



Let's Pretend!

Make-believe play builds the foundation for advanced thinking skills. When your child is engaged in pretend play, she gets to solve problems, think for herself, demonstrate her feelings, use interesting words, and interact with the world around her.

- You can demonstrate how to pretend. Pretend to be asleep. Pretend that you are a wild animal. Pretend to eat something delicious that isn't really there. Your child will be amazed and delighted by your silliness.
- The imaginative leaps your child makes, such as pretending a block can be a car, telephone, or cookie, shows his understanding of how one thing can stand in for another. Provide unstructured play materials—such as boxes, blocks, scarves, paper scraps, and so on—that allow your child to imagine and create.
- For your baby, a game of Peek-a-Boo is a game of pretend. Try variations, such as hiding your face behind a hat or using a stuffed animal.
- When your child imitates the things you do, such as fixing a bed for a doll, he's discovering the meaning of the roles and relationships of other people. He's also realizing that he doesn't have to copy you exactly and is free to imagine other ways to make a bed for his doll.
- Dressing up helps your child explore other roles. It takes very little to come up with a costume that will satisfy a young child. You can use construction paper, fabric scraps, scarves, old clothes, shoes or boots, purses and bags, and hats.
- Help introduce themes to your child's play by giving her a wide variety of experiences. Take her to a restaurant, the zoo, the library, and on errands to the bank, the post office, and other places where you and she can interact with others. Observing and participating in real-life situations, especially interacting with people, helps your child in creating her own play scenarios.

- Pretend play comes in different sizes. Creating scenes and scenarios with dollhouses or mini figures gives your child an opportunity to play a variety of roles at once. (You don't need expensive toys or dolls to play. Make simple figures from paper, cardboard, or Popsicle sticks.)
- Let your child tell you about what is happening in his make-believe world. Don't assume the teacup he hands you is a cup of tea, or that because he is wearing a cape he is a superhero. Say: *Tell me about what you are wearing.* Or: *What do you want me to do with this cup?*
- When you join your child in pretend play, follow her lead. Play your part in a way that builds upon her ideas and leads to next steps. Try to sense her mood. Is this a silly game, a reenactment of a real situation or storybook event, or an imaginary story in which anything can happen?