

The Stages of Play

(as described in Children's Play: The Roots of Reading. Edited by Edward F. Zigler, Dorothy G. Singer, & Sandra J. Bishop-Josef. Zero to Three Press; Washington, DC: 2004; pp. 38-39. All relate to Jean Piaget's socialization and cognitive levels of development.)

Important Precursors:

- ***Joint Attention*** – child looks from a desired object, person or event to a caregiver or conversational partner, back to the desired object, person, event
- ***Object Permanence*** – knowing that when an object once present is out of sight (such as under a blanket), is still present
- ***Tool Use*** – recognizing that objects can be used as tools to get what is desired (ex. using a stick to pull a wanted toy out from under a chair)
- ***Functional use of Toys*** – recognizing how to play with toys (ex. putting a pretend phone to the ear)
- ***Symbolic use of Toys*** – using an object to represent something else (ex. using a block to represent a phone, a sponge, or a truck)

Stages of Social Play

1. ***Solitary Play*** – ex. infant watches mobile overhead; toddler plays alone zooming cars on the floor
2. ***Parallel Play*** – two children play side-by-side at times glancing at each other, but not really interacting
3. ***Associative Play*** – children play side-by-side, but begin to imitate each other and incorporate components of the counterpart's play
4. ***Cooperative Play*** – children fully join together to create an occurrence or produce a product (ex. build a block tower together or engage in dramatic play, such as playing house)

Stages of Cognitive Play

1. ***Functional Play*** – child associates an object with an action (ex. child picks up a broom and sweeps the floor or puts phone to ear)
2. ***Constructive Play*** – child uses materials to build a structure (ex. building block bridges or towers)
3. ***Dramatic play*** – one or more children play out a real or imagined event (ex. children pretend to cook dinner)
4. ***Games with rules*** – children play a game together following a mental representation of the rules (ex. children playing a board game or play a ball game according to their own agreed-on rules)

Stages of Symbolic Play

1. **Presymbolic Scheme** – infant shows understanding of object use or meaning through a brief action (ex. brings a brush to her hair)
2. **Self-pretend** – baby shows awareness of the pretend nature of a self-directed activity (ex. baby pretends to drink from an empty bottle making sipping noises, then closes eyes tightly pretending to sleep)
3. **Decentered Pretend** – the child's play includes another person or object or the child engages in an activity that is usually performed by someone else (ex. child pretends to feed a teddy bear or a child pretends to read a book to his mother)
4. **Pretend Play Combinations** – a situation where two or more different schemes are described in sequence (ex. child plays that he is baking a cake by mixing batter, pouring it into a pan then placing it into the oven)
5. **Planned Pretend** – pretend play situations where a child re-enacts an event and announces what he is going to do (ex. "I'm going to pretend that I'm a zookeeper and let all the animals run out!")