**Play**

Play is known to support the social, emotional and functional development of children; anti-anxiety chemicals are released during play, and production of “feel good” hormones increase. Play can also be a safe and child-friendly way of processing and externalising feelings and supporting children’s emotional regulation. Through play, children can learn a variety of skills fundamental to their development such as, social language, turn-taking, self-esteem, cooperation, attention and emotional growth, all whilst having fun. Play is something that is easy to incorporate into your routine at home, and can combine times of child-led (non-directive) play and adult-led (directive play) with a caregiver.

**Practical Ideas/Strategies**

* Provide as much opportunity within your routine for play as possible; have clear times when child-led play is encouraged (such as when you need to prepare dinner), and when 1:1 time can be provided
* Child-led play should be free from adult agenda, with the child directing the play. Boundaries to provide safety and security should remain, as should supervision, but this does not necessarily require your physical presence.
* Consider different forms of play that your child enjoys. This could include (but is not limited to):
  + Physical play (running, jumping, obstacle courses, trampoline, swings, whole-body movement based activities, rough and tumble, hide and seek, chase, physical exercise, dancing, etc.)
  + Role Play (e.g. drama or music therapy, puppets, dressing up, acting out a favourite TV show or film, etc.)
  + Sand Play (you could use a Tupperware box, oven cleaning tray or outdoor sand pit and fill it with sand – cheap sand is available from most supermarkets or Argos)
  + Water Play (as above, to provide containment)
  + Arts and Crafts – consider using a dedicated space outside or in the home, encourage the use of aprons to protect clothes, use water-based paints if possible and use a wipe clean mat or old sheet that can go in the washing machine
  + Small World Play (use of symbolic items, toys, cuddly bears, cut outs from magazines or newspapers – this can be used within Role Play, Sand Play or Water Play where appropriate)
  + Sensory Play (consider activities which stimulate senses individually as well as together, e.g. sight, smell, touch, taste, sound, movement and pressure)
* Provide an atmosphere free from undue pressure and stress, but with a degree of pleasurable interest
* Encourage social interaction for a percentage of activities, e.g. with siblings or with caregivers. It is just as important to have uninterrupted times of play with your child to:
  + Develop skills with turn-taking and waiting
  + Developing nurturing and positive connections, particularly as we are experiencing times of heightened stress and uncertainty
  + Provide you both with a sense of security and connection
  + Encourage your child to follow an adult-led agenda in a safe and playful way

**Online Resources / Videos**

* The power of Play: <https://youtu.be/-J-cihpkSoo>
* Play toolkit Videos (A series of video guides on how to make play inclusive and accessible): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xsa8w82xPsQ&amp;list=PL3cz6p9Us2bP6NIaZ47OzO48fQnMBFXnw>
* Play resources for Parents: [Free Resources for Parents and Carers - Clear Sky - The Power of Play](https://clear-sky.org.uk/resources_for_parents_carers/)
* Therapeutic play Information. Noah’s Ark Centre: [Noah's Ark Services - Therapeutic Play: Activities and Techniques for Parents/Carers and Educational Staff to put in their Toolbox](https://www.noahsarkcentre.org.uk/therapy-activities.html)
* Sensory Play ideas: <https://www.thegeniusofplay.org/tgop/ideas/for-special-needs/genius/play-ideas-tips/play-ideas-special.aspx?hkey=000566f9-52df-4c68-a96b-08e4bf95f982>
* Making play inclusive: <https://www.sense.org.uk/get-support/support-for-children/play-toolkits/>
* Benefits of Sensory Play: <https://www.thegeniusofplay.org/genius/expert-advice/articles/sensory-play-for-kids-with-special-needs.aspx#.Xpbyynk1vIV>
* NHS advice and support on accessible toys, play and learning: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/caring-for-children-and-young-people/accessible-toys-play-and-learning/>
* Taking turns in play: <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/file/information-childcare-providers/Takingturns.pdf>