

Social Play Development

Knowing what types of social play to expect across early childhood can help caregivers support children as they learn to play with their siblings, friends, and peers.



SOLITARY PLAY:

begins in infancy and continues in the preschool years

The child plays alone without attending to children around them. The child might explore toys through sensorimotor play or engage in more complex pretend play behaviors as they age.

Examples:

- Infant mouthing a teething toy
- Preschooler engaging in pretend play with a doll

ONLOOKER PLAY:

begins in infant & toddler years and continues in the preschool years

Child watches others play and may make comments. However, the child does not attempt to join in the play activity with peers.

Examples:

- Watching peers race cars
- Watching peers play at the water table



PARALLEL PLAY:

begins in the toddler years and continues in the preschool years

Children play near each other with similar toys in similar ways

Examples:

- Children building towers with blocks next to each other
- Children drawing with chalk on the sidewalk next to each other

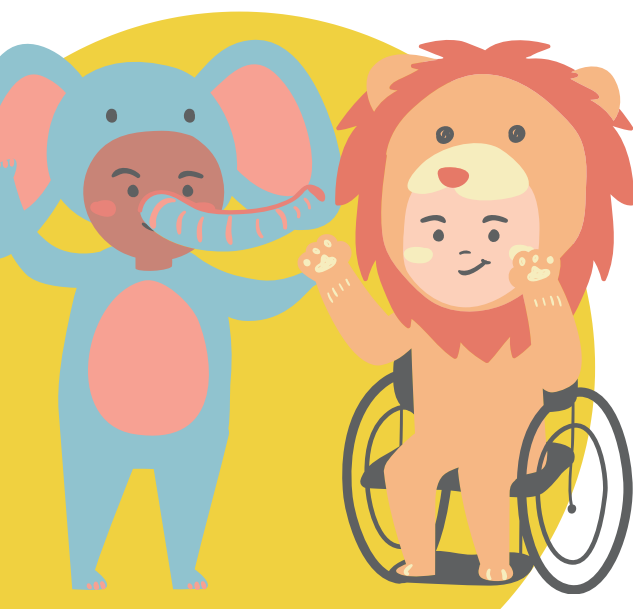
ASSOCIATIVE PLAY:

begins and continues in the preschool years

Two or more children playing with similar toy sets, but play is not coordinated. Children share toys and often talk to each other about their play.

Example:

- Children playing at the water table, sharing eye droppers and beakers, and occasionally talking to each other.



COOPERATIVE PLAY:

begins in the late preschool years and continues with adult support

Two or more children playing together with common materials and a common goal. Children also often have assigned roles.

Examples:

- Children building a city with blocks and each child has a job or specific role
- Children dressing as firefighters with the shared goal of putting out a fire