

FACILITATING DYNAMIC SOCIAL SITUATIONS

In this section, we will introduce the concepts of:

Unit 4: Choosing the Appropriate Activity

Unit 5: Coming to Center

Unit 6: Making Child-Directed Play Appropriate

Unit 7: Turn-Taking



Introduction

The next four units focus on skills that encourage and support spontaneous child-initiated social interactions. In this section, the facilitator will be introduced to strategies for creating activities and modifying the child's environment to help them join group activities. These strategies are also helpful in promoting longer periods of social participation and more playfulness with others. Manipulating the types of toys and activities, changing the proximity of peers, and redirecting the child's play will help provide positive play experiences.

Knox (1996) observed characteristics of playful children as "curiosity, imagination, joy, physical activity, and social and verbal flexibility." Children with typically developing social skills inherently adapt their social interactions and activities to create play that is successful and fulfills their need for positive social relationships. Many of the children enrolled in Buddy Club™ are able to learn and use the strategies presented in this workbook. However, they continue to struggle with playfulness. They may have the ability to start a game but are unable to maintain their status in the group if another child adapts the game. They are not as spontaneous or flexible in their play with others. These difficulties may include "negative affect or verbalizations, physical or emotional withdrawal, lack of control over a situation, refusal to participate, preference for adults or younger children, and emotional immaturity" (Knox, 1996).

Children are required to change and adapt constantly with various adults and other children in the context of an activity. It is virtually impossible to identify concrete strategies for the delicate nuances of dynamic play. In giving the facilitator strategies for setting up play, we are providing the children with opportunities to challenge their play skills at their comfort and ability level so they can continue to develop their skills, feel motivated to interact with others, and adapt to changes.

UNIT 4: CHOOSING THE APPROPRIATE ACTIVITY

THE CONCEPT

What is an appropriate activity?

An appropriate activity is one that allows the child meaningful interaction with objects or peers, is relevant to the child's interests and abilities, and provides just enough challenge to generate the child's attention and effort without leading to frustration and failure. A child who struggles with social interaction needs encouragement to participate in activities that may be perceived as challenging or difficult by making them fun and interesting.

Choosing the appropriate activity can be more difficult than it sounds. Adults who facilitate social skills can help children be more successful by choosing toys or activities that are popular with peers, fun, and interesting. An appropriate activity provides an opportunity for a child to "get into the game" and to feel successful with social interaction. Adults may find it useful to watch current television shows or movies, observe the types of toys that appeal to children the same age, and increase awareness of super heroes that are currently in vogue. In addition, therapists, parents, and teachers can decrease the challenge of the activity, so the child focuses on developing the skills needed for social interaction, rather than trying to master the activity.

Why is it important to choose an appropriate activity?

During childhood and adolescence it is very important to "fit in." One way to do this is by choosing and engaging in similar activities that minimize differences. Children are more likely to be successful in developing and using social skills if they know about and engage in activities that are meaningful and appealing to their peers. A child who chooses activities with a balance of novelty

A CHILD WHO CHOOSES ACTIVITIES WITH A BALANCE OF NOVELTY AND FAMILIARITY IS MORE INTERESTING AS A FRIEND.

and familiarity is more interesting as a friend. Often when children engage in appropriate activities they bring something new and interesting to peer interactions.

Problems underlying difficulty in choosing an appropriate activity:

The facilitator may find it difficult to engage a child in social interactions when the social activities are not appropriate relative to the child's interests or skills. Although we assume every child wants to play, we cannot assume every child has the ability or desire to engage in an activity selected by peers. The child may become overly absorbed in an activity (limiting social interaction) or withdraw (requiring more adult support to participate). In either scenario, the child's social interactions are impacted and limited by the activity choice.

Challenges that contribute to a child's tendency to choose activities that are not interesting to others include:

- Obsessive interests
- Unusual hobbies
- Limited exposure to mainstream culture
- Cultural or value differences in the family
- Developmental delays

Challenges that contribute to a child's difficulty participating in activities chosen by a peer group include:

- Poor motor-planning skills
- Deficits in sensory integration, poor perceptual awareness
- Delayed play skills
- Physical limitations affecting access to activities
- Limited attention to task
- Feeling disenfranchised from the group
- Lack of interest

UNIT 4: CHOOSING THE APPROPRIATE ACTIVITY

Social consequences of choosing activities that are not appropriate

Activities that are too challenging, not challenging enough, or inappropriate due to the social context or the child's age can make the child appear unattractive to playmates. As a result, children may be rejected by their peer group, treated as if they are younger than their age, or bullied by others.

When a child requires close adult support to participate in an activity, peers may be hesitant to approach the child or more attracted to the adult rather than the child. In this scenario, the child does not have the opportunity to interact directly with a peer, as an adult is intervening and possibly imposing social rules that may not be conducive to peer-to-peer interaction.

See Appendix A for more information on development of appropriate activity choices.

USING THE CONCEPT OF CHOOSING AN APPROPRIATE ACTIVITY

Choosing an appropriate activity is a skill that supports a child's motivation and success in social participation. There are a few components to keep in mind when helping children choose activities that will keep them in the game.

Defining a Role. In any game there are many ways the child may choose to be involved. Consider the following when helping a child define a role:

- Different roles in a game could include player, observer, and director.
- Some groups choose to rotate roles; others keep the same roles throughout.
- Facilitators can define the roles of the game and choose the most appropriate roles to allow children to participate to their fullest potential.
- At times, we are required to modify the rules of the game to make every child successful. For example, if the group game requires physical skill

QUICK TIPS

- ◆ Observe what is popular with children the same age as your child and incorporate these activities into your play time.
- ◆ Ensure that the child has cultural opportunities to experience things that interest peers.
- ◆ Assign roles to each child in the group based on strengths and needs.
- ◆ Identify the roles in a given activity and assign roles that match the child's abilities.
- ◆ Positive experiences keep children engaged and motivated to practice their skills.

that a group member does not possess or enjoy, that child could be designated to say "ready, set, go," or take charge of the equipment.

Setting a Goal. Facilitators can easily become focused on how a child is performing an activity rather than interacting. Set a social goal for the child. This goal reflects the child's needs, abilities, comfort level, and the family's needs.

- Keep the goal simple. If the child struggles with sitting at a table with peers for more than 20 seconds, have the child stand or take frequent breaks and return to the activity for short periods of time.
- Throughout the play activity, it is important to monitor the appropriateness of the activity. For example, ask yourself, "Is the child interacting or part of the group?" "Is this activity too hard to too easy?"
- Social interaction is not necessarily about completing the activity. It is about the process that is shared with others. If a child has not completed the craft project but has shared materials, engaged with a friend, and enjoyed the involvement, then progress is being made toward that child's goals of positive social interactions.

UNIT 4: CHOOSING THE APPROPRIATE ACTIVITY

Setting the challenge. When the focus of the activity is on social-skill development, set up activities that focus on social skills rather than motor skills.

- If an activity is too physically or cognitively challenging, children will focus on where they are challenged or avoid the activity all together.
- When facilitating social interactions, choose activities that emphasize social engagement rather than working on the fine-motor, gross-motor, or cognitive goals and objectives at the same time.
- Unit 4: Choosing the Appropriate Activity on the accompanying DVD shows examples of children in activities that require varying levels of adult support. In the block activity, we

see that Michael requires a great deal of support to place a block on the structure, and this interferes with Michael's ability to interact with his peers. The demands of the block activity are taking precedence over the demands of the social activity. In the next scene, Michael is participating in a writing task, a known strength. He requires fewer cues from an adult and is engaged with his peers. The writing task appears to be the just-right challenge that allows Michael to appropriately adapt to the activity and participate socially. Assessing the child's skills and the amount of support needed for success are important components of choosing appropriate activities for a child with social challenges.



FACILITATOR CHECKLIST: CHOOSING THE APPROPRIATE ACTIVITY

- ◆ Is the child interested in this activity?
- ◆ What does the child prefer to play today? For example, does he or she prefer a table-top or outdoor activity? Does he or she prefer to play in a large group or smaller group?
- ◆ Does the child require one-on-one adult support in this activity?
- ◆ Is adult support interfering with the child's ability to participate with other children?
- ◆ Can I use a peer to support the child rather than an adult?
- ◆ Is the child more focused on the activity rather than the social interaction?
- ◆ Which role will allow the child to participate to his or her fullest potential?

UNIT 4: CHOOSING THE APPROPRIATE ACTIVITY

INTRODUCTORY LESSON

Use this instructional session to reinforce the importance of choosing the appropriate activity.

MATERIALS

- Dry-erase board, markers, and eraser
- A variety of board games or gross-motor games appropriate for a variety of skill levels
- Picture cards of available activities

SETUP

- Prior to conducting a group session, identify a small group of children with similar abilities and interests.
- Determine the location of the group session. It may be beneficial to host a session in a familiar environment with limited distractions (i.e. a home or small park).
- Plan a group session, one-and-a-half to two hours in length.



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UNIT 4: CHOOSING THE APPROPRIATE ACTIVITY

ACTIVITY

- Gather the group and introduce the participants.
- Show the group the games or activities that are available.
- Ask the group to choose activities and plan the order in which they will be played.
- Write the schedule on a dry-erase board for the group to see. If the children are not reading, use picture cards placed in a numbered sequence.
- Allow the children to begin the activities with minimal adult support.
- Observe the play.
- Determine the different roles each child is naturally assuming.
- Make adjustments to the roles to allow play to continue and to foster successful interactions. For example, if more than one leader is emerging, set rules for taking turns as the leader.
- If a child is choosing a different activity from the rest of the group, attempt to bring him or her into the game by creating a new role in the play that matches the child's abilities. For example, if the group is having a race, a child who does not want to run or compete could be the announcer who says, "ready, set, go!"
- Use a motivating play interest to set up a theme for imaginary play. For example, children interested in trains may like to join a group on a climbing structure if the structure becomes a pretend train and they are designated as train engineers or mechanics.

UNIT 4: CHOOSING THE APPROPRIATE ACTIVITY

CHOOSING THE APPROPRIATE ACTIVITY: PRACTICE ACTIVITIES

OUR TOWN



MATERIALS

- Dry-erase board, markers, and eraser
- Blankets, towels, play tunnels
- Toys and objects that can be used for construction play, such as blocks, boxes, and plastic food containers

SETUP

- Plan a play time for the child with one peer in a familiar setting such as at home or day care.
- Prepare the child in advance by explaining that a friend is coming over and that together they will have a chance to make a pretend town.
- Rehearse with the child possible ideas for things that might be part of the town, e.g., roads, markets, hills, etc.



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UNIT 4: CHOOSING THE APPROPRIATE ACTIVITY

ACTIVITY

- Clear an area in a room that has some comfortable furniture, e.g. couches or padded chairs.
- Show the children the materials and ask them for ideas about how to make a town.
- Make a list or draw pictures of their ideas on the dry-erase board.
- If the children are naming inappropriate or overly complicated ideas, help them think of things that can be more easily made with the materials.
- Ask the children which things they each want to build and which things they think they should build together. This gives you a chance to talk about how some jobs might be a better fit for one person (e.g., if one child is taller and could reach higher or one especially likes to draw and could make signs) and how other jobs might be better accomplished as a team.
- Help the children get started by making pretend roads, bridges, and buildings with the blankets, towels, play tunnels, and boxes. Encourage the children and make adjustments to facilitate successful building and cooperation.
- After the town is built and play is ending, talk to the children about the things that worked especially well. Help them recognize their best skills by saying things like, "You were really good at making the tower on top of the theater. What are some other things you might like to build?"
- If the child has a tendency to get "stuck" or over-focused on favorite topics, help the child make the topic more appropriate to the play situation. For example, if the child always want to talk about dinosaurs, suggest that a dinosaur museum be added to the town where the information about dinosaurs can be kept in one place.
- Have the children take turns being the leader and going to different "locations" in town.
- You can further encourage imaginary play by acting out what you do at different locations. For example, you can say, "It's Mom's birthday. Let's get some flowers at the flower shop."

UNIT 4: CHOOSING THE APPROPRIATE ACTIVITY

CHOOSING THE APPROPRIATE ACTIVITY: PRACTICE ACTIVITIES

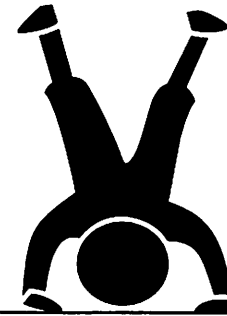
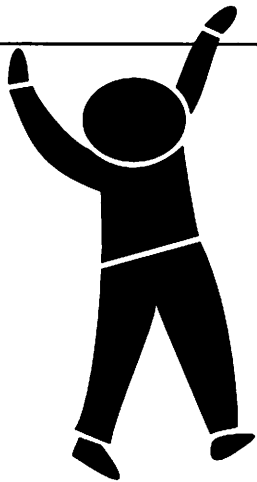
DAY AT THE PARK

MATERIALS

- Sand toys, shovels, pails
- Small toys to hide in the sand

SETUP

- Take the child and one or two friends to the park.
- On the way, talk about things they can do at the park.
- Review safety rules for being in the more open play area of the park as opposed to the relatively confined space of the home.



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UNIT 4: CHOOSING THE APPROPRIATE ACTIVITY

ACTIVITY

- Watch the activities the children choose at the park.
- Help them use the play equipment in ways they can be successful. For example, if a child is not able to go across the monkey bars, see if hanging for 10 seconds and then jumping to the ground is a possibility.
- Look for ways the children can play on park equipment together, e.g., going down a slide together.
- When the children are ready for less-vigorous play, gather them around the sandbox and make a game of burying the toys in the sand and then finding them, using the shovels and pails. Encourage the group to stay in close proximity by drawing a large circle in which the group can play.
- Suggest games, such as finding the toys with eyes closed or hiding the toys for each other.
- Limit the number of shovels and toys to encourage the group to share and trade.
- Look for ways to adjust the park activities so the children can play successfully at their skill levels.
- Help the children incorporate into the play themes special interests or topics on which they tend to get over-focused. For example, if a child likes to talk about a television character, try to work that character into the play with the small toys and guide the conversation using other strategies such as thought bubble and talk balloon presented in later chapters.

UNIT 4: CHOOSING THE APPROPRIATE ACTIVITY

TAKING IT HOME AND TO THE COMMUNITY

Choosing an appropriate activity in daily life

Choosing a community activity focused on a child's strengths and needs is crucial for supporting successful experiences and motivating a child to participate. If your child enjoys arts and crafts and prefers interactions in a small group, consider inviting friends over for a craft day. Make it a regular play date once or twice a month for an hour or two. Encourage your child to participate in choosing the craft and planning his or her time with friends.

If your child is more successful with shorter periods of interaction, consider meeting a friend at a park for a 30-minute picnic. Plan an interactive snack that the children make together.

Be sure to plan specific activities that bring out your child's best attributes. Prepare additional activities in case the children do not want to play what is presented. Avoid activities that your child will want to play alone. Include activities that require some level of social interaction. For example, if your child enjoys playing in the sand box, create an activity in which your child and a friend work together to build a mountain. Limit the number of sand toys and encourage the children to trade, using skills they learned from Unit 2: Trading.

Observe how your child is interacting. Refer to the facilitator checklist in this unit to determine if the activity is going well. If the child is becoming overwhelmed or tired, think about ending the play session earlier than planned or changing the activity. Above all, end on a high note.



THE CONCEPT

What do we mean by “coming to center?”

Have you ever noticed how people linger around a table of appetizers; how people surround someone holding a new baby; or how people huddle around a campfire? We use the term “coming to center” to refer to the tendency to gather in a social way around a central object or activity. Shared toys or activities bring children one step closer to interactive play in a group performing common actions. When children are enticed to a common play space by an appealing toy or activity, they can learn social behaviors by participating and practicing socialization alongside others (Parham & Fazio, 1997).

Why is coming to center important?

Play is dynamic and varies greatly depending upon the play partners, type of activity, and the environment in which it occurs. Typical children intuitively modify their behavior and actions based on their ability to relate to the perspectives of others. (Parham & Fazio, 1997). For every play opportunity there is a chance to adapt and adjust to peers and therefore learn from the experience.

COMING TO CENTER IS A WAY TO HELP CHILDREN LEARN TO PLAY IN CLOSE PROXIMITY TO PEERS.

Coming to center is a way to help children learn to play in closer proximity to peers. Some of the positive social behaviors likely to be seen and imitated in this type of situation include, “the frequency of smiling and laughing, sharing and co-operative acts, eye contact and physical proximity” (Stone and LaGreca 1986). Playing with others around a common goal or in a group gives children the opportunity to learn about the concepts introduced in this workbook. While the initial motivation to come to center may be the toy or activity and not necessarily the other children, the benefit of positive play within close proximity of others can be a powerful influence in shaping socialization.

Factors that make coming to center difficult for children

For a variety of reasons some children may be disinterested or reticent to join a group. For some children, discomfort with being physically close to others can result in a tendency to avoid a group activity. Other children may truly want to join in but not know how to include themselves into the group.

Children may be unsuccessful in joining a shared object or activity because of:

- Irritability or discomfort due to heightened responsiveness to sensory aspects of an experience such as noise from voices and toys, odors, and touch from people leaning or reaching. This may be especially challenging for children when they are in less predictable, noisy, and/or crowded environments.
- Poor awareness of their body position in space
- Poor spatial awareness of depth and of the distance between themselves and other children
- Lack of awareness that peers are gathering around an activity
- Poor ability to communicate the desire to join in and to maintain interactions
- Difficulty with motor-planning skills that allow for initiating, sequencing, and timing of shared actions
- Poor ideas of possible ways to play and interact
- Shyness or other personality traits that lead to a tendency to want to play alone
- Lack of exposure to peers
- Lack of experience in successful interactive experiences

UNIT 5: COMING TO CENTER

Social consequences for children who have difficulty with coming to center

Children who are not able to easily and readily join their peers around shared toys and activities are at risk for becoming increasingly socially isolated. They may miss many of the subtle yet important lessons children learn within the day-to-day exchanges that occur during play. Other children may not know they are interested in playing with them. If others misunderstand their actions, they may also be ostracized or teased by the group.

A child who is struggling with social skills needs even more practice at play to learn how to act with others. Coming to center offers opportunities for feeling part of the group due to proximity, imitation, and role modeling.

See Appendix A for more information on the development of intentional engagement.

ENCOURAGING AND SUPPORTING CHILDREN FOR COMING TO CENTER

There are many simple ways to bring a child to center. Some important ideas to keep in mind for successful facilitation of bringing children to center include:

- Provide a large central toy or activity that is appropriate for the children's age level and interests.
- Toys that are especially effective are large items that can be incorporated with smaller, related toys. Examples include a large volcano as the center item with two or three toy dinosaurs for each child or a rescue hero tower with two or three action figures for each child
- A large structure such as a dollhouse or construction set is ideal for capturing the children's attention and interest while still giving them room to play creatively next to each other.
- Dramatic play can be also be used to help chil-

dren come to center, e.g., using a table or a large cardboard box to create a puppet theatre with each child having one puppet to facilitate communication and play between the children.

- Dress-up is especially fun when there is a stage on which to perform. The stage, which can be a large blanket, a square drawn with chalk, or a roped-off area, becomes a natural center around which children can gather.
- Your creativity influences the children's creativity.
- A large art project is another simple way to have all the children join in one area. A large poster-board picture with a variety of markers, crayons, or paint can keep children doing the "same thing at the same time," and at their own ability levels. This is a great time to practice trading, too!
- Cooking is also a great way to have children participate in a common activity. Having the children pour ingredients and stir is helpful for turn taking. They can also work together to decorate cookies, place toppings, and assemble servings, giving compliments to each other at the same time.
- For active children, building a pretend fire with a pop-up tent nearby can be a great way to come to center. Have the children shred red, orange, and yellow paper into a pile. Place a flashlight under the paper fire and flip off the lights. Then gather around the fire to talk or have a snack. Use the tent as another center that can serve as a social meeting place.

QUICK TIPS

- ◆ Use paper bags to pre-sort equal amounts of small, related toys.
- ◆ Give each child a bag and tell them, "These are your toys to play with. If you see something else that you want, you must trade with your friend."
- ◆ Use masking tape to help the children know where their bodies should be.
- ◆ Draw a large circle or square with chalk or in the sand to help the child stay in close proximity to her peers.



FACILITATOR CHECKLIST: COMING TO CENTER

Use the following questions to determine how to help a child come to center:

- ◆ What level of play skill does the child demonstrate?
- ◆ Is the child aware of peers playing around him or her?
- ◆ How does he or she react to children in close proximity? Agitated? Defensive? Unaware?
- ◆ Does the child know how to trade?
- ◆ Does the child spontaneously join peers in play?
- ◆ What motivates the child to get closer to peers?
- ◆ Does the child demonstrate the understanding of personal space? Body talk?
- ◆ Are there opportunities for this child to practice throughout the day? Where? When? With whom?

UNIT 5: COMING TO CENTER

INTRODUCTORY LESSON: FRIENDSHIP MIX

Use this group activity to discuss and reinforce coming to center concepts while preparing a snack.

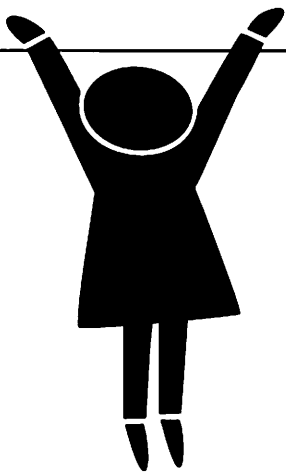
MATERIALS*

- 1 cup of M&M's®
- 1 cup of peanuts
- 1 cup of crunchy cereal squares
- 1 cup of raisins
- Any other 'trail mix' type goodies (dried fruit, cashews, Cheerios®)
- Large bowl
- Large spoon
- Small paper cups

**adapt ingredients based on dietary needs and potential allergies*

SETUP

- Set out the ingredients on a table in individual containers



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ACTIVITY

- Ask the children to identify the food item from those available that they wish to contribute to the mix.
- If more than one child favors the same item, each can pour a portion of the item into the bowl.
- Open a discussion about how all of these items will taste great together and that it's a good thing to have many different flavors and textures: crunchy-sweet, salty-crunchy, dry-crunchy, sweet-chewy.
- Compare the various flavors and textures to the differences which exist between children. Everybody is unique, like different flavors and that's what makes friendships fun.
- Encourage the children to come up with other examples of how it's good to be different from each other. Ask the children to identify something that they do well. Talk about how these special abilities make them each special.
- Give each child a turn pouring an ingredient into the bowl and stirring the mix. Point out that they are taking turns.
- Give each child a paper cup of Friendship Mix. Encourage them to try all the items. Point out how this mix is like a classroom with a variety of children. Children have different interests and skills but everyone is part of the class.

UNIT 5: COMING TO CENTER

COMING TO CENTER: PRACTICE ACTIVITIES

VEHICLES AND MOUNTAIN OR TUNNEL

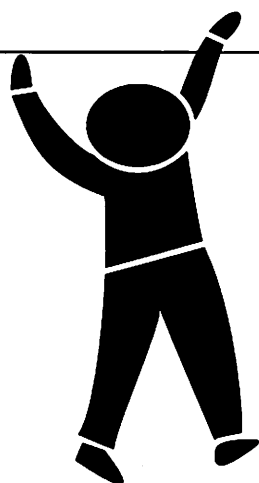


MATERIALS

- Large tent or tunnel
- Masking tape
- Vehicles, two to four vehicles for each child
- Paper bags, one for each child

SETUP

- Tape a large circle or square on the floor to identify the play space. It needs to be large enough for the tent or tunnel with a minimum of two feet of moving space in all directions around each child.
- Pre-sort vehicles in bags so that the children have an equal number (two to four items each).
- Keep the tent or tunnel out of the children's view until you introduce it so they are not distracted by it.



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ACTIVITY

- Ask children to sit in the designated play space.
- Tell them, "I have a special bag for each of you. Inside are toys just for you. If you want a toy from a friend, you have to trade." (Review the rules to trading if necessary.)
- Allow children to play with the vehicles for a few minutes.
- Say, "I am going to put something really special (you can use age-appropriate terms such as "cool," "awesome," or "amazing") in the middle. It is something you can all play with together."
- Place the tent or tunnel in the middle and observe the children coming to center.
- Allow the play to continue while shifting the children to all face the large item.
- Praise the children for all playing with the same items. "Look. You are all playing in the same play space with the same toys. That's what friends do."
- Continue to reinforce the desired behaviors.
- When the children appear to be losing interest, end the activity. It is important to end the social interaction on a high note to leave a positive impression.

UNIT 5: COMING TO CENTER

COMING TO CENTER: PRACTICE ACTIVITIES

SAND PLAY OUTDOORS IN THE COMMUNITY



MATERIALS

- A variety of sand toys

SETUP

- Draw a large circle in the sand and place the sand toys in the middle.

ACTIVITY

- Remind the children that play “is when you are doing something fun with others.”
- Allow play to occur without prompting.
- Observe the children and identify who may need your help.
- Provide as little direction as possible so that the child can become more independent.
- Give cues to the child such as, “Look at _____ building a castle,” “I see sand toys over there,” “Find a friend,” or “What are you playing?” You can also provide nonverbal cues such as handing the child a shovel and bucket without saying anything.
- If the child requires more direction to participate, point out the play space and ask him to play within it.
- Reinforce participation based on the child’s level. If the child is fairly independent in play, wait until the end of the activity to provide reinforcement. If the child needs prompts throughout, provide subtle reinforcements throughout, such as whispering, “nice playing with others,” giving a smile and a nod, or showing a thumbs-up sign.



**REAL-
WORLD
STRATEGIES**

TAKING IT HOME AND TO THE COMMUNITY **Coming to center in daily life**

Joining a group and coming to center may be intimidating in community settings like the playground or the community swimming pool. It can be difficult to join a group already doing something together. To come to center successfully in the community, children need to know how to interrupt a group to ask to join, show interest in the existing activity, understand what is important to those already participating, and figure out what to do once you join the group.

When opportunities for coming to center arise in community settings, bring the child's attention to ways in which they are coming to center to play with peers. For example, when all the children climb on the same play structure at the park, reinforce this natural coming to center by saying, "I see that you all are playing on the same thing at the same time. You are playing together!"

During community activities it is especially helpful to use familiar phrases to help the child take part. Phrases that are helpful include, "Find your friends," "Do what your friends are doing," "What are your friends doing?" and "You can do that, too." Other opportunities may arise at places such as the beach, when children are working together to dig a large hole; at the zoo, when looking at or petting the same animal; and at school, when children are drawing in the same area with chalk or all drawing parts of a larger picture. Look for creative ways to bring children together during craft, cooking, and outdoor activities. You can also provide the child interesting objects or activities that make him or her the "center." For example, the child may hold a basket of instruments, invite the other children to take one, and then all play them along with a favorite music CD.

UNIT 6: MAKING CHILD-DIRECTED PLAY APPROPRIATE

THE CONCEPT

What is child-directed play?

Child-directed play is chosen by the child or guided by the child's areas of interest and motivation. Most children will naturally want to play in ways that are of greatest interest or fun for them. To blend social interaction with child-directed play, facilitators need to take note of what motivates each child and look for ways in which children can choose activities and direct their play in collaboration with peers.

Why is it important to make child-directed play appropriate?

Generally, social interaction is internally motivated in nature. In other words, we seek social interactions for the purpose of being with others. Play with others is most meaningful to a child when it is internally motivated. When the play activity is chosen by the child, he or she is more likely to remain interested and engaged. These meaningful activities motivate children to further

PLAY WITH OTHERS IS MOST MEANINGFUL TO A CHILD WHEN IT IS INTERNALLY MOTIVATED.

participate and find new ways to pursue more fun and interesting activities (Yerxa et al., 1989). In Unit 4, we discussed choosing an appropriate activity and setting goals for the play session. We will want to keep in mind that our goals focus on the child's engagement and participation in an activity. In this unit, when we discuss an activity, we are focused on the interaction the activity promotes rather than the activity itself. When we allow the child to direct the play, we are able to keep the play activity at a level that will maintain the child's engagement and interest and we are also tapping into the internal meaning and motivation of play. The child will be more likely to independently generalize an activity when it is meaningful.

Problems that interfere with appropriate child-directed play

Children who struggle with directing their own play may have challenges such as:

- Difficulty with initiating actions
- Decreased ability to form ideas about how to play
- Limited drive toward doing something new or novel
- Self-consciousness about poor coordination
- Limited memory needed for remembering how to play games
- Delayed speech and language abilities needed to get attention and to express ideas
- Fixation on selective themes and/or inflexibility with change in set routines

The degree to which children direct their own play can also be affected by experiential and environmental conditions such as:

- Limited exposure to novel toys and objects
- Excessive structure and/or interference from adults during playtime
- Overuse of external rewards and feedback that may result in limited intrinsic motivation for play
- Lack of peers or role models who provide motivation for child-directed interactions

Social consequences of limited, or inappropriate child-directed play

Children who have difficulty self-directing play or playing in ways that are appropriate to the play setting may choose games that are not of interest to their peers. They may find themselves isolated by peers or choose to play by themselves.

When a play activity is not internally motivating:

- The child may struggle to engage in the activity
- The play may not be appropriate for that child
- A play activity that is adult directed may keep the child's interest for a period of time. How-

UNIT 6: MAKING CHILD-DIRECTED PLAY APPROPRIATE

ever, the child may be less likely to reproduce the activity or interaction independently because it may not be an activity in which they are internally motivated to participate.

See Appendix A for more information on the development of play.

USING THE CONCEPT OF MAKING CHILD-DIRECTED PLAY APPROPRIATE

Often the children with whom we work choose activities that are solitary or do not promote social interaction. As facilitators, it is essential to look for even the smallest opportunity to incorporate social interactions. Look for moments to create parallel play or trade toys while continuing to incorporate the child's choices in the activity.

Try to create an activity that makes the child's interest in it attractive to the group. For example, if a child is fixated on elephants, introduce imaginative play around safari or circus themes. Assist the child in demonstrating his or her knowledge and expand the play ideas so it becomes more interesting for others. Engaging with other children and broadening the child's special interest make it possible to be more socially appropriate in the future.

Unit 6 of the accompanying DVD provides guidance for facilitating appropriate child-directed play. For example, we see Caitlin driving a toy car on a painted mural. This activity chosen by Caitlin did not promote interaction with her friends. In fact, when one of the therapists attempted to intervene and stop the activity, Caitlin ignored her and continued her activity. As we take time

to observe Caitlin's play choice, we see an element of child-directed play as she has turned the mural into a road on which to drive her car. We view this as an opportunity to make her self-directed choice more appropriate to allow social interaction. The therapist brings in a large piece of paper on which to draw a road for Caitlin's car. She acknowledges Caitlin's idea and attempts to attract her attention and play to the floor where other children can gather and participate.

As Caitlin's interest in the modified activity grows, the therapist incorporates a peer and asks Caitlin to provide a car for her friend to drive on the road. At this point, the play can continue with increasing opportunities for social interaction.

To facilitate appropriate child-directed play remember to:

- Observe what the child is playing
- Look for opportunities to facilitate a social interaction
- Bring the child to center
- Limit options to encourage trading or social interaction

QUICK TIPS

- ◆ Observe what the child chooses to play.
- ◆ Find opportunities to join in the play with the child as a means to learn the child's rules to the game.
- ◆ Bring the child to center where other children can gather.
- ◆ Give other children similar toys.

INTRODUCTORY LESSON: FREE PLAY

MATERIALS

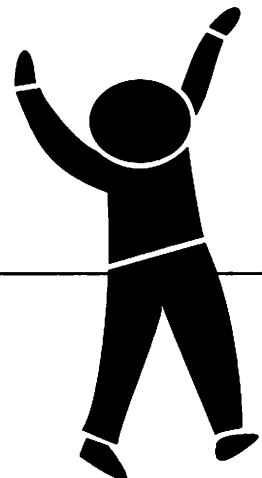
- Crayons
- Paper
- Dress up clothes
- Toy cars
- Blocks

SETUP

- Set up a variety of activities in different locations in the room.

ACTIVITY

- Encourage the child to pick an activity.
- Observe how the child plays with the toys and note areas of skill and areas of need.
- If the child plays alone or moves away from the group, look for an opportunity to encourage social interaction.
- Bring the child to center. Define the play space.
- Provide other children with similar toys.
- Limit options to encourage trading.
- Sit with the group and model play.
- Explain the rules. Some children require rules to be explained clearly to understand what the game is about.
- Try to expand upon and generalize specific and idiosyncratic interests of individual children.



UNIT 6: MAKING CHILD-DIRECTED PLAY APPROPRIATE



FACILITATOR CHECKLIST: MAKING CHILD-DIRECTED PLAY APPROPRIATE

- ◆ What is the child playing?
- ◆ Does the child use toys for their intended use?
- ◆ Can I incorporate another child?
- ◆ Do I need to modify the activity to incorporate another child?
- ◆ Can I bring the child to center?
- ◆ How can I encourage the child to acknowledge a peer?
- ◆ Does the child have a special interest that I can use in more generalized play with others?

UNIT 6: MAKING CHILD-DIRECTED PLAY APPROPRIATE

FACILITATING APPROPRIATE CHILD-DIRECTED PLAY: PRACTICE ACTIVITIES

PLAYGROUND GROUP

MATERIALS

- Equipment for popular playground game
- Dry-erase board and markers

SETUP

- Observe popular games on the child's school playground.
- Learn the basic rules to the games.
- Gather a group of children who struggle with participation on the playground.

ACTIVITY

- Discuss games they would like to learn.
- Meet 10–15 minutes before recess begins.
- With the group, write the first three rules to the game on the dry-erase board.
- Practice where to stand and how to play.
- Post the rules by the court.
- Continue playing as recess starts.
- If new children join the game, review the rules.
- Explain that the rules help the group learn how to play.
- If newcomers have new rules to add, add the rules gradually as play progresses and the group is comfortable.
- Encourage the group to play together during other recesses and on other days.
- Share information about the group's games and rules with an adult who supervises during recess.
- Try to anticipate how specific interests might distract or dominate the play and be ready to facilitate broader play themes.

UNIT 6: MAKING CHILD-DIRECTED PLAY APPROPRIATE

FACILITATING APPROPRIATE CHILD-DIRECTED PLAY: PRACTICE ACTIVITIES

BUILDING A CITY

MATERIALS

- Masking tape
- Chalk
- Large piece of butcher paper
- Building blocks
- Crayons or markers
- Dolls or action figures
- Toy cars

SETUP

- Identify the children's interests prior to the activity and use toys that relate to their interests and abilities.
- Mark off a large area on the floor with masking tape or chalk.
- Set up the butcher paper and markers.
- Draw a road.
- Build a small building with blocks and leave an unfinished building on the paper around the drawn road.
- Put out enough dolls, action figures, or cars so each child has one toy.
- Put a car on the road.



(continue with activity on next page)

UNIT 6: MAKING CHILD-DIRECTED PLAY APPROPRIATE

ACTIVITY

- As the children arrive, help them identify the available play materials. You could say, "Today we are building a city where you can draw, build, or play with cars. Take a look and see if you want to play."
- Observe the children to determine how they are playing with the available toys.
- If a child has moved a toy outside of the marked-off space, cue him or her to return to the space where the group is playing.
- Encourage the children to share and trade the limited toys you provided. There should be enough for everyone to have something.
- If two or more children are playing in parallel, encourage them to work on something together. For example, if they are independently building their own towers, encourage them to work together to build one big tower with all their blocks.
- Use costumes or imaginary play to further motivate the group.

UNIT 6: MAKING CHILD-DIRECTED PLAY APPROPRIATE

TAKING IT HOME AND TO THE COMMUNITY **Appropriate child-directed play in daily life**

Preparing children for what to expect in a community location is key to successful participation. If an activity is familiar, children are more likely to participate. Discuss the activities available and the social skills they can use to get in the game (e.g. body talk, turn taking, etc.). Giving children opportunities to take breaks from social participation also allows for more appropriate interactions. If an activity becomes overwhelming or too challenging, allow children to excuse themselves for a brief break. Discuss appropriate ways and places to take a break. For example, if the children are at a fast-food restaurant with an indoor play facility, they could tell their friends they are going to get drinks.

Setting up play activities on a playground for a variety of skill levels ensures that all children have an opportunity to play. Consider setting up a number of courts, based on skill level, with popular ball games. For example, if handball is popular on the playground, be sure to set up “A-level” courts for highly skilled students and “B-

level” courts for less competitive players. Perhaps there is a “coaches court” where skilled players have the opportunity to teach new players who wish to learn. Initially, this concept would need monitoring by an adult. However, as this becomes part of the school culture less monitoring may be necessary.

Discuss the activities a child chooses before arriving at the community location. If anticipating activities is difficult, when the child arrives take three to five minutes to create a play plan. Ask the child what he or she will do and in which order. If peers are available, ask which friend the child would like to play with in each activity. It may be a good idea to choose one activity to play alone to allow for a break from social interaction.



THE CONCEPT

Why is turn-taking important?

Turn-taking allows a child to interact with others in a way that maintains equality among the players. Turn-taking promotes cooperative play skills and teamwork, which are important developmental skills that support successful interactions when playing on a team or working in groups.

By allowing another child to take a turn, you are acknowledging his or her presence and respecting the contribution he or she makes to the game. Acknowledgment and respect of an individual are important ways to demonstrate friendship. Children who demonstrate these qualities are likely to be included as playmates.

When turn-taking is a problem

Some children do not observe and interpret a situation accurately. They may miss important information when confronted by certain people, things, or situations in their environment. They may be unaware that children are taking turns. Children who require

support to take turns may have:

- Difficulty in observing the social context to see that other children are waiting for a turn
- Poor body awareness or visual-spatial concerns (e.g., They may not notice the customary spacing used among a group of children.)
- Attention deficits or difficulty with organization of behavior causing difficulty with assessing and following the order of turn-taking

TURN-TAKING PROMOTES
COOPERATIVE PLAY SKILLS
AND TEAMWORK.

Social consequences of difficulty in turn-taking

Children who struggle with turn-taking may appear impulsive, controlling, or selfish. They may have difficulty waiting or handling frustration. Other children may argue with them and, over time, avoid playing with them altogether. Many times these children are unaware that their actions are causing problems. They argue back or withdraw, feeling it was their turn and the game is unfair.

See Appendix A for more information on the development of turn-taking.

UNIT 7: TURN-TAKING

TEACHING THE CONCEPT OF TURN-TAKING

Visual cues are essential for children who struggle to find and follow the flow of a game. The accompanying DVD demonstrates the use of an object that was readily available to define the flow of turn-taking. Some of the children in the group understand the order. They assist the other children who may have more difficulty with this skill by stating, "My turn." As the group becomes familiar with the flow of the game, we can remove the turn-taking object and encourage the children to use verbal cues if they miss their turn or someone goes out of turn.

Start by helping the child *understand the concept of turn-taking.*

- Turn-taking requires one or more participants.
- By taking turns, play is fair. Everyone gets a chance to play.
- Taking turns requires patience and trust.

QUICK TIPS

- ◆ Pass a simple object around the group as each child takes a turn.
- ◆ Number the children's seats to determine the order of play.
- ◆ Pair an appropriate verbal cue with the visual cue. The child can say, "It's my turn" or, "I'm next."

Once the child understands the concept of turn-taking, present some *rules about turn-taking:*

- While one person plays, the other waits and watches.
- Everyone needs to know the order of the game so they will know when it is their turn.
- Your body shows that you are interested in playing; stand or sit so it looks like you want to be a part of the game.



FACILITATOR CHECKLIST: TURN TAKING

Use the following questions to determine how to help a child with turn-taking:

- ◆ Does the child know when it's his or her turn?
- ◆ Does the child know when his or her turn ends?
- ◆ Does the child know who takes a turn before and after him or her in the game?
- ◆ Does the child assume a body position that indicates a desire to take a turn?

UNIT 7: TURN-TAKING

INTRODUCTORY LESSON

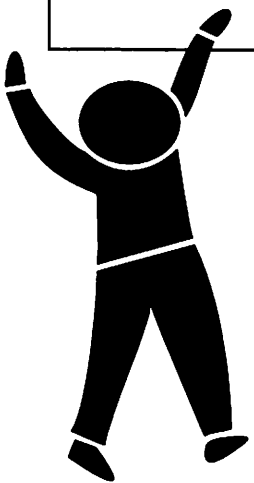
Use this instructional session to reinforce the concept and rules of turn-taking.

MATERIALS

- Turn-taking object (e.g. marker, ball, etc.)
- Board or card game

SETUP

- Place a basic board game in the center of the table or on the floor.
- Visually define each child's personal space (e.g. chairs, carpet squares, pillows).
- Determine who will start the game and in which direction turns will be taken.



(continue with activity on next page)

ACTIVITY

- Hand the turn-taking object to the first child. Say, "This is the turn marker (name the object). When you are holding the marker, it is your turn."
- After the first child's turn, ask him or her to pass the marker to the next child.
- If children go out of turn, remind them they need the "turn marker" to take a turn.
- If someone forgets to pass the object, give the waiting child an appropriate phrase to use. "My turn! Can I have the marker?"
- Step back and observe the game.
- If the group is independently passing the object and making statements to cue for their turn, remove the object and encourage the group to continue playing.
- Observe how often you must cue the group for turn-taking. If it is necessary to make frequent verbal cues, return to using the turn-taking object.
- Pair visual cues with verbal cues that children would typically use in a game (e.g. "My Turn" or "You skipped me").
- When the children are comfortable with the flow of the game, reduce the use of the visual cue.
- Subsequent games may need initial visual cues to define the flow.

UNIT 7: TURN-TAKING

TURN-TAKING: PRACTICE ACTIVITIES

WHO GOES FIRST? WHO GOES NEXT?



Materials

- Chalk
- Rubber mats
- Playground ball

Setup

- Set up a playground game such as kickball for which children are required to wait their turn in line

Activity

- Draw boxes on the ground or lay down rubber mats in a line to indicate where children will wait for their turn to kick.
- Number the boxes to indicate the order.
- Discuss that the boxes are the waiting spaces. If the children want to kick the ball, their bodies need to show they want a turn. They do this by waiting in line.
- Instruct them to follow the numbers to determine who takes a turn before and after them.



TURN-TAKING: PRACTICE ACTIVITIES

PLAYING IN A GROUP

MATERIALS

- Card game, table-top game (i.e. hockey, foosball, pool), or board game for two players
- Butcher paper or dry-erase board
- Markers
- Masking tape

SETUP

- Set up the game and game pieces.
- Identify the different roles of the game (e.g. player one and two, score keeper, time keeper, etc.)
- Determine how many rounds of play you will need to be sure everyone in the group has a turn at each role.

ACTIVITY

- As a group, identify who will assume each role in the game for the first round of play.
- Explain how you will rotate the roles.
- Draw a visual diagram of the turn-taking rotation on the board or paper.
- Write the different roles of the game players on strips of masking tape. Place these on the chairs where the participants will sit when they are in that role. When it is time to switch roles, it's also time to switch seats.
- Begin the game.
- Participants who are not directly playing can be encouraged to support the players by cheering them on or giving compliments.

UNIT 7: TURN-TAKING

TAKING IT HOME AND TO THE COMMUNITY

Turn-taking in daily life

Turn-taking occurs in a variety of ways in the community. We wait our turn at grocery stores and restaurants. At school we take turns speaking. We indicate when it is our turn by raising our hand. Turn-taking occurs on the playground, in the classroom, at home, and in the community.

Identifying when turn-taking is required, such as where people are waiting in line, can be helpful to children who are beginning to learn this skill. When at a store or restaurant, encourage the child to show you the line where you stand to pay or order. Ask the child where to stand to be in line for a turn. Discuss who will go before and after you to help with awareness of others in line.

If there are visual cues in the environment, point these out. Sometimes, fast-food restaurants or movie theaters put lines on the floor or use stanchions with ropes to define where people line up to wait.

Sometimes we are unsure who goes before us. If this situation arises, encourage your child to ask, "Were you here before me?" If someone goes out of turn and you anticipate your child will become upset, help him or her remain calm and use the phrase, "Excuse me, please."

