



Time to Pretend

Children love to pretend. Pretend play is important because it helps build the foundation for advanced thinking skills. When your child is engaged in pretend play, she can make decisions and solve problems. She can also act out her emotions, explore new roles, and work together with friends. Pretend play also allows her to interact creatively with the world around her.

- Be flattered when your child tries to imitate you—how you talk or the way you work at the computer. He is exploring the roles of the people closest to him and realizing his own place in the world.
- Gather recycled family clothing (both men’s and women’s) and accessories such as shoes, bags, and hats for your child to use as dress-up clothes. Dressing up helps both girls and boys explore different roles in the family.
- Set out everyday materials such as boxes, blocks, and paper scraps for your child. As she pretends that a box is a spaceship or that a block is a phone, she begins to understand the idea that one thing can stand for another. This will help her begin to understand that she can use symbols like letters and numbers to communicate.
- Provide props to spark your child’s imagination. Common household items such as a bandage can encourage your child to imagine a doctor’s office. A magnifying glass can turn your room into a science lab. Pots and pans can be the start of a new and exciting (pretend) restaurant.
- Explore interesting places and attend neighborhood events that interest you and your child, such as public parks and museums or music festivals and yard sales. Discovering new people, places, and events will give her new ideas for pretend play. Your local library may offer free passes to museums and other places.
- Inspire pretend play wherever you go with your child. In the car, give him a paper plate “steering wheel” so he can pretend to drive along with you. When you run an errand, bring along a paper towel roll (a “telescope”) and encourage him to pretend to be on a spy mission as he looks for the oranges you need for your fruit salad.
- Ask “What if…” questions to encourage creative play and scientific thinking, for example, *What if this box was a sailboat? Where would you go? What would you take with you?*
- Listen to what your child says about what is happening in his make-believe world. Don’t assume the teacup he hands you is a cup of tea or that because he is wearing a cape he is a superhero. Let him lead you in directing the pretend play. Play your part in a way that builds upon his ideas and leads to next steps. Try to sense his mood. Is this a silly game or an imaginary story in which anything can happen?