

PLAY AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Alongside their physical, motor and cognitive development, children also move through different stages in their social development, which is reflected in their play. This social development is often described using the stages of play below (Parten, 1932). Just as with the developmental stages above, most children will show aspects of each stage at various times and will not necessarily move through them in sequence. However, keeping these in mind when you watch the child at play may help you to think about:

What type of play is most comfortable and relaxing for the child, and when they might require more support?

Stages of social play	What the child does	What you can try
Solitary Play	Happiest playing by themselves	Let the child know you are interested by: ✓ Sitting with the child ✓ Commenting on what they are doing ✓ Using adult-child interaction (people play) strategies ✓ Having 2 sets of the same toys, so that you can copy what the child does, without having to share
Onlooker Behaviour	Easily distracted by other's activities Will leave activity to see what others are doing Does not choose to join in	Try the suggestions above and: Play alongside the child and describe what you are doing Provide similar toys so they have the opportunity to join in Praise any attempts to do so
Parallel Play	Plays beside others without interactions May use similar toys, but play is independent of each other	Join in play alongside your child Describe what they're doing and copy some of their ideas Provide opportunities for sharing, turn taking and encourage any interaction from your child
Associative Play	May happily play along with others and have verbal interaction, but no attempt to organise the play	Join in with your child's chosen activity Encourage and praise their ideas Offer choices about possible next steps in the play, using the other children's ideas
Cooperative Play	Children collaborate to plan and structure the play May move on to playing games with set rules	As you play, you can show your child how to accept instructions and take on ideas by doing this yourself If your child is playing with others, you could try some simple turn taking games Encourage and praise any attempts to share or cooperate with others