

Stages in the Development of Play

Play is an important way for children to learn and explore. Various types of play occur as children develop providing that the environment is supportive and materials are available to them. The changes in play are linked to cognitive and social development. The table below shows the stages in play development. Play development continues during the early years and can be expressed in relation to age and developmental stage. For example, exploratory play will continue throughout the pre-school years, observed in different ways from mouthing toys at five months, to looking for mini beasts at 3 - 4 years.

This table is from: Sheridan, MD, (2007), From birth to five years: Children's developmental progress.

Age	Cognitive Sequence	Social Sequence
From birth	<p>Exploratory Play</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spontaneous activity Involuntary movements begin to develop purpose e.g., a toy moves when the baby moves arms 	<p>Caregiver play</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focussed looking Copying facial expressions Vocalisations Development of purposeful actions due to receiving reliant responses
5 months	<p>Co-ordinated orienting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visual regard and hand - eye coordination Object exploration e.g., banging, mouthing 	<p>Integrated people - object play</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Toys can become the object of a shared attention. This is supported by an adult
9 months	<p>Cause -and - effect play</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actions aim to achieve specific effects e.g., pushing buttons etc 	<p>Showing and sharing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Holding up toys in order to gain interaction with an adult
12 months	<p>Functional play</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using toys / objects for their intended function e.g., rolling a ball, putting on a hat, pushing a car etc. 	

Age	Cognitive Sequence	Social Sequence
18 months	Pretend play <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using dolls / toys as agents e.g., feeding a doll etc. 	Joint interactive play with adults <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Copying actions of adults Turn take with an adult e.g., with a ball, bricks etc.
2 years	Play sequences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acting out known routines Symbolic play <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using objects as other items 	Parallel play <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Playing alongside children
3 years	Imaginative play sequences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acting out know activities and events Fantasy play 	Associative play <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being able to share materials for play, but following their own ideas
4 years	Narrative play <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of miniatures Conventional and fantasy play scenarios 	Co-operative play <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some negotiation with peers Understanding of rules