

Autistic Play is Authentic Play

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- Play is the spontaneous activity of children.
- A child's play is individualized based on their interests and sensory preferences. This means that autistic children may play differently from their neurotypical peers (and that's okay!).
- Autistic children often have special interests related to letters, numbers, and non-traditional toys (such as spoons, keys, straws, door stops, or rocks).
- Autistic children typically enjoy holding, gathering, sorting, organizing, and/or lining up their preferred objects.
- Carefully examining and exploring all the sensory aspects of preferred objects is another common trait of autistic play.
- Our goal as parents, therapists, and teachers should not be to change the way an autistic child plays; rather, we should honor the child's interests and play style by engaging in child-led activities.
- Joining the child's play instead of directing it is how we demonstrate that we value their individual interests. Be a play partner instead of a play director!
- If the child is not ready to play WITH us yet, we can start by playing alongside the child (in what is called parallel play) in a pressure-free manner. During this time we must be careful not to create an asymmetrical interaction by asking too many test-like questions (*What color is it? How many are there?*) and giving too many directives (*Say 'ball'*).
- Respectful interactions are the key to building meaningful relationships with autistic children (and non-autistic children too!).



Examples of
authentic
play

