feel empathy but to convey it to the child, 'I can see that this is hard for you', 'Your knee is really red, I bet it hurts.' Empathy allows the child to feel their feelings, not suppress them. It encourages the release of grief and rage which, if buried, can continue to cause emotional and behavioural problems. Adults should empathise with the child before putting disciplinary measures in place and while employing those measures (e.g., consequences). The adult must be genuinely empathic, not flippant or sarcastic

# DAN HUGHES' 24 S'S








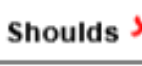
A guide for raising your troubled or sensitive child





 <p><b>Safety ✓</b></p>	<p>Being physically present with a child and emotionally available to him helps to develop a secure base and builds attachment. It also provides effective discipline, helps the child develop skills and reduces shame by letting him know he is good to be with. It is important not to isolate the child or get angry, <i>especially</i> when he is distraught and /or behaving badly.</p>	 <p><b>Soup ✓</b></p>	<p>Accepting food and sharing family meals is a big part of accepting nurture and feeling like part of the family. Feeding your child gives them the message that they are cared for. In the past they may have been left hungry, fed inappropriately, or roared at to eat. Providing comfort food (for Dan its soup!) can mend a bad day.</p>
 <p><b>Structure, choice, routine, rituals ✓</b></p>	<p>Reduce the child's stress by structuring their activities and routines and making choices for them or by limiting choice to 'this or that one'. Be predictable by always accepting and validating a child's thoughts, feelings and behaviours, but surprising with the consequences you provide for misdemeanours. Re-attune quickly after any separation, discipline or dysregulation. Be directive and firm with instructions, while remaining attuned and empathetic to the child's difficulties.</p>	 <p><b>Seeking meaning ✓</b></p>	<p>When you and your child begin to understand why they do certain behaviours it can be easier to change those behaviours. Likewise, it is easier for them to accept your boundaries and consequences, when they understand you are motivated by a desire to care for them and not because you want to punish them. Explaining boundaries to the child in terms like, "because you are worth it", teaches them that they are worthy of care, reduces shame, makes explicit your intentions, and supports your relationship with them.</p>
 <p><b>Soothing ✓</b></p>	<p>A traumatised child who becomes distressed may be more likely to show rage or fear than to ask for comfort, so stay with the child and introduce soothing in tiny steps, remaining empathic when your care is rejected. Regularly soothing a child helps to co-regulate their distress, teaches self-regulation and self-care. If it is not appropriate to hug, comfort verbally or send home a 'hug token' to parents.</p>	 <p><b>Special ✓</b></p>	<p>Every child needs to know they are amazing – it's what babies learn from good enough birth parents. Your child needs to know that you feel this way about them, that by being your child they are unique, special and separate from every child who is not yours. Discover what is unique about your child and accept them for who they are. This form of acceptance is much better than praise in building self-esteem. As Dan says, "<i>Discover the song that is in their heart and sing it to them when they forget it.</i>"</p>
 <p><b>Smiling ✓</b></p>	<p>This refers to the atmosphere of your home/school as much as the look on your face. The idea is to create a space where life feels good, where you focus on the positives, e.g. at an aggressive outburst try, "Listen to you! You really know how to show me you are angry." Keep your interactions playful and accepting.</p>	 <p><b>Sense of humour ✓</b></p>	<p>A sense of joy, playfulness and humour is connecting and repairing. Humour should never be directed at the child but should be about having a shared sense of fun. Humour helps us all take conflict less personally. It is often part of the repair of relationships and helps create good memories. Humour puts problems in perspective.</p>
 <p><b>Supervision ✓</b></p>	<p>Intensive supervision creates opportunities for a child to succeed, thereby reducing the child's shame response and emotional outbursts. Supervision means being with a child as if they were a toddler, structuring the environment, engaging in a playful way and helping to regulate the child's emotional response. Provide supervision that's a gift not a punishment.</p>	 <p><b>Stretching ✓</b></p>	<p>As parents and carers we may need to stretch and modify our childrearing beliefs and practices to meet the individual needs of a child who has experienced trauma. The way our parents raised us or the way we have raised birth children may have been 'good enough', but is unlikely to match the level of intensive, specialised care a traumatised child requires.</p>
 <p><b>Success ✓</b></p>	<p>Children with attachment issues often expect to fail. Help them succeed by matching your expectations to their developmental, not chronological age. If Sasha pinches her sister after sitting beside her for five minutes, practice sitting nicely for two minutes. Stay with her and appreciate how well she's doing. These children also find it hard to learn from routine mistakes. Reducing shame lets a child acknowledge, rather than deny, routine mistakes. Once acknowledged mistakes become learning opportunities.</p>	 <p><b>Sorry ✓</b></p>	<p>Sorry is one of the most powerful words in your vocabulary. Apologising when you get it wrong increases your child's respect for you, models repair and shows that everyone makes mistakes. It also teaches the child that they are important to you. Saying it and meaning it can help to calm the worst battles or prevent them taking place.</p>
 <p><b>Storytelling tone ✓</b></p>	<p>Speaking with a tone of voice like that of telling a story tends to engage a child and hold his attention. He is also likely to be more receptive to your guidance than if you were to use a lecturing tone. Children pay little attention to lectures; they may comply verbally, but there is less true engagement. Ultimately, lectures have less influence on behaviour.</p>	 <p><b>Sensory ✓</b></p>	<p>Because sensory motor skills develop early in life, they can be compromised by neglect or abuse in infancy. An affected child may have difficulty regulating behaviour and emotions, paying attention, or may have problems with co-ordination, balance, movement, pressure and touch. A sensory integration assessment can often help with all of these.</p>
 <p><b>Sleep ✓</b></p>	<p>Getting to sleep and staying asleep may be difficult for a child because of fears associated with night-time, separation, the bedroom, the state of being less in control, and because there are few distractions in bed. Not getting enough sleep can seriously affect daytime performance and behaviour levels.</p>	 <p><b>Self care ✓</b></p>	<p>Caring for traumatised children is hard work and if we don't take care of ourselves we can have trouble regulating our emotions or feeling good about life. We need to protect ourselves and our adult relationships, participate in activities and spend time with people who help us feel good about life. Why? Because we're worth it!</p>

# DECREASE

 <b>Shame</b> ✘	<p>Children often have such a deep sense of shame caused by how they were treated in the birth family that they can't understand why you would want to care for them. You can't talk a child out of his shame. You need to express empathy for his sense of feeling bad, and gently explore how it feels, how he manages it, and where this belief may have come from.</p>
 <b>Sarcasm</b> ✘	<p>When adults try to limit their anger over a child's behaviour, they may express it as sarcasm. Sarcasm triggers greater shame within the child than a direct expression of brief anger. This is because he becomes confused as to how genuine the adult's thoughts and feelings are toward him and he is less able to trust them. When using PLACE, always do so with genuine empathy, curiosity and sincerity to avoid sounding mocking or sarcastic.</p>
 <b>Shouting</b> ✘	<p>Anger from adults confirms a child's belief that he is bad. To change this belief we need to avoid threats, swearing, name calling and angry, negative or ambiguous facial expressions. Children with attachment difficulties tend to read ambiguous faces as sad or mad; they may interpret mild annoyance as rage, and hear adult disapproval as, "You hate me". If you get angry, express it directly about a specific behaviour. Give a quick alternative, not a lecture and repair the relationship asap.</p>
 <b>Smacking</b> ✘	<p>It may seem obvious but it still needs to be said that smacking a child is likely to activate terror, shame and/or rage within the child who may associate the smack with being physically abused in the past. A traumatised child may not trust adults who smack and may struggle to resolve the effects of past abuse and neglect.</p>
 <b>Stimulation</b> ✘	<p>Neglect and/or abuse in infancy causes deficits in brain function that make it hard for children with attachment difficulties to regulate their emotions - even positive ones! These children need life to be low key so they don't become hyper aroused or stressed. When a child becomes distressed or behaviour deteriorates ask yourself, "Was he over stimulated?" A big party, a funfair, or too many presents at Christmas may be as difficult to manage as a problem at school.</p>
 <b>Secrets</b> ✘	<p>Children need to know their history, so don't keep secrets about their past because you think it is too difficult to share. They need to know how they got to be who they are and where they are. Difficult information can create challenges in the short term but ultimately it will build a relationship of trust. Obviously, we need to consider carefully when, how and who should do the telling.</p>
 <b>Seclusion</b> ✘	<p>Time out for bad behaviour is likely to leave a child feeling abandoned and unsafe. We don't isolate children for being sad so why do it when they're angry? Staying calm and present can help a child stay regulated. Avoid lecturing, staring or controlling behaviour. Let her know you are available if she needs anything.</p>
 <b>Shoulds</b> ✘	<p>Expecting that a child should be able to do something because of his chronological age is setting him up for failure and shame. Match your expectations to the child's developmental age and what he can achieve consistently, then gradually encourage a bit more, while remaining patient. Children with attachment difficulties may be age appropriate in certain skills and behind in other, less obvious, skills that can cause continuous challenges for them.</p>