




How Play and Story Telling Can Support Relationships and Communication

Sarah Valeri, LCAT



It is in playing and only in playing that the individual child or adult is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self.

~DW Winnicott

Sensory and Movement Games that Build Interaction and Communication:

Segni Mossi Activities

These activities are created for everyone to participate as they are able. They combine movements, perception, and interaction to make simple activities that help integrate the mind and body and relationships. These videos are of a large group, but can be adjusted for a few children or an adult and child.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xBFqwfgcOVI>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4CHhY8VrN_o

Resources on DIR Floortime Play

<https://www.stanleygreenspan.com/>

Dr. Jan Van Dijk, specialist on communication with children with sensory impairments and communication delays.

<https://www.perkinselearning.org/dr-jan-van-dijk-child-guided-assessment>





Ways We Share Stories in Play

Research: Sensory Research, seeking out repeated sensory experiences, or collecting information on different sensory experiences can help a child better understand and process experiences around them. Parents can support this by repeating the experience with the child and gently adding to the experience.

Repertee: Any communication or play with a back and forth turn taking. This is the foundation of communication. Find opportunities to mirror or imitate your child's expressions and see how they respond! Use sound, rhythms, facial expressions, dance moves. Anything.

Sharing Memories: Notice examples of what your child attends to in a new place and how they feel about it. Create a story together with motions, expressions, and notice the smells, sights, sounds that were important to your child. Retell this story and include all the different things they noticed. It is ok to repeat this story the same way. It will develop over time.

IT IS OK In Play and Storytelling to...

Repeat

Repetition is sometimes seen as a bad habit, but all children repeat conversations when they are trying to understand new information. It also gives the child some reassurance of consistency.

Follow your child's lead

Imitating a child's responses often helps them realize someone is listening! In my experience this led to children adding more variations to their stories and songs and language, as they were motivated to have someone reflect back what they did or said.

Be silly

Have fun for real. Do not worry too much about specific goals. Be in the moment. If it's difficult for your child to know when it's ok to make a little more noise or when it's time to stop, help them create a short routine or signal, or designate a play space where some extra activity can be permitted. This will keep some clear boundaries around play and quiet times.


Be serious

If your child is retelling a serious or stressful story, they are trying to understand it. As long as they are not too overwhelmed, support them. If retelling an event or memory causes them great stress, it would be a good idea to work with a play therapist.





Methods for Storytelling



Radio Theater: Use homemade sound effects to include children of all ages and verbal ability. Sound effects can be made with kitchen items: a covered bowl filled with rocks, a little sack filled with corn starch makes a squeaking sound like walking in sand, use shoes tapping on the floor, doors opening and closing, crinkling candy wrappers, whistles or bangs to emphasize different events in the story. Even if your child is not speaking, they will be learning to attend to the sounds, timing, and emotion in the room. After repeating a simple story a few times, it will get easier for your child to add their own emphasis and contributions.

Picture Books: Made with photos or artwork these books can be used to revisit memories and retell stories according to each person's point of view. Again repetition is a good foundation.

Use sensory play to develop vocabulary: Often when we work with sensory materials with a child we describe sensations as we would experience them. For instance a child with a visual impairment may experience a sensory ball as "bumpy" rather than "blue". Be sure to use vocabulary that matches your child's experience so they have a word that matches what they are noticing.

Record yourselves telling stories for fun or to keep memories.

This brings your child's awareness to their voice and increases their awareness of vocal expression.

