



Why play in Therapy?

Alight Pediatric Services Inc.

What is Play-Based Speech and Language Therapy?

Play-based therapy is when the speech language pathologist (SLP) targets speech, language, and social skills through playing with toys or activities. The SLP creates opportunities for the child to practice the target skill while engaging with motivating items that match the child's interest.

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You may have heard that "play is a child's work". There is lots of research that shows why young children learn the best when they are engaged and playing as opposed to sitting down and completing 'work'.

- When children are engaged with toys and activities that interest them, they are more motivated to communicate and keep interaction going. This is important for practicing language.
- Play-based therapy also helps the child and therapist build a positive interaction while learning. Having a strong interaction and rapport is crucial for teaching speech and language skills.
- Play and language are very close linked together. In particular, language and social skills are tied closely with symbolic play skills in young children.
- Research also shows that children learn faster when they are taught through play because we are teaching language that is related to what they are interested in. This helps them connect real-life events with the speech and language skills they are learning.

An Example!

While 'playing' with a Mr. Potato Head toy, your child's therapist could be targeting (just to name a few):

- Social skills (e.g., eye contact, turn taking, etc.)
- Developing play based skills (e.g., pretend play)
- Vocabulary of body parts
- Basic concepts (e.g., in, out, on, behind)
- Function, size, category, etc. of words
- Following directions (e.g., "put the glasses on top of his hat")
- Requesting

In your sessions , if you feel your child's SLP is 'just playing' with your child, I encourage you to ask your therapist what goals are being targeted and how play-based therapy can help in achieving those goals. As you collaborate with your child's SLP, you will gain the confidence to use the strategies at home!

Compiled by Charlene Mun, MSc-SLP, R.SLP, SLP(C) (2020). Information based on 'Language Disorders from Infancy through Adolescence' by R. Paul & F. Norbury (2001)



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