



Play is a primary occupation in which people engage. Play is the most important area of child development. It is through play that a child will learn about themselves and the world around them. Functional play is when a child interacts and plays with a toy or object according to its specific function. For example building a tower with blocks, pushing trains along a track, giving a baby doll a bath, or sweeping the floor with a broom. A child will begin to understand the function of objects and carry out the appropriate action associated with these objects around the age of 6-12 months. The child's play will become more skilled as they develop and explore through play.

Play has a role in the development of socialisation, cognition, language and motor skills. It also serves as a source of fun and enjoyment for the child. This is important to recognise when using play in therapy, it should enhance the child's development and enable them to gain function, while maintaining a sense of fun.

Functional Play



C. H. Christiansen, C. M. Baum, and J. Bass-Haugen (Eds.). (2005). Occupational therapy: Performance, participation, and well-being (3rd ed.). Thorofare, NJ: SLACK Incorporated.

How do we use FUNCTIONAL PLAY at Macarthur Children's Developmental Clinic?

Play can be used as a modality, for example being used to teach a specific skill (e.g. develop physical, cognitive, emotional or social abilities). Clinicians create the ENVIRONMENT to encourage and support the PERSON in participating in the OCCUPATION. You may be developing the child's motor, sensory integrative, communication, cognitive, or social skills for them to participate to their best. This leads to PLAY as the goal, which is a meaningful occupation for the child to engage in.

Play

Different areas of functional play could include;

- Blocks (building towers, castles, houses, bridges etc.)
- Playdough
- Sand play
- Mr potato head
- Trains
- Farm/Zoo
- Threading cotton reels
- Puzzles
- Feeding doll
- Bathing doll
- Put doll to bed
- Brush doll's teeth
- Brushing doll's hair
- Tea party
- Shopping
- Cooking
- Gardening
- ...

Ways we can teach;

- Visuals with step by step pictures
- Demonstration
- Hand over hand guiding
- Verbal instruction
- Video of others (or them)
- Combination of above



Cognitive

A child's cognition can be developed by teaching them the purpose of objects in play (e.g. a broom being used to 'clean/sweep' the floor), attention, sensory integration, matching, cause effect, problem solving

Social

Being able to interact appropriately with others, children and adults, a child will need to initially learn the basic social skills of turn taking, sharing, being cooperative etc. These are all learnt through the OCCUPATION of PLAY.

Language

We can use the task of play while teaching;

- Vocabulary
- Concepts (i.e. in on under etc.)
- Pronouns (He/She)
- Functional phrases

Fine Motor

Learning to manipulate the materials in play will develop fine motor skills. These skills will set a child up for learning more complex skills such as pencil and scissor use and tying their shoelaces.