

# Pretend Play

## Why is pretend play important?

Developing pretend play abilities help children develop their knowledge about the social world. The ideas of pretend play come from the child's imagination rather than the physical environment.

### ***What You Can Do to Increase Your Child's Symbolic Play Skills***

#### *I. Teach conventional, or functional play skills*

This type of play is using objects in the way we socially use them (e.g. brushing your hair with a comb).

**Step 1-** Use the steps of joint play routines to introduce an object (e.g., phone, brush, cup)

**Step 2-** Choose a theme for playing with the object (e.g., putting phone to your ear and saying "Hello")

**Step 3-** Use imitation to help teach the action (e.g., place the phone to your child's ear)

**Step 4-** Vary and expand play by introducing other characters (e.g., place the phone to a doll's ear)

- Use this step to act out actions with dolls and animals

**Step 5-** Expand the play into other activities (e.g., call grandma from a real phone)

#### *II. Move from Imitation to Spontaneous Symbolic Play*

- During this phase use objects to create "scenes" with your child (cup, plates, and eating utensils)
- Allow your child to explore the objects to see what he/she will do first
- Comment on your child's action ("Bear is eating")
- Then imitate your child's actions
- If your child does not initiate an action with the object provide a model for the child to imitate

#### *III. Teach Symbolic Substitutions*

During this step your child will learn to treat objects as if they were something else (e.g. using a drumstick as a spoon, using a square puzzle piece as a phone). This type of play helps to promote imagination and "thinking" skills.

#### *IV. Develop Symbolic Combinations*

During this phase, help your child create scenes from daily life they can act out using their pretend play skills. You will begin with scenes that require only one or two actions (e.g. laying the doll to bed, covering it with the blanket). Eventually, they can expand and add more actions, objects, steps and variations (Bear goes to the doctor, making a meal and eating it with pretend food). Make sure to narrate during this, pairing the language you would use in this routine at home with the actions.