

Playing with my child

1. What is Play?

Most of the children between the age groups of 2-10, and even till the ages of 16 or 18 spend majority of their time in play. Children indulge in different kinds of games everyday in a small or big group. Each of these games give them an opportunity to communicate, explore, experiment, create and pretend something, all of which contributes to their cognitive development.

The urge to play is inborn in all children, even those with special needs. All children go through the same stages of development, though every individual develops at his/her own pace. Play can be rowdy and boisterous like a game of football or cricket or it can be quiet and thoughtful like a game of snakes and ladders or building a tower. It can be done alone or with others. A large group of children may join in or a friend or two may play together.

2. Why should we encourage play?

If we look at a deafblind child, for her/him the world does not exist beyond his arm's reach. Some children who may be able to see and hear a little bit, we don't know how clearly they can see and hear. Most of the times, what they see and hear may be more confusing/frightening to them and they may not be able to make sense of what they see or hear.

In reality the child's own body is the only thing, which he can control. Thus we see most of the children with deafblindness engaging in self-stimulatory behaviors.

The child learns about the world as he makes different movements with his body and as his body comes in contact with different objects and people. Most of the sighted children see other children playing with toys and with one another and they gradually learn incidentally just watching them play. We do not have to teach them how to play. If we look at deafblind children, we do not see them playing as other children do. Most of the times this is because they do not know how to play, or sometimes they engage in play which is very repetitive or monotonous, and mostly using the same objects or toys. We need to organise and structure the play time we give for children with deafblindness.

3. What do we play with?

Play does not require only a toy, but often one is used. An object not normally regarded as a toy often becomes one. e.g. children playing in the kitchen with bowls, spoons, pots and pans. Mostly we see that children with deafblindness do not know how to make use of objects. It takes a lot of time for the child to understand the functions of objects. Some children will hesitate to touch objects that are new to them. We need to encourage children to use their other senses in order to explore the object and get information about it. Children feel safe, secure and motivated if someone else plays with them.

4. What are the different types of play?

The way children play and the way they use objects and toys, changes or takes on different levels as they grow and develop. Just about any play activity the child does, fits into any one of the following:

Sensorimotor play: - It involves the senses and movement. The baby begins with accidental moves and gradually becomes more purposeful. e.g. infant accidentally hits the bells hanging over her. Through repetition and practice s/he gradually gains control over his muscles and can intentionally swipe at the bells to make them jingle. S/he gradually starts mouthing what s/he sees or touches to explore and find out what it is.

Before a student learns to play with objects, they will need to learn to play with you. In the beginning the mother talks to the child, touches him, cuddles him, etc. All this helps the child

learn to explore. He tries to look at the mother, see what she is wearing, try to touch her, and both of them interact with each other physically and at the same time the mother talks to the child about what he is doing which also gives him the language input.

Physical play: - Play involving running, jumping and climbing, gives children the chance to strengthen muscle and develop muscle control and practice new skills.

Symbolic play: - Gradually the child attempts things for daily activities, such as drinking milk from an empty glass; children pretend to be doctor/postman/driver/father/teacher etc.

Games - This is the most mature form of play and continues into adulthood. Game play is social behaviour and involves interactions with at least one other person.

Whenever the child with deafblindness plays it is also important to give him the language along with play. You could select the key words in the activity, which you want to emphasize upon the child. It may not be possible for him to receive all the language that goes along with the activity and you could select some words or phrases, which could be stressed. e.g. if the child is playing with a ball, then small conversations like throw ball, you like ball? you want it? feel it bounce, roll it, etc. should be done.

5. What are the benefits of play?

Play promotes the development of skills, concepts, behaviours and knowledge that will be needed as an adult. Whether children play alone or in a group, play always reduces monotony, prevents boredom and helps children develop new skills and interests. Play leads to the development of new skills in different areas such as cognitive, physical, emotional, etc.

E.g. a child who plays with a toy train, learns that when he turns the key, the train starts, it stops when it hits something, it stops or topples down, it can move fast or slow, etc. Through manipulation and exploration he goes on learning new concepts as he continues to play with different objects and toys.

Physical play involving large muscle movements like those used in walking, running, jumping and swinging or involving smaller muscle movements as in finger plays, helps the child to develop their physical abilities.

Recreational skills are gradually developed through play. Games also teach sharing, turn-taking, competing fairly and good sportsmanship. All these skills are needed not only to play games and sports but for life in general.

6. What are the needs of a child with Deafblindness?

Understanding the child's vision and hearing will give you a better idea of what your child can see and hear, under what conditions he can see and hear. Since this child has a vision and hearing impairment, he will have to use his other senses to learn about the world. You will have to provide toys or objects that make noise, have interesting textures and smells and that motivate the child to interact with them.

One of the most important things you can do is to create an environment where it is easiest for the child to use his remaining senses. He will also need an environment where he knows he will be safe and secured. If a child does not feel safe, he cannot play freely and spontaneously.

7. What is the best position for play?

It is up to you as a parent, to find out in what position your child is most comfortable and in the best position so that he can interact with other people as well as toys or objects.

Do remember that all children need opportunities to move around and change positions. New position allows different muscles to be exercised and helps your child from getting tired easily.

Cardboard boxes of different sizes are useful for making chairs and tables for small children. If your child is learning to sit, place the child inside a large cardboard box with the back to the corner for support. If necessary a belt can be strung through two slits in the cardboard and tied around the waist and chest for additional support. Inside the box, toys will remain within reach. You don't always need equipment to vary your child's position. Your child can sit on your lap facing away from you and play with both hands while you provide support at his hips, waist or chest with your hands.

The best way to decide for the right position is to introduce a position that is the next step in his sequence of physical development. The baby who is just learning to maintain a sitting position when supported is not ready to learn how to stand, but he is ready to learn to strengthen his back and stomach muscles and to balance himself in an upright position.

8. When to Play?

- Pick a time of the day when the child is likely to be at his best.
- Pick a time with the fewest distractions.
- Play as long as it is enjoyable for both of you.
- Make other children or family members part of the play session
- Have a beginning and ending routine for your play session. That way the child knows what to expect.
- Build play experiences into your daily routines. Bath time, dressing time, feeding time, travel times are all opportunities for playing and learning.
- Do not force the child only because you have time.

9. What makes a good toy?

- Good toys are well made and strong, because toys that break easily will frustrate the child
- Proper size so they can fit easily in the child's hand and should not be so heavy that he cannot control.
- They should have attractive colours such as red, blue, yellow, orange, etc.
- They should be multi sensorial, meaning it should be interesting to look at, to listen, to chew on, to feel and to play with.
- They should be such that the child can manipulate it in a variety of ways. That it should have more than one use.
- They should have a cause and effect qualities, so the child can push, pull, turn, etc.
- They should be safe that is without any sharp edges, glass, or having pieces that break off easily.

10. What are some activities we can use as play?

Activities that allow you to move together and share the experience provide a good way to establish a bond with the child and provide enjoyment for both of you. Observe your child and see what kind of movements he enjoys. When sitting close to the child do the movement together, e.g. rocking, swinging, etc. Gradually the child could learn to indicate when he wants more of the movement. You could also combine two movements and see which one the child prefers more and indicates it.

- **Movements:** Running, swinging together on the swing, jumping by making a small game including these different movements
- **Equipment:** Use equipment such as slide, merry go round, etc for the child and both of you could go on it together. Plan different movements in the house by making it into a game, e.g. tables or stools. Let the child climb over table, crawl under the chair, jump over the stool.
- **Music:** Music could also be used for the child. If s/he likes to listen to music, making movements along with him according to the rhythm is a good enjoyable activity. See if the child makes any movement on his own, in response to the rhythm, if not guide him.

- **Water:** Water play is an activity liked by many children. You could fill water in a small tub or bucket, put different things in the water, which the child can find out, some things which float, some which sink. You could also add some soap so that it makes some bubbles. Children could also play in a group with this activity. The Child will have lot of fun, splashing water, making bubbles, finding things and getting wet.
- **Swimming:** Many children enjoy swimming. Swimming could be introduced to the child, if the child has access to a pool. Almost all children like this activity, and enjoy along with other children in the group.
- **Outings:** Children could go on an outing to the garden, beach, etc and could have fun over there. Walking on the grass, wet and dry, collecting different flowers or leaves with different textures, shells from the beach, playing in the sand, digging, filling it in the bucket, making small mountains, etc. After coming back they could make a small collage using all the material they collected on the way back.
- **Craft:** Craft activities can be used with the children as well. Different items such as buttons, some food grains, shells, sand, small paper balls, used calendars; etc can be used to make different craft items. The child can be involved in all steps of the activity right from setting it up to cleaning up, so that s/he gets a proper idea of the whole process.
- **Drawing and painting:** Finger painting, spray painting with a toothbrush, hand printing, vegetable printing (with lady's finger, onion, cutting small designs on the potato), block printing all could be used to provide a variety to the child and keep him interested in the activity.
- **Best out of Waste:** Hand puppets using socks, bags, etc can be made which can help to visually stimulate and encourage the child to look and track. Different faces can be made using the hand puppets. Small cloth bags could be made filled with different items stuffed inside so that the child can feel different textures and explore. S/he could match the textures or find the different one amongst the others.
- **Household items:** You can help the child to put small vessels; tins or even matchboxes filled with sand or mud one on top of the other to build a house or a tower. The child will enjoy knocking it down, either with his arm or with a ball.

You can use dough along with a rolling pin, scoop, spoon, wooden hammer, etc. Child will be taught to roll part of the dough into a ball. He can make different shapes with the dough, he can pound and make it flat, roll it, etc.

Many such activities can be planned using material available in the house or community. Play is very important for children with deafblindness as it is for all other children. With a little bit of planning and creativity, many activities can be done so that children can learn as well as enjoy at the same time. It is however important to look at the interests of each child and accordingly plan for the activities. Once this is taken care of you can think of many ways in which both of you can enjoy and learn together.

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