

Developmental Area:	Symbolic
Skill Strand:	Role Play & Creativity
Skill Phase:	At First
Skill Step:	I engage in pretend play, initially, with familiar activities that I can copy

You may be wanting to facilitate this skill step with most of your children if you are considering targeted skill progression and creating firm foundations for progression. You may want to facilitate this skill step with just a few children or with an individual target child as this is their next step.

Whatever the reason, this Practical Ideas Sheet will help you to reflect on your current practice and maybe to get some new ideas. Where possible, the practical ideas are grouped into the three layers of your practice. However, for this skill step, it is much more about our targeted use of the Learning Environment, considering our interactions as we do so.

Interactions

If you are working on this skill step, it is likely that the child will be at earlier stages of language development. If so, useful strategies as you model play and add language are:

- Where possible, be face-to-face and at the child's level, especially if you are building this skill step in a busier learning environment.
- Follow the child's lead and add language to match what they are doing.
- Add language using short sentences to keep your language load lower. Leave gaps between things that you say.
- Be repetitive to give the child more chances to hear the same words and language models. Repetition is crucial so saying less words but saying them more often can be really productive.
- Keep leaving gaps to give children time to process what you have said and the space to say something or to communicate with you non-verbally.

Targeted Use of the Learning Environment

You will have the resources and opportunities you need already to focus on this skill step. To begin with, home corners or home related resources can be very useful as children will be familiar with these things and what you are pretending from their real lives.

Use these resources and model really simple things such as eating food, having a drink or putting baby to bed. To begin with, keep repeating the same activity for a while before moving on to another thing. Later on, the child will put these pieces of activity together to form sequences of play but we have to start small and build from this.

You will often be facilitating this skill with many children present and that this is fine. However, where a child is older but needs backtracking to this much earlier skill, maybe demonstrating gaps with skills such as Auditory Attention and Receptive Language Skills too, it can be useful to try and find some time to be in an area with this target child when there are less distractions. This is difficult but consider are there any ways you can create little shots of time like this, even just for 5 minutes? Although you will still be utilising the Learning Environment, such shots of time become like a more focussed intervention with the target child.

It is important to note that most children develop the ability to pretend as they develop language. Children with language delays (especially affecting Receptive Language and Vocabulary) may also be delayed with their play development. Some children with disordered language, disordered communication and children who have received a diagnosis of ADHD will find this type of play specifically different.

Where a child is presenting with disordered development, we need to realise that we need to 'teach' the child how to play in this way so modelling and finding the time to offer this input is essential. In such cases, focus on one area at a time. When the child has 'learnt' how to use the resources and play in that area, move onto somewhere else.

It is also important to remember that, without this input, such children may only play with a limited number of resources, demonstrate a more limited repertoire of play and tend to stick with the same resources and areas all of the time. It is essential that we realise that this is not simply an issue of 'interest,' it is the child's way of letting us know that they need more support with play.