

Gravesham Early Years Specialist
Teaching & Learning Service



Identiplay

Early Years Specialist Teachers
Ifield Smile - Specialist Teaching and
Learning Service
Cedar Federation
Ifield School,
Cedar Avenue,
Gravesend
DA12 5JT

Teaching Play to Children with
Social Communication and
Interaction difficulties

Based on Nicky Philips and Liz Bevan's work

Tel: 01474 536924



Why Play?

All Children need play skills if they are to be fully included. Children naturally need to experience peer interactions. Play is a tool for learning and all children need this opportunity. All children need to practice social routines in safe surroundings.

Specific areas of development progress when children engage in play including cognitive development (learning, problem-solving, thinking and planning); social skills, language (understanding, using speech with others and turn taking); problem solving such as asking for help and solving difficulties and emotional development (managing feelings, understanding others and developing empathy). All these skills are critical for further learning and engagement.

Play relies on language skills, an understanding of social interaction skills, flexibility and imagination and a motivation for social experiences. All these skills are exactly the areas of difference and difficulty, along with sensory processing differences, that children with social interaction and social communication difficulties experience. It is no wonder that play for these children, is very often described as repetitive, sensory seeking and/or avoiding. These children with often find themselves isolated and frequently seek this state. We often see their play as lacking in imagination and flexibility but instead often copied from others with few original or developing ideas.

How can we help?

Identiplay is an approach that helps establish a shared focus. By doing this, it helps develop imitation skills, which in turn builds children's confidence as they practice a new skill. The idea is to set up a parallel play scenario with toys that meet the child's play development and motivation. Have two of each item with a clearly defined play area for the child and yourself. Playing alongside each other with no interference from the adult will help encourage the child who finds interaction so difficult, to learn new play skills. The adult needs to provide a very simple narrative to match the play actions to provide the child with structure, consistency and an understanding of what is happening. In time the routine allows for the adult to build in change and develop flexibility to the familiar, for the child. Always allow the child to explore the toys first before modelling your play sequence. Try and sit at a table at first, so that you can be eye level with the child. Sitting on a chair will also support listening and attention skills. Later, once the play routine is established you can move beyond the table top setting to floor and standing play.

Benefits from an Identiplay approach

Research shows that children who participate in Identiplay activities show an increase time playing alongside other children in parallel play. They also show an increase in social interaction behaviours (an increase in eye contact and verbal communication). There is evidence that the children's play becomes increasingly more purposeful with the toys available to them. The children can be observed replicating the taught play sequence with the toys and adding their own creative additions. Examples of Identiplay Kits :

Cars, animal sets, click-clack cars, trains, farm-yard, garage, dolls house etc.

