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ASD Tips

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Developing play skills

Before you start

- The way in which children with autism play can be very unusual. Progress can be very slow. Pretend play may not develop, or at least not in the same way as for other children.
- The play of children with autism is often taken over by their need for 'sameness'. Play becomes another sort of repetitive activity, which can block out other people and cut down on all the opportunities for learning that play usually brings.
- An important aim is to encourage more variety in children's play so that new experience and learning is made possible. This also increases the child's enjoyment and satisfaction. We need to remember that play isn't just about learning. It's also about fun.
- Children with autism also need to learn how to play **with** people. They need to learn that people can be interesting and fun. Again, this opens up a whole range of new experiences and opportunities to learn.
- A longer term, but very difficult aim, is to help the child towards pretend and imaginative play. He needs to be able to think flexibly in order to hold in mind two different things at the same time: what a thing **is** and what it is **standing for**.



Developing obsessions into social play

“My child spins everything he gets his hands on and he cuts us out completely.”

What to look out for:

- It may not be why they started in the first place, but repetitive activities and obsessions of all kinds may be ways of blocking out people. People make demands, or are just puzzling, so the child tries to block them out.
- Unfortunately, blocking out people cuts the child off from some very important types of learning.
- Repetitive activities and obsessions can range from simple physical activities, such as spinning or flicking objects, through to wanting only to talk about astronomy or vacuum cleaners.

Things to try:

- Join the child in his play.
- Move from playing alongside him to swapping toys between you. Watch for awareness from him that you are there and are also spinning things.
- You need to move towards **sharing** an object which spins. Once you are sure the child is aware of you and your ‘spinner’, try having one ‘spinner’ between the two of you. To start with, **his** turn will need to be a lot longer than yours, but slowly build up your turn and reduce his.

