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Barnet Children's Integrated Therapies

Play and Early Childhood Development



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- Four stages of play
- Practical tips for parents and caregivers
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Occupational Therapy and Play

- **Occupational Therapists** work with children, young people, their families and caregivers to support engagement in **meaningful occupations.**
- **Floortime Model**: Dr. Greenspan and Dr. Wieder's Floortime model and therapy uses play to support emotional and developmental growth. There is substantial evidence to support this approach, available at: Home of DIRFloortime® (Floortime) - DIR® Research

Play

Play is a primary occupation of childhood (RCOT, 2023/OTPF)



TABLE 1. AREAS OF OCCUPATION

(Continued)

REST AND SLEEP

Includes activities related to obtaining restorative rest and sleep that supports healthy active engagement in other areas of occupation.

- **Rest**—Quiet and effortless actions that interrupt physical and mental activity resulting in a relaxed state (Nurit & Michel, 2003, p. 227). Includes identifying the need to relax; reducing involvement in taxing physical, mental, or social activities; and engaging in relaxation or other endeavors that restore energy, calm, and renewed interest in engagement.
- **Sleep**—A series of activities resulting in going to sleep, staying asleep, and ensuring health and safety through participation in sleep involving engagement with the physical and social environments.
- **Sleep preparation**—(1) Engaging in routines that prepare the self for a comfortable rest, such as grooming and undressing, reading or listening to music to fall asleep, saying goodnight to others, and meditation or prayers; determining the time of day and length of time desired for sleeping or the time needed to wake; and establishing sleep patterns that support growth and health (patterns are often personally and culturally determined).

  (2) Preparing the physical environment for periods of unconsciousness, such as making the bed or space on which to sleep; ensuring warmth/coolness and protection; setting an alarm clock; securing the home, such as locking doors or closing windows or curtains; and turning off electronics or lights.
- **Sleep participation**—Taking care of comfort and safety of others such as the family while sleeping.

EDUCATION

Includes activities needed for learning and participating in the environment.

- **Formal educational participation**—Including the categories of academic (e.g., math, reading, working on a degree), nonacademic (e.g., recess, lunchroom, hallway), extracurricular (e.g., sports, band, cheerleading, dances), and vocational (prevocational and vocational) participation.
- **Informal personal educational needs or interests exploration (beyond formal education)**—Identifying topics and methods for obtaining topic-related information or skills.
- **Informal personal education participation**—Participating in classes, programs, and activities that provide instruction/training in identified areas of interest.

WORK

Includes activities needed for engaging in remunerative employment or volunteer activities (Mosey, 1996, p. 341).

- **Employment interests and pursuits**—Identifying and selecting work opportunities based on assets, limitations, likes, and dislikes relative to work (adapted from Mosey, 1996, p. 342).
- **Employment seeking and acquisition**—Identifying and recruiting for job opportunities; completing, submitting, and reviewing appropriate application materials; preparing for interviews; participating in interviews and following up afterward; discussing job benefits; negotiating salary and work conditions; and accepting or declining job offers.
- **Retirement preparation and adjustment**—Determining aptitudes, developing interests and skills, and selecting appropriate avocational pursuits.
- **Volunteer exploration**—Determining community causes, organizations, or opportunities for unpaid "work" in relationship to personal skills, interests, location, and time available.
- **Volunteer participation**—Performing unpaid "work" activities for the benefit of identified selected causes, organizations, or facilities.

PLAY

"Any spontaneous or organized activity that provides enjoyment, entertainment, amusement, or diversion" (Parham & Fazio, 1997, p. 252).

- **Play exploration**—Identifying appropriate play activities, which can include exploration play, practice play, pretend play, games with rules, constructive play, and symbolic play (adapted from Bergen, 1988, pp. 64–65).
- **Play participation**—Participating in play; maintaining a balance of play with other areas of occupation; and obtaining, using, and maintaining toys, equipment, and supplies appropriately.

LEISURE

"A nonobligatory activity that is intrinsically motivated and engaged in during discretionary time, that is, time not committed to obligatory occupations such as work, self-care, or sleep" (Parham & Fazio, 1997, p. 250).



PLAY

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Play is the work of the child

Maria Montessori

How does play support development?

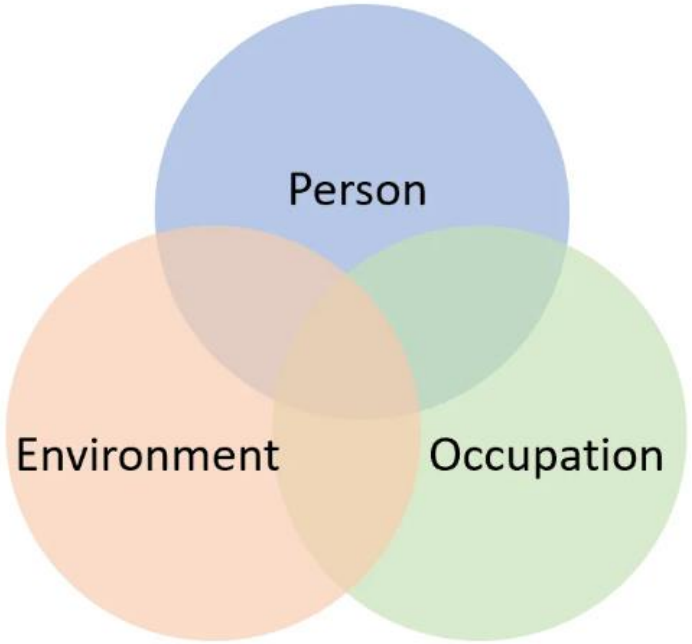
Cognitive Development: Supports critical thinking, problem-solving, and memory by engaging children's imagination and attention.

Emotional and Social Skills: Teaches empathy, cooperation, and communication. It helps children form secure attachments and understand social routines.

Motor Skills: Strengthens motor skills, coordination, hand skills and postural control.

Language Development: Expands vocabulary and improves communication through motivating interactions.

Factors Impacting on Play



Person: Cognitive abilities, age and stage of development, physical capabilities, sensory processing, communication skills.

Environment: Family and culture, resources, accessibility, peers.

Occupation: Type of play, child's interests, likes and dislikes.

(Baum and Christiansen, 1985)

Sensory Processing and Play

Sensory processing is the ability to take in sensory information from all our senses and then organise the information in our brains so that we can respond to this information in an appropriate way.

Some children may:



- Avoid playing on nursery or playground equipment.
- Avoid certain types of play, such as messy play, or seek intense sensory activities.
- Show sensitivities to certain noises impacting on being in a busy setting.
- Find it difficult remaining in a calm and alert state, impacting on their ability to engage in play.

Achieving the 'Just Right Level'

Meet the child at just the right level for them to be **slightly challenged** but **able to achieve success**. At this level they are motivated to engage in play and progress developmentally.

This is usually achieved through:

1. Scaffolding the amount of support provided
2. Adjusting the level of the task
3. Adjusting the environment
4. Choosing the right activity to meet sensory needs and understanding their **stage of play**.

Stage 1: Sensorimotor Play

Children are exploring the world through their senses and motor movements.



Water Play



Sand Play



Playdough



Obstacle Course



Finger Painting



Messy Food Play

Support hand skill development/motor planning/dexterity.

Stage 2: Relational Play

Children make connections between objects and start problem solving.

- Stacking cups
- Shape sorters
- Tipping water from once cup to another
- Shaking marbles in a jar





Stage 3: Using objects in play

- Rolling a ball
- Watering plants with a watering can
- Talking on a pretend phone
- Feeding a doll with a toy spoon



Stage 4: Imaginative Play

Pretend play is essential for learning and development.



Toy animals



Kitchen/Home Corner/Dress up



Role Play

1: Sensorimotor (Exploratory) Play







Consider: Warm water, smell of soap, sound of the bubbles, postural considerations, environment, textures of objects, motor skills such as squeezing bottle.

2: Relational Play





What happens if I stack the boats, or knock them against each other?
What happens if I tip the water table?

3: Object Play



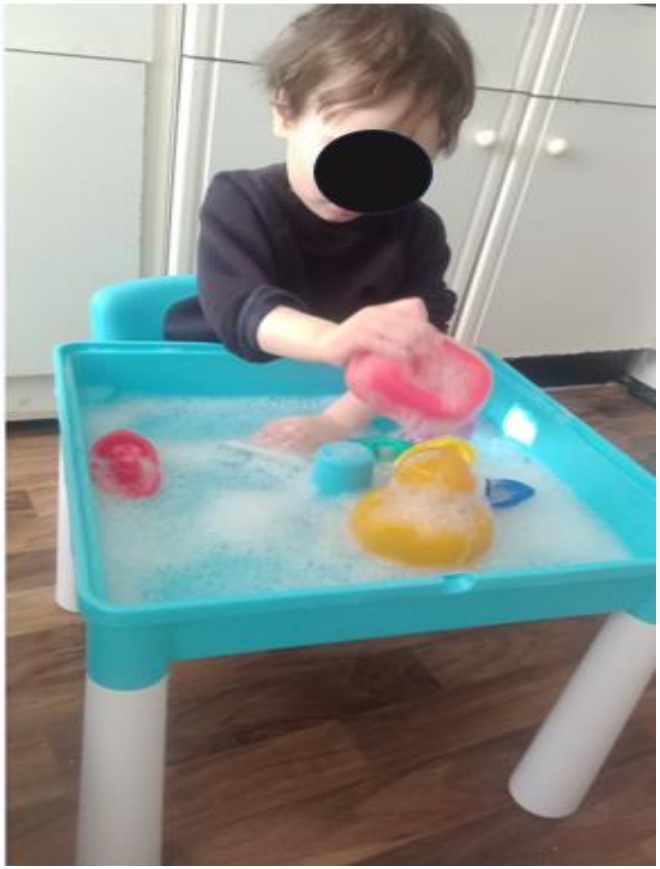
Understanding the shape and appearance of an object (toy duck).

Helping the duck ‘swim’ in water.

Pushing the boats around the water.

Understanding the role/purpose of an object.

4: Imaginative Play



Developing the play sequence using imagination, e.g. giving the duck a hair wash and helping it dive down to fish in the pond.

Problem solving: The duck is hungry, what can he eat?

Empathy, theory of mind and understanding: The duck hit his head on the boat, how does he feel?



Scenario

What would you do if a child was shaking a box of shapes in the corner of the classroom by him/herself for extended periods of time?

Consider – is it ‘sensory’ or is it play? If so, what stage of play could this be?

How can you expand this play to support development?

Quality Play Time – Advice for Caregivers

- Set aside 5-10 minutes of one-on-one time with your child.
- Keep the room quiet by turning off the TV and radio or take the child to a quiet room in the nursery.
- Let your child **choose** the activity (shaking objects) and join in their play.
- Focus your full attention on your child, avoiding distractions.
- The play itself is more important than talking.
- Quality play time strengthens the caregiver-child relationship.
- It provides attention without being dependent on language skills.
- Ensure you have a distraction-free environment for this focused time.
- Consider including a playmate.

In doing so… you are meeting key developmental principles:

1. **Building Upwards:** Meeting each child at their current developmental level.
2. **Using Play:** Using play and playfulness as a primary means to engage and teach.
3. **Following cues:** Providing sensitive interactions by following the child's lead.

The relationship you build with the child is essential for their development.

Summary

- Play is essential for early childhood development. This is backed by research.
- There are four main stages of play: **sensorimotor, relational, object and imaginative play.**
- Consider setting up the ‘just-right’ play environment, then work with a child to expand play sequences.
- Interactions should be spontaneous, joyful, child-led and relationship based.
- **Take home message: all types of play are meaningful and purposeful for that child.**

Signposting

Barnet Children's Integrated Therapies (CIT)



- Accessing our service
- Information for Professionals
- Meet the Team
- Parental Advice and Support
- Helpful Links and Information
- FAQs
- Find us

Welcome to Barnet Children's Integrated Therapies

[Barnet Children's Integrated Therapies]

Free Universal Occupational Therapy Workshops:

[Barnet Children's Integrated Therapies (CIT) (whittington.nhs.uk)]

10/10/2024 09:30-10:30 **Early Years Staff, Parents**	**Self Care in the Early Years** *Aims:* *We will be discussing how motor skill challenges can impact on child's participation in self-care activities such as dressing, toileting, feeding themselves, etc. and look at strategies on how to meet your child's needs to help them better engage in their self-care skills.*	*To Book:* https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/self-care-in-the-early-years-tickets-925932297427?aff=oddtdtcreator
06/09/2024 11:00-12:00 **Parent, Early Years Staff, School staff, other Professionals**	**Introduction to Sensory Based Functional Needs** *Aims:* *To look at what are you and your child are struggling with on an everyday basis. Why? How sensory processing difficulties can present. Differentiating between sensory and behaviour. General strategies on how to try and manage difficulties with sensations*	*To Book:* https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/introduction-to-sensory-based-functional-needs-tickets-925801155177?aff=oddtdtcreator
10/09/2024 15:30-16:30 **Suitable for All**	**Sensory Circuits** *Aims:* *Do you require support understanding a sensory diet? Do you think you can set up a sensory diet? Join us here to get support*	*To Book:* https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/sensory-circuits-tickets-925811766917?aff=oddtdtcreator

More About Play

06/03/2025 12:30-13:30 **Early Years staff, Parents, Other Professionals**	**All About Play** *Aims:* *To gain an understanding of the stages of play development* *-Think about using play to support social communication, language development, sensory needs and fine motor skills* *-How to develop children's play through modelling and appropriate toy selection.* *-Share ideas for fun activities to try at home.*	***To Book:*** https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/all-about-play-tickets-1093559619259?aff=oddtdtcreator

Thank you

Contact Details -

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020 3316 8900
Book a 30-minute drop-in session with an OT. No referral required.

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References

RCOT Occupational therapy and play practice guideline (2023). Available at: Occupational Therapy and Play Practice Guideline – RCOT Accessed: 02.01.25

www.icdl.com

Universal trainings: https://www.whittington.nhs.uk/document.ashx?id=15232