

Child-Led Play

- + Take 15 minutes today to join in your child's play.
- + Allow your child to choose what they would like to play with.
- + Try using these tips below and the Head, Heart and Hands technique.
- + Have fun!

Focusing

The aim is to focus completely on your child during this playtime. Switch off your phone and make sure there will be no disruptions during this time. Show your child that you are interested and attending to them by sitting at their level and following their play. Make eye contact with your child and look at your child, so that when they look up, they see you looking at them and realise that you are interested in what they are doing. This is your time to enter into your child's world.

Reflecting

Really try to connect with your child's feelings in their play. Reflect these feelings back to them to help them feel understood, for example: *"You are smiling because you are happy with your picture"* or reflect the feelings of the characters they are playing with: *"That dinosaur seems really angry today"*. It shows the child that you are interested and want to understand them. It also helps to develop emotional literacy by identifying, accepting and labelling their feelings.

Mirroring

Mirror their sounds and actions and feelings, so it helps them to feel understood and gives you a chance to join in (e.g., hum a tune when they are humming, clap if they are clapping).

Closeness

Show them you are having fun by laughing with them. Use the opportunity to sit close to them and have plenty of physical contact through play acting and hugs, etc.

Encouragement

Encourage them in their play rather than correcting them. If your child decides to put the beds into the kitchen of the dollhouse, let them. Instead, take an interest and reflect on what they are doing (*"They are all going to sleep in the kitchen"*). When your child asks what you think of their picture, rather than saying *"it's lovely"*, encourage them (e.g. *"You chose loads of colours"*). This will make them less conscious of their performance and more in tune with the joy of creating.

Boundaries

Keep your time, letting them know when they have 5 minutes left. Finish the playtime by summarising what you did together, how much you enjoyed it and let them know when you can play together again soon.

This week in school, the children have been learning about the Head, Heart and Hands technique for friendships. This technique can be used in all relationships. It is outlined below, including how you can use it during playtime.

Head Heart Hands



Head

Thinking about my child and wondering what he or she is thinking about. Focusing just on them. I wonder what could be going on in their minds. During 1 on 1 playtime, I will put away any distractions (phones, etc.) and I will try to focus completely on my child.



Heart

Putting myself in my child's shoes and imagining how they feel. Guessing is good. Recognising these thoughts as separate from my own. During 1 on 1 playtime, I will try to feel my child's feelings.



Hands

Doing and saying things that let my child know that I am trying to understand them. An action, word, sound or facial expression to let my child know that I really get it. During 1 on 1 playtime I will try to find opportunities to let my child know that I am trying to understand them.

Adapted from Reflective Functioning and Play, Debi - Maskell Graham 2016 by Linsey McNelis.