



Speech-Language Pathology

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Expanding Object Play

Children usually play with toys in many different ways. This helps them to learn about all of the things that a toy can do. This type of learning is important because it also helps a child to develop his/her imagination. Children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) often play with objects in only one or a very few ways. We know that when children with ASD learn to play with objects in many different ways (Yoder, 2006), or when they use objects to pretend, they say more words (Smith, Miranda, & Zaidman-Zait, 2007). Below are some ways you can teach your child to play with objects in different ways!:

Action: Try different actions with objects, for example:

- A ball can be rolled, thrown, bounced, or kicked.
- A baby doll can eat, sleep, play, bathe, etc.
- A toy car can go (drive), stop (park), or crash.

Concept: Change the way you play with a toy, for example:

- Cars can go up a hill or down a hill. They can also go fast or slow.
- Bubbles can be blown up high, under a table, or on the table. You can blow a big bubble or a little bubble.
- Put bean bags into a basket to make it heavy or light.

Location: Play with the toy in different places, for example:

- Roll a car on a table, mat, floor, or driveway.
- Play with toy letters at the table, in the bathtub, or on the refrigerator
- Play with a ball at the park, yard, or playground.

Change it up!

- Change the color, size, and/or texture of the object.
- Put different objects together. For example, have a car crash into a stack of blocks.

Special Teaching Tips:

- Offer your child choices as often as possible! Your child can choose:
 - The object he/she wants to play with
 - What he/she wants to do with the object (i.e. the action or concept).
 - Where he/she wants to play with the object (i.e. the location).
- Once your child learns how to play with different objects in different ways, make object play into a special game. Try the "Silly Unmatched Play Game¹" In this game, the child chooses one card for an object and one card for an action and performs the action with the object.
- Make it into a game!—Take turns with your child doing some of the activities suggested above.

¹Adapted with permission from Twachtman-Reilly, J. (2009, summer). *Tips for Translating Research into Practice: Tips for expanding object play. Autism Spectrum Quarterly*