Part 3: Addressing Play and Playfulness
When Intervening With Children With an Autism Spectrum Disorder

Topic 1: Reviewing Core Concepts of Play and Playfulness for All

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Learning Objectives

• Delineate the difference between the definitions of play and playfulness and the terminology often associated with play and playfulness.
• Recognize and describe the characteristics of play and the taxonomies associated with play.
• Recognize and describe the difference in use between the conceptual framework of play as a means to an end and play as an end.
• Identify the difference in play and playfulness observed between typically developing children and children with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD).
• Recognize the significance of play for guiding the intervention plan.

Characteristics of Play

• Play is "voluntary, intrinsically motivated, fun, enjoyable, pleasurable, creative, nonliteral, process oriented vs. product oriented, nonserious or survival-oriented, free choice, active engagement, spontaneity of action" (Parham, 2008, p. 4).
• "A critical feature of play in this sense is that it is not dependent on the materials, activities or contexts involved; rather, the status of any activity as play is dependent on the attitude taken by the player him/herself. . . . [T]o play in this sense is that it should be internally motivated rather than motivated by the promise of external rewards" (Luckett, Bundy, & Roberts, 2007, p. 366).
• "Fun" is the most important element to play (Miller & Kuhaneck, 2008).
Taxonomies

- **Taxonomies**: categorization or classification.
- Developmental age level at which a *child is functioning* is based on age-expected gross motor skills, fine motor skills, and visual–motor skills.
- Scoring criteria represent performance of a normative sample of the same-age population.
- Knowing developmental age helps with the intervention plan, but it does not tell the whole story.

Stages of Play

Stop the CD, and print and read Handout 1.

The summary of stages of play in Handout 1 is a compilation from various sources and is a guide to assist in understanding the differences between play of typically developing children and children with an ASD.

Social Play

Stop the CD, and review the levels of social play as described in Table 14.1 on page 367:

- Solitary play
- Onlooker play
- Parallel play
Ages of Social Play

• 1–3 years of age = primarily solitary play stage (Tanta, 2010)
  — Attachment with family is extremely important during this stage.
  — Object and pretend play dominate, with the beginning of understanding another’s perspective (e.g., fake crying).

• 3–6 years of age = preschool stage (Tanta, 2010)
  — Increased independence occurs, and true socialization with peers begins, as seen during make-believe and cooperative play with peers.
  — Constructive play, rough-and-tumble play, and role-playing are also hallmarks for this stage.

• These two stages are the foundation for peer relationships.

Video Analysis:
Michael Playing With Grandfather

Stop the CD, and print and complete Learning Activity 1.

• What stage of play is Michael in?
• Does he need to be talked through or taught how to play, or does he freely explore the objects and his environment?
• Does his play stay within one stage or does it go back and forth?
• What do you observe about the variability of Michael's play, his ability to challenge himself, the toys he interacts with, his ideation and creation of a play activity, and his ease in executing the play activity?
• Does he get stuck in one activity that needs to be performed the exact same way?
• If play changes, does he have an idea of what to do?
• Socially, how does Michael acknowledge his grandfather? Does he encourage his grandfather to play with him? Does he seek his grandfather’s security?
Analysis of Michael’s Play Stage

- Michael’s play stage?
- Talking through or teaching how to play? Free exploration?
- Does his play stay within one stage?
- Variability of Michael’s play?
- Rigidity of play?
- Response to changes in play?
- Socially acknowledge his grandfather?

Playfulness

- “Playfulness has been defined as simply the disposition to play” (Skard & Bundy, 2008, p. 71).
- “The high correlation of playfulness with adaptability and coping suggests that playfulness may be one of the most important aspects of play” (Hess & Bundy, 2003; Skard & Bundy, 2008, p. 71).
- Playfulness deals with the process more so than the product (Rubin, Fein, & Vandenberg, 1983).
- Playfulness for children with an ASD is considered a “connection between the participants in the game” (Skard & Bundy, 2008, p. 71).

Play is a means to an end and an end.

- Play as a means to an end:
  - Play is used to achieve an outcome (i.e., improved motor control, praxis, sensory processing functions, or cognitive functions); in other words, it is a “therapeutic modality” (Hinojosa & Kramer, 2008, p. 321).
  - In intervention, play is used to address the components (i.e., client factors, performance skills, demand of the activity, and context) that are interfering with obtaining an outcome.
- Play as an end:
  - Play—true play—is the end goal for therapy.
  - Play is “purely for the sake of pleasure” (Hinojosa & Kramer, 2008, p. 321).
Video Analysis: Dianna Playing

Stop the CD, and print and complete Learning Activity 2.

- What is the conceptual framework being addressed?
- From the therapist’s standpoint, is the primary purpose of this play scenario play as a means to an end or play as an end?
- What observations of Dianna’s play assist in your analysis?
- How is the occupational therapist clinically reasoning during this treatment session to capture the essence of the conceptual framework being addressed?

Analysis of Dianna’s Play

- What is the conceptual framework being addressed?
- From the therapist’s standpoint, is the primary purpose of this play scenario play as a means to an end? Or play as an end?
- What observations of Dianna’s play assist in your analysis?
- How am I clinically reasoning through this treatment session to capture the essence of the conceptual framework that I am working on?
Video Analysis: Iain Playing

Stop the CD, and print and complete Learning Activity 3.

- What is the conceptual framework being addressed?
- From the therapist’s standpoint, is the primary purpose of this play scenario play as a means to an end? Or play as an end?
- What observations of his play assist in your analysis?
- How am I clinically reasoning through this treatment session to capture the essence of the conceptual framework that I am working on?

Analysis of Iain’s Play

- The conceptual framework being addressed
- Play as a means to an end or play as an end?
- Observations of Iain’s play
- Clinical reasoning
**Play of Children With an ASD**

**Suggested Reading**

- Chapter 8: Common and Uncommon Daily Activities in Children With an Autism Spectrum Disorder: Challenges and Opportunities for Supporting Occupation
- Chapter 14: Encouraging Play and Promoting Peer Interactions in Young Children With an Autism Spectrum Disorder

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**Play of Children With an ASD (cont.)**

Play Behavior of Children With Autism

- They are less involved in the exploration of objects in unstructured environments and structured environments (Sigman, Mundy, Sherman, & Ungerer, 1986).
- They involve themselves in more sensorimotor and relational play (Baranek, 1999; Dominguez, Ziviani, & Rodger, 2006; van Berckelaer-Onnes, 2003).
- An increase in functional and symbolic play occurs if structure and language skills equal that of a 5-year-old (Lewis & Boucher, 1988; Sigman & Ungerer, 1984; Stone & Lemanek, 1990).
- They visually inspect toys with more attention to the particular feature of a toy (e.g., Thomas the Tank Engine's™ eyes; American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2000).
- Their play is less diverse, with intense attachments to certain objects (APA, 2000; Tilton & Ottinger, 1964).

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**Play of Children With an ASD (cont.)**

- Relational play is noted more in children with an ASD, with more rigid and repetitive play noted with objects (Ungerer & Sigman, 1981); these children have a greater tendency to manipulate toys atypically and for self-stimulatory purposes, with less exploratory play elicited (Williams, 2003).
- Play preferences were noted to occur less with functional play items (Sigman & Ungerer, 1984; Stone, Lemanek, Fishel, Fernandez, & Altemeier, 1990) and more with popular media toys, such as Thomas the Tank Engine and Pokemon™ and action figures like Power Rangers™ (Desha, Ziviani, & Rodger, 2003; Dominguez et al., 2006).
- The use of toys was found to be narrow and repetitive, such as playing with a toy in the same way (i.e., spinning the wheels of a car repeatedly; APA, 2000; Rapin, 1991).
- Spontaneous play remains limited, even with scaffolding from adults (Thorp, Stahmer, & Schreibman, 1995).
- Make-believe play occurs less, whether structured or not (Stone & Lemanek, 1990).
Social Play of Children With an ASD

• Children with an ASD engage in more isolated play or solitary play (APA, 2000).
• Parents reported that 90% of their children avoided eye contact (Volkmar, Cohen, & Paul, 1986).
• These children have fewer gaze shifts between two persons as well as between an object and a person (Swettehanm et al., 1998).
• The use of simple manipulative toys and predictability afforded these children more tolerance to social toys (Ferrara & Hill, 1980).

Video Analysis: Iain Playing With Cars

• In viewing Iain’s video playing with cars (Slide 25), analyze Iain’s play behavior, specifically his stage of play, the fluidity of his play, and his problem-solving ability when things are not going his way (Learning Activity 4).
• Then, recall the earlier video on Michael (Slide 9), and reflect on your analysis of Michael’s play skills (Learning Activity 1) compared with your analysis of Iain’s.

Video Analysis: Iain Playing With Cars (cont.)

Stop the CD, and print and complete Learning Activity 4.

• What play stage is Iain demonstrating?
• Does he need to be talked through or taught how to play? Or does he freely explore the objects and his environment?
• Does his play stay within in one stage or does it go back and forth? Diverse and free flowing? Or does it appear “stuck”
• What motivates Iain? Preferred type of toy?
• Think about the variability of his play, his ability to challenge himself, the toys he interacts with, his ideation and creation of a play activity, and ease in executing the play activity.
• Socially, how does he acknowledge this therapist? Encourage this therapist to play with him?
Analysis of Iain Playing With Cars

- Stage of play?
- Does he need to be talked through or taught how to play?
- Fluid play—flowing and exploratory
- Play switch from one stage to another? Or is it stuck?
- Is it diverse and free flowing?
- What is his play preference? Type of toy?
- Is his play variable? Does he challenge himself?
- Ideation and motor planning ideal?
- How does he interact with me? How does he encourage my involvement? What is my purpose?
- How does Iain’s play and socialization compare to Michael’s?

Reframing Play of Children With an ASD

- Play is meaningful and purposeful to the child with an ASD, even though it may not look like the play of typically developing children.
- Occupational therapists should
  - Assist families in accepting their child on the child’s terms,
  - Apply less judgment and add more respect and recognize the individuality of each child, and
  - Apply less pressure on parents to change the way their child plays.

(Spitzer, 2010)
Reframing Play of Children
With an ASD (cont.)

Spitzer (2010) wrote that the meaning or intent of play is difficult for adults to understand for three reasons:
1. Adults often interpret the meaning of play via personal perspectives.
2. Adults rely on communication and language to relay thoughts; those skills are difficult for children with an ASD.
3. Adults need to understand the context in which play is performed instead of only observing behavior and making a judgment.

Tim: Keeping an Open Mind

Supporting play that is meaningful to the child with an ASD is essential for the occupational therapist to
• Establish rapport with the child and family,
• Demonstrate respect for the child,
• Build trust with the child, and
• Value the uniqueness of each child.

Significance of Play

Stop the CD, and read “Significance of Play” on pp. 365–366.
• “Through play, children learn to explore, develop, master physical and social skills, and adapt within their own environment and culture” (Tanta, 2010, p. 365).
• Play assists children in learning social norms and rituals within their culture (Parham, 2008, p. 14).
• Play assists in the development of the socioemotional health of the child and the family:
  — Children with an ASD seek comfort or interactions less from their parents than do typically developing children and seem not to empathize if a parent is hurt or stressed (Adien et al., 1991).
  — Social–emotional health is an issue for the family of a child with an ASD (Moore, Hobson, & Lee, 1997; Stern, 1985).
Video Analysis:
Michael Playing With Grandmother

Stop the CD, and print and complete Learning Activity 5.
- How is Michael interacting with his grandmother?
- How is his grandmother interacting with him?
- Does his grandmother read his cues?
- How does the grandmother support his play and interactions with her?
- How would you describe his play?
- How does his play influence and encourage social interactions with others?

Analysis of Michael Playing With Grandmother and Grandfather

Interacting with grandmother:
- Michael seeks security from his grandmother.
- She reads his cues and encourages interactions.
- He feels secure enough to use grandmother as play item.
- Michael's smile, laugh, and movements encourage social interactions to occur.

Interacting with grandfather:
- Michael seeks security from his grandfather; once he has it, he moves away to explore his world.
Summary

In this topic, we explored

• The definition of play and playfulness and the terminology often associated with play and playfulness,
• The characteristics of play and the taxonomies associated in describing play,
• The difference in use between the conceptual framework of play as a means to an end and play as an end,
• The difference of play and playfulness observed between typically developing children and children with an ASD, and
• The significance of play in the social–emotional health of children and in the development of social participation and lifelong relationships.

References


References (cont.)


References (cont.)


