

A Practical Guide to Understanding Onlooker Play in young children

What is onlooker play?



Onlooker play is when a child watches other children play. While they may make comments about the play, they don't attempt to join in the play activity with the other children.

Why is onlooker play important?

- Children can learn how to play by watching the other children
- Children can learn social skills by watching other children interact with each other



Begins in infant and toddler years and continues through the preschool years

How does onlooker play support children's development?

Onlooker play promotes the development of:

- more complex play behaviors,
- talking about play,
- more complex language,
- thought organization,
- confidence,
- cooperation,
- and much more!

How can adults support onlooker play?

- Provide opportunities for the child to observe other children playing
- Encourage the child to watch other children as they play
- Make comments about the play activity of the other children
- Provide the child with time and space to engage in onlooker play

This work was funded in part by the Caplan Foundation for Early Learning. For more information on the Play to Learn project click [here](#).



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