

# Object Play Development

Knowing what types of object play to expect across early childhood can help caregivers support children as they learn to play with items in new and more complex ways.



## SENSORI-MOTOR PLAY

**begins in infancy and continues through the toddler years**

The infant explores the world by touching, mouthing, etc.

Examples:

- Mouthing a teething toy
- Banging a block on the floor
- Shaking a rattle

## RELATIONAL PLAY

**begins in the toddler years and continues through the preschool years**

The child explores objects by stacking, building, grouping, etc.

Examples:

- Stacking blocks on top of each other
- Lining up figurines
- Grouping cars by color



## FUNCTIONAL PLAY

**begins in the toddler years and continues through the preschool years**

The child explores uses objects in the manner in which they are supposed to be used.

Examples:

- Tapping the top of a drum
- Putting a puzzle piece in a puzzle
- Playing with cause and effect toys

## FUNCTIONAL PLAY WITH PRETENSE

**begins in the toddler years and continues through the preschool years**

The child uses actual or miniature objects in the manner in they are supposed to be used without the reality based outcome.

Examples:

- Drinking from a toy cup
- Holding a toy phone to their ear



## OBJECT SUBSTITUTION

**begins in the toddler years and continues through the preschool years**

The child uses objects as if they were something else.

Examples:

- Using a block as a phone
- Stirring a pot with a stick
- Using a bowl as a hat

## IMAGINING ABSENT OBJECTS

**begins and continues through the preschool years**

The child performs a motor action that suggests using an objects in the object's absence.

Examples:

- Flying an imaginary plane
- Putting hand to ear as if holding a phone
- Bringing hands to lips as if eating



## ASSIGNING ABSENT ATTRIBUTES

**begins and continues through the preschool years**

The child assigns roles, emotions, or attributes to themselves, objects, or others.

Examples:

- Child says:
  - "The baby is sad."
  - "The cars are fast."
  - "The dinosaur is sick."
  - "I'm the doctor."

## SOCIAL PRETEND PLAY

**begins and continues with support through the preschool years**

The child engages in play with others around a non-literal theme or using common toys in a non-literal manner.

Examples:

- Using blankets as a tent and making a fort
- Making a cake with Play-Doh for a birthday party



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