



Facilitating Play Dates for a Child with Special Needs

Presented by:

Tracey Greenwood, M.A.

Special Education Consulting Teacher

March 6, 2018

Loudoun County Public Schools

Tracey.Greenwood@lcps.org

(571) 252-1000

Facilitating Play Dates

- Importance of play and leisure activities
- Readiness for a play date
- Selecting a focus
- Selecting play partners
- Organizing the play setting
- Structuring the play group
- Supporting and guiding the play date
- Questions

What is Play?

- Pleasurable
- Requires Active Participation/Engagement
- Spontaneous, Voluntary and Motivating
- Flexible and Changing
- Involves people, places, times and props
- Enables children to develop in all areas

Developmental Stages of Play

- Exploratory play
- Cause and effect play
- Functional play
- Constructive play
- Physical play
- Pretend play



Social Dimensions of Play

- Isolate
- Orientation or Onlooker
- Parallel or Proximity
- Turn taking
- Common focus
- Common goal



Types of Social Play

- Playing alone (Solitary play)
- Playing alongside (Parallel play)
- Playing and sharing with others (Associative play)
- Playing and cooperating (Cooperative play)



Importance of Play

- Develops self confidence and competence
- Way to connect with others
- Allows the use of props and themes to create social and imaginary worlds
- Way to explore societal roles and rules
- Avenue to experience cognitive, social, linguistic, motor and emotional growth
- Way to negotiate social conflicts

What is Recreation and Leisure?

- Free time
- Personal
- Voluntary and Motivating
- Can be done at home, school or community
- Both individual and group based
- Can be indoor or outdoor
- Understanding, knowing and experiencing

Importance of Leisure Activities

- Pleasurable
- Relaxing
- Fun
- Way to connect with others
- Leads to the development of other skills
- Enhances overall quality of life



Challenges for Children with Special Needs

- Communication
- Socialization
- Attention
- Imagination
- Restricted Interests/Repetitive Behavior
- Sensory Processing Impairments
- Theory of Mind

Rationale for building play into home routines

- How to use free time appropriately
- Connecting to others
- Building a repertoire
- Increasing amount of time
- Exposing
- Desensitizing to sensory and environmental factors

How Do We Get Started?



Readiness for a Play Date

- Is it developmentally appropriate?
- Does your child engage in independent play or leisure activities that are reinforcing?
- Does your child attempt to socially engage others?
- Does your child attend to others?
- Does your child imitate the actions of other people?



Selecting a focus for the play date

- Developmental play patterns
- Communication functions and means
- Socialization with peers
- Longer engagement
- Developing friendships

Individual Activity

Complete the Play Preference,
Communication and Social Skill Inventory
on your Child



Choosing Play Partners

- Goal is to develop meaningful, long-lasting relationships



Finding Play Partners

- From existing social network (family, school, home, neighborhood, community)
- Socially competent
- Enjoy playing with others
- Role models in the areas of weakness for children with special needs

Considerations

- Gender
- Age
- Development and Ability
- Temperament
- Social Style
- Play Interests
- Primary Language
- Sibling Relationships



Logistics of the Play Date

- When
- With whom
- Where
- For how long
- How often
- What materials
- What to do



Organizing the Play Setting

- Utilize a consistent space
- Clearly define boundaries
- Organize the area with furniture
- Limit Distractions
- Organize the materials by activity or theme

Play Area Example



Selecting Materials & Themes

- Play Fascinations
- Play Materials
- Actions with Materials
- Play Activities
- Play Themes
- Leisure and Recreational Activities



Individual Activity
fill out play inventory (3-7)

Individual Activity

- Selecting age appropriate and developmentally appropriate activities
- Based upon your child's play/leisure preferences, develop three play theme boxes or three leisure activities and a list of materials
- Toys/activities should have the following:
 - High motivational value
 - Be developmentally appropriate
 - High social/imaginative potential
 - Reflect diversity of ability/gender/ethnicity

Structuring the Play Date

- Opening
- Rules/boundaries
- Plan for the Play
- Play
- Clean-up
- Plan or ideas for next meeting
- Closing

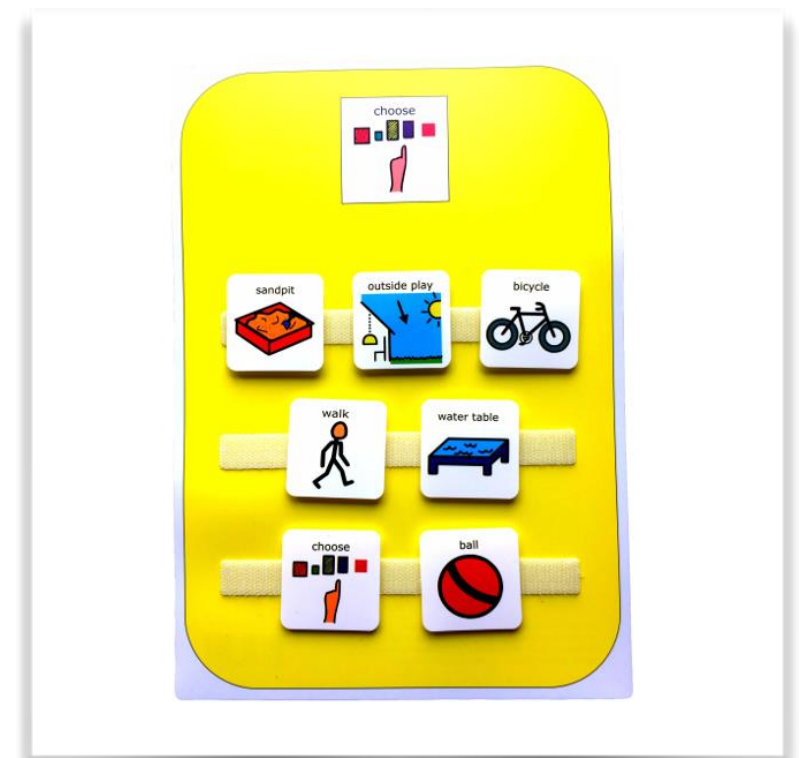
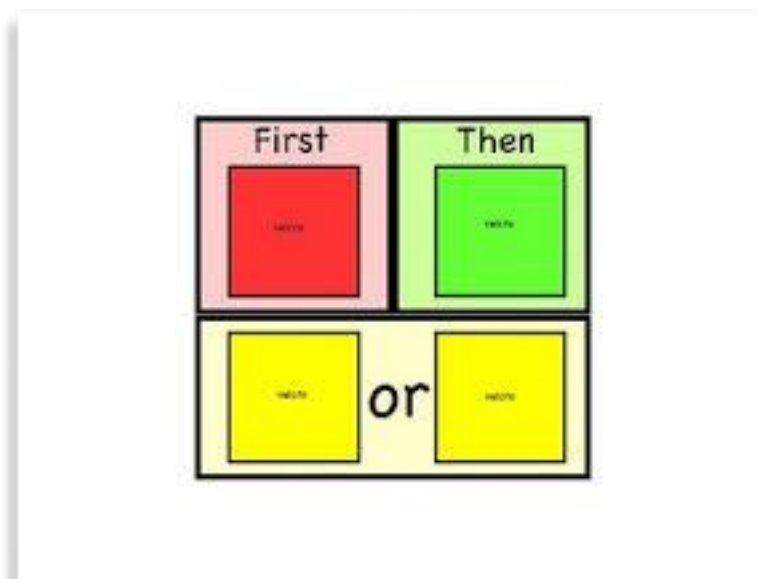
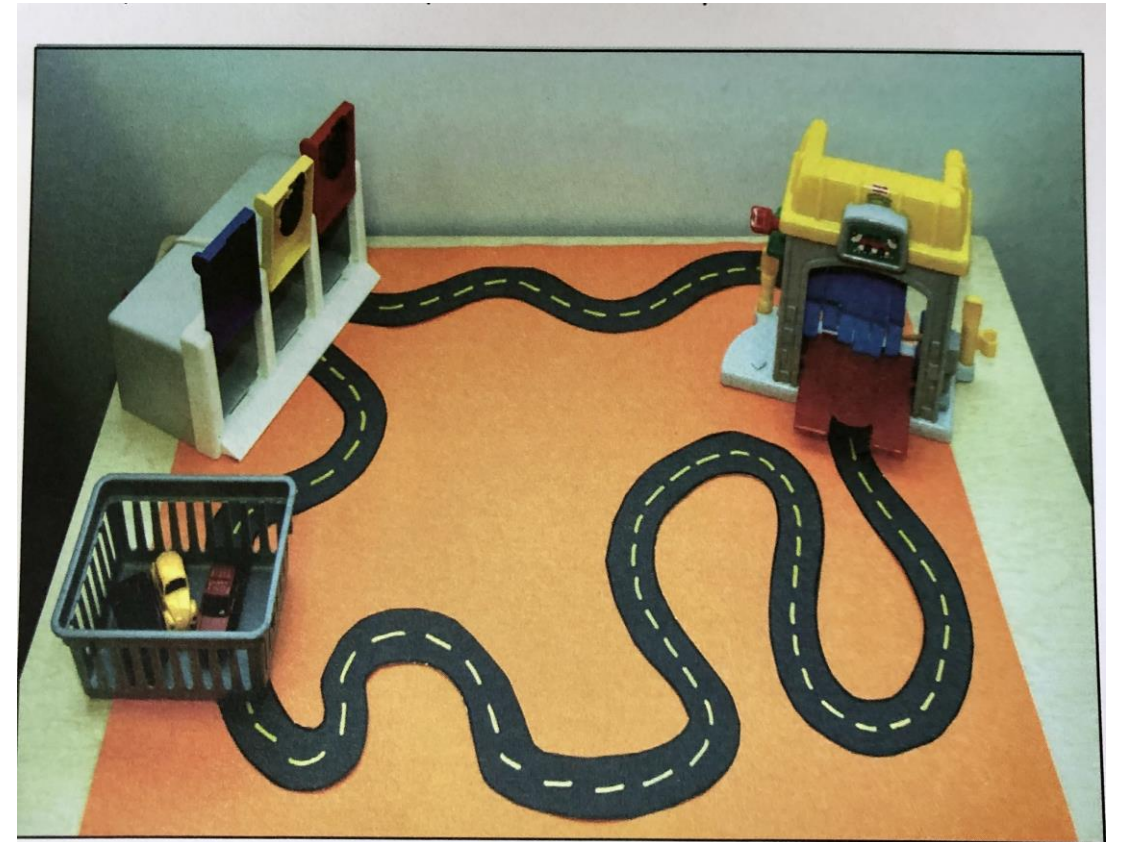


Supports

- Visual schedule for the play date
- Visually represented “play date rules/boundaries”
- Familiarize peers and your child with needs
- Social stories
- Social scripts
- Cue cards
- Visual conversation starters

Supports (cont'd)

- Visual choice board of play activities
- Visual timer
- Visual play scripts
- Communication systems/ devices
- Designated places to sit (chairs or carpet squares)
- Behavioral supports (first-then)



You Are the Director

- Be an observer
- Follow the children's lead
- Repeat and expand on favorite activities
- Look for opportunities to target goals
- Model respectful and inclusive behavior
- Distribute attention among all the children
- Have fun!
- Reflect after each group



Follow your child's lead and insert yourself in the play to encourage back and forth interactions.

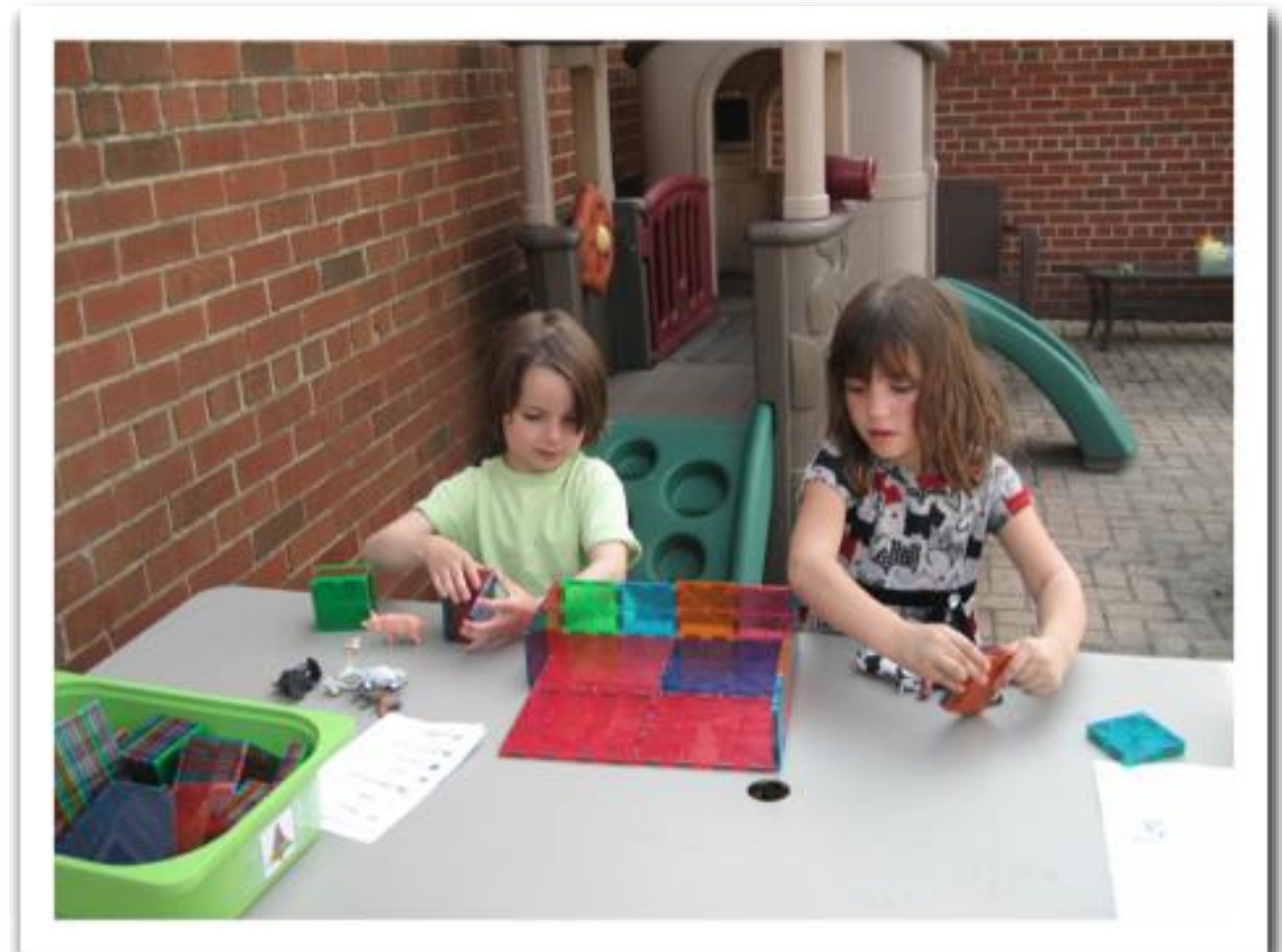


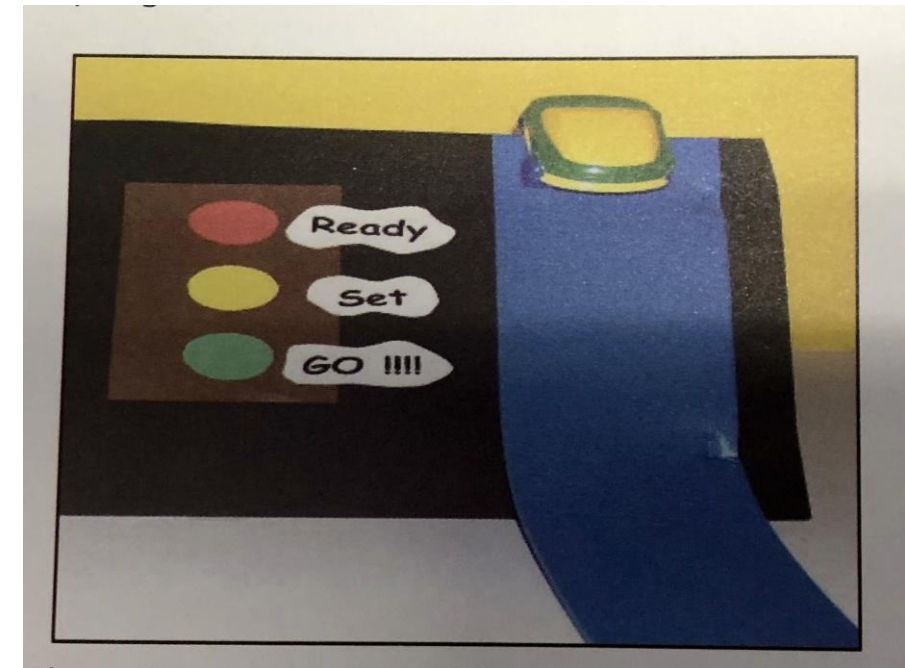
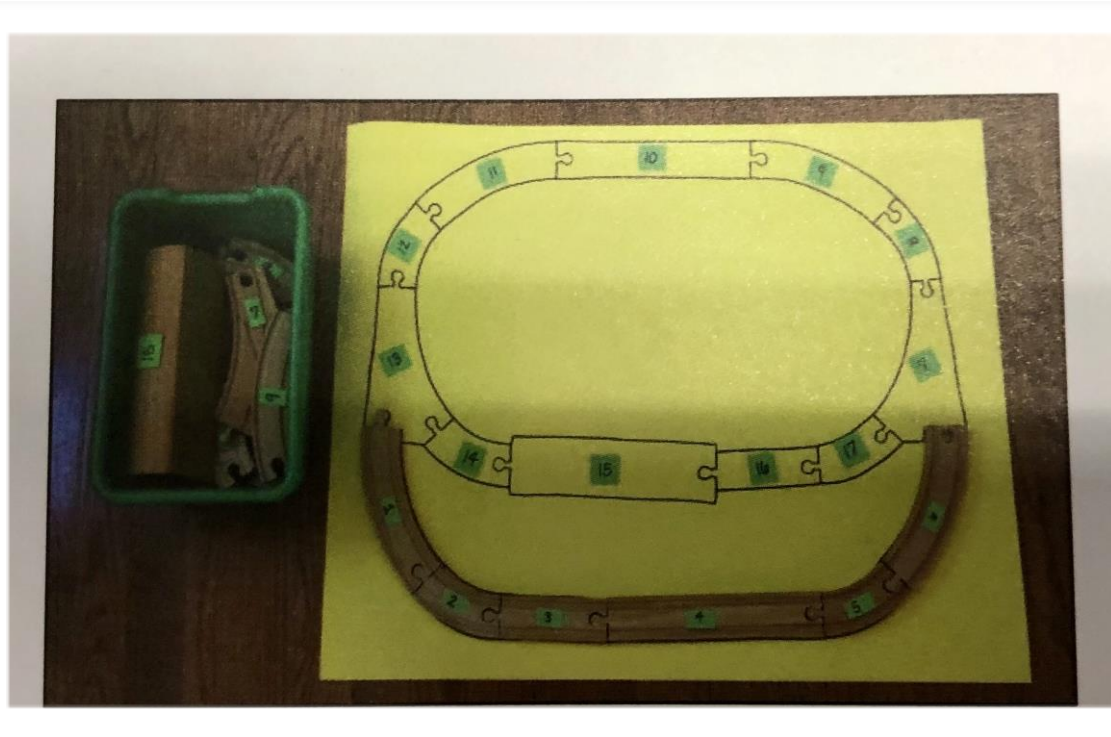
Guiding Strategies

- **Recognize** ways children initiate play (non-verbal and verbal)
- **Interpret** for the peers what the child with special needs is communicating
- **Respond** by assisting your child in finding ways to initiate play (may need to be pre-taught)

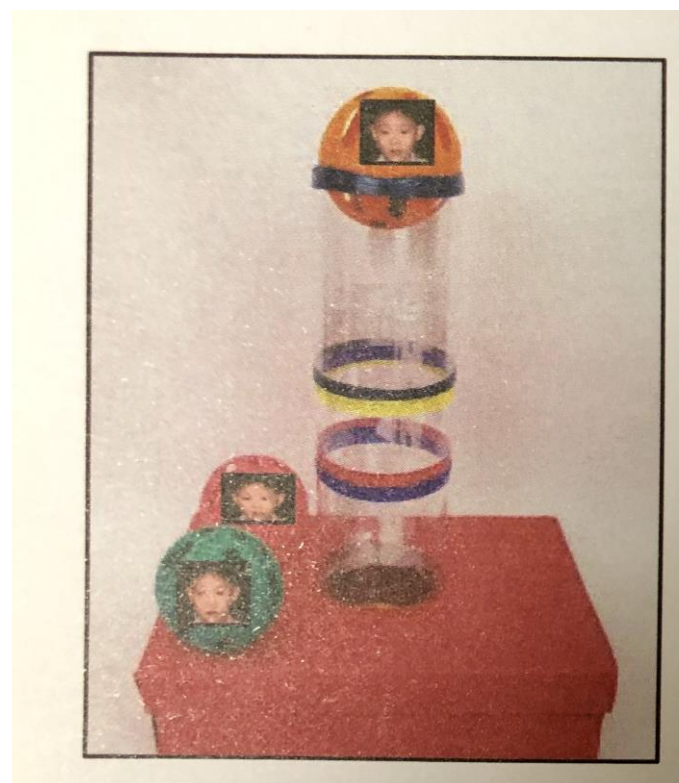
Types of Play Guidance

- Orienting
- Imitation- Mirroring
- Parallel Play
- Joint Focus
- Joint Action
- Role Enactment
- Role Playing





Use interests, create toy appeal and structure when selecting toys for your child.



Scaffolding Play

- Adjusting assistance to match or slightly exceed the child's independent level of play and engagement
- Knowing when to intervene and when to step back
- Linking new information to existing information
- Build on success



Examples of Maximum Support

- Setting out play materials
- Identifying toys used and roles in play
- Scripting actions or words/phrases
- Partnering peers
- Inserting a ritual



Examples of Intermediate Support

- Offering suggestions
- Posing leading questions
- Commenting on the play
- Reframing the play event

“What do you think she wants to do right now?”

Examples of Minimum Support

- Remaining on the periphery
- Being prepared to intervene as needed



Reflecting

- What went well?
- What was difficult?
- How can I continue what worked?
- How can I change what was difficult?
- Did I select the correct play partner?
- Did I have enough supports in place?
- Was the length of the play date appropriate?
- Take anecdotal notes

Resources

- Peer Play and the Autism Spectrum: The Art of Guiding Children's Socialization and Imagination by Pamela Wolfberg
- Do-Watch-Listen-Say: Social and Communication Intervention for Children with Autism by Kathleen Ann Quill
- Skillstreaming The Elementary School Child: New Strategies and Perspectives for Teaching Prosocial Skills by Ellen McGinnis and Arnold P. Goldstein
- Tasks Galore- Let's Play: Structured Steps to Social Engagement and Symbolic Play by Eckerode, Hearsey, Fennel and Reynolds

Q&A