



Pretend Play Zone



Imaginative play is critical for children for so many reasons: creative thinking, literacy development, social/emotional regulation, and social skills development. Some children with developmental disabilities will need more modeling and support to engage.

Consider the following to support the pretend play area:

Role Model: For some children, pretend play is natural. For others, it may be more difficult to pick up on social cues or utilize their imagination. Role model for them what pretend play looks like. You can also use verbal prompts: If in a kitchen... “Do you want to bake me a cake? Should we make hamburgers?” Simple questions can lead them to engage in make believe.

Turn Taking: Pretend play is a great way to practice taking turns, impulse control, etc. Guide the students with disabilities creatively... “Let’s put on our apron and chef’s hat before it is our turn in the kitchen to cook! What should the name of our restaurant be... In N Out? Will you be the chef? Can I take the orders from customers?”

Skill Development: For some children with disabilities, self-feeding and other skills may be delayed. Pretend play is a great way to practice this! Example: if using dolls, encourage the child to feed the doll! “I think our baby is thirsty. Show me how you give her a drink?”

Hand-Over-Hand Guidance: If the child struggles with holding/grasping things like a cup, spoon, plate, you can place your hand on theirs to guide them. Example above: place your hand on the child’s, pick up the cup, and feed the doll.

Supplies: You can have easily identifiable costumes (fireman’s hat, chef’s uniform, princess dress), which will help children with developmental disabilities connect with pretend play as they may have seen those images in books. You can also have scarves, aprons, etc. that allow for creative storytelling. Consider varying them at different times to see what happens!

Social Stories: This is a common tool used to help children with Autism conceptualize an event that may have happened or one coming up to reduce anxiety (going to the dentist, going on an airplane to visit grandparents). By creating a story out of the event, it gives them a sense of familiarity. Pretend play is an excellent time to create social stories relevant to that child’s lived experience!