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A Guide to Playing with Children with Autism

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A guide to playing with children with autism

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What are the characteristics of autism?

- Issues with communication, either the absence of expressive speech or impairments in the quality of speech;
- Issues with social interaction and engagement with others;
- Repetitive and/or, highly-routinized behaviors;
- Lack of pretend or symbolic play skills.

How do children engage in play?

- Alone, in pairs, in groups
- Structured, planned
- Unstructured, spontaneous
- Play stations
- Parallel play
- Pretend play
- Symbolic play

How to determine what type of play children with autism prefer:

- Watch the child carefully to determine his likes and dislikes. If he dislikes messy play, you probably won't be able to engage him with wet sand or play dough.
- Pay attention to any intense interests or hobbies by noting what television shows or movies the child seems to prefer.
- Does your child protest when a toy is removed?
- Pay careful attention to toys of interest in new environments – a doctor's waiting room, or at a neighbor's house

Some suggestions for playing with children with autism:

- Seize the moment – take advantage of times when your child appears interested in playing, even if it during bath time, for example
- Have various toys within sight of the child; he will be more likely to play with a toy that is out than one in a toy box or drawer
- Don't rush the child! It may take him a few minutes to "warm up" to a toy
- Think creatively! Chocolate pudding can be finger paints, cereal can be stringing beads, marshmallows can be stacking blocks

