

POWERFUL PLAY

A DISABILITY GUIDE
TO DEVELOPMENT

WE KNOW FROM CALLS TO OUR NATIONAL NURSE HELPLINE THAT FAMILIES CARING FOR A DISABLED OR TERMINALLY ILL CHILD CAN SOMETIMES FIND IT DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND THEIR CHILD'S PLAY NEEDS. THIS IS OFTEN BECAUSE FOCUSING ON THE MEDICAL OR BEHAVIOURAL NEEDS TAKES OVER AND PLAY BECOMES SECONDARY TO THE PRACTICAL SIDE OF GETTING THROUGH EACH DAY.

PLAY IS A VITAL PART OF ANY CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT SO TO HELP YOU UNDERSTAND THE BENEFITS TO YOUR CHILD AND HOW YOU CAN GET THE MOST OUT OF PLAYTIME, WE HAVE PUT TOGETHER THIS USEFUL GUIDE WITH SUGGESTIONS FOR PLAY, DIFFERENT TECHNIQUES TO TRY AND WHERE TO GO FOR MORE SUPPORT.

If you would like to speak to Newlife's Care Services Team about anything in this brochure call **0800 902 0095** (free from UK mobiles and landlines) or dial **01543 468 400** (normal call charges apply) Monday – Friday, 9.30am – 5pm and until 7pm on Wednesdays.

Alternatively you can email **nurse@newlifecharity.co.uk** or go to the website, **newlifecharity.co.uk/contact** to use our 'Live Chat' service.

Please note that verbal translation services are available through the Nurse Helpline.

Need support or information?



Want to speak with a Newlife Nurse?

Newlife's Care Services Team readily use confidential translation services. We want you to feel comfortable when raising sensitive questions or discussing important matters.

 **0800 902 0095**

Simply call (free from UK mobiles and landlines) and inform a Nurse of your preferred language.

Newlife Nurses will provide caring emotional support and useful information regarding:

- rare & complex conditions;
- local & national services;
- rights & benefits;
- access to health & social care professionals;
- delivery of care in the community.

POWERFUL PLAY - INTRODUCTION

All children have the right to play and this should not exclude disabled children. Play is incredibly valuable to all children, teaching vital skills like taking turns, encouraging communication and demonstrating cause and effect. However, we understand that when a child has a physical disability or special educational needs it can present barriers that may make it difficult for children to fully enjoy the experience.

Many families caring for a child with disabilities worry their child will find it too difficult to 'play' and struggle to find suitable toys that will catch

their interest. Specialist toys are also often very expensive and it can be difficult to understand how your child will benefit from them and if they will respond to them.

Play at home is a key way of supporting your child's all round development as well as supporting any skills that school may be working towards developing. This guide offers practical information and suggestions for how to get the most out of playtime, for both you and your child, regardless of disability.

“Every child has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities...”

United Nations Convention – The Rights of the Child

WHY IS PLAY SO IMPORTANT?

Exploration and discovery are key to play, and experimenting with different senses can be very enjoyable for children. Stimulating these senses also strengthens connections in the brain which is important for all types of learning. The benefits of play for children with disabilities and special needs include:

- **Physical development:** sensory activities can be a good workout for the small muscles in their hands and fingers and coordination of larger movements (known as fine motor control).
- **Communication skills:** whatever their level of language development, children can often express their reactions to the immediate environment, e.g. showing excitement at splashing water, or surprise when they experience something new.
- **Cognitive development:** understanding how things work, comparing the characteristics of different features of toys.
- **Social skills:** watching how others play, copying and sharing ideas and taking turns in games.
- **Self-awareness:** learning what materials they like and don't like, increasing their understanding of themselves.
- **Emotional development:** a good release for energy or stress, and means children can also express the full spectrum of feelings in constructive ways.

“**Play is the highest form of research.**”
Albert Einstein

LEARNING HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD PLAY

Here are some tried and tested play techniques that will encourage your child to learn a range of physical, cognitive and social skills:

Scaling

Simply being able to do something isn't what makes play enjoyable. Just remember to focus on what your child can do, rather than what they can't, when planning play time. For example, when trying to teach a child how to thread, start off with bigger items to thread and stiffer materials, like threading hair bobbles onto the end of a wooden spoon or hanging wooden bangles on a mug tree. Repeated simple and achievable activities can bring great joy.

Forward and Backward Chaining techniques are also readily used when scaling and teaching new things, they can be used to teach the child a task and to actively involve the child in the task.

What is Forward Chaining?

The child begins with the first step of the task sequence, then the second step and continues learning steps of the task in a sequential order until he or she can perform all steps in the task. Forward Chaining can be helpful for children who have difficulties with sequencing skills.

What is Backward Chaining?

When using Backward Chaining, the adult performs most of the task and the child performs the last step of the sequence to receive positive reinforcement for completing the task. Practice continues with the adult completing fewer steps and the child completing additional steps. Backward chaining is particularly helpful for children with a low frustration tolerance or poor self-esteem because it gives immediate success.



WHAT IS AVAILABLE?

There are a number of ways families can find out what services are available to support them to help their child access play services. You could speak to your child's GP, Health Visitor, Occupational Therapist or Social Worker who will be able to signpost to some organisations or support services.



Portage

Portage workers provide a home-visiting service for pre-school children (under five years old) who have special educational needs, and their families. They work to a portage model which aims to develop play, communication, relationships and learning.

Portage Aims To:

- Work with families to help them learn together, play together, participate and be included in their community in their own right.
- Play a part in minimising the disabling barriers that confront young children and their families.
- Support the national and local development of inclusive services for children.

How Portage is Delivered

- Traditionally Portage is delivered by Portage Home Visitors who are employed as part of a Portage service to support children and families within their local community.
- Each Portage service is different and the model of delivery will differ from area to area.
- A full description of the Portage Model of Service Delivery is given in the NPA Code of Practice.

Find out more about Portage Services and Service registration at portage.org.uk

Your child's SEN Co-ordinator at school may also be able to provide information and advise on how you can access specialist play services that may compliment strategies being introduced by the school.

The Role of the SEN-Co

Once your child starts attending an educational setting – school or nursery, Local Authority funded or private setting, there will be a SEN-CO. The day-to-day responsibility for the operation of SEN policy and coordination of specific provision made to support individual pupils with Special Educational Needs, this includes those who have EHC plans or statements of special educational needs.

- **The SEN-CO will be advising and supporting colleagues to best support the child within the setting.**
- **Ensuring parents are closely involved throughout and that their insights inform action taken by the setting.**
- **The SEN-CO will also be liaising with professionals or agencies beyond the setting such as educational psychologists, health and social care professionals, and independent or voluntary bodies.**

As a parent you may find that you have meetings with the settings SEN-CO as well as the child's teacher or early year's practitioner. This is to ensure that any adaptations to your child's learning and care is understood by all.

If you live in England & Wales

The first port of call to find out what's available to you and your family is to contact your local authority as services and provision vary from authority to authority.

You should be able to find the local offer for your area by going to your local authority's website and searching for 'local offer'. Contact your local authority in the first instance:

<https://www.gov.uk/find-local-council>.

If you live in Scotland: The first step is to get in touch with your local authority:
Find My Authority

If you live in Northern Ireland: For more information visit: **NI Direct Government Services**



“

WE REALLY APPRECIATE ALL YOU DO AND YOU HAVE HELPED GRAYSON SO MUCH WITH ALL THE TOYS IN HIS POD. WE WILL BE SAD TO GIVE IT BACK AND HAPPY IT WILL BE GOING TO ANOTHER CHILD AFTER US!”

PLAY THERAPY POD

At Newlife, we understand the power of play and the impact it can have on a child's physical and social development, and cognitive abilities. We also know how hard it can be for families to get hold of specialist toys, which often come with a specialist price tag. Families frequently have to prioritise purchasing practical equipment for their child and toys are pushed to the bottom of the list. Apply online for 12 week loan of a Play Therapy Pod at:

<http://newlife.support/PTPApply>



THE MANY BENEFITS OF PLAY

Physical Development

Some of the benefits of play in terms of physical development may seem fairly obvious if a child is able to run around and be active, but the benefits run much deeper than that. Play can help a child's vision – as they follow a particular toy with their gaze it strengthens their muscles around their eyes as well as improving hand to eye coordination. Play can also encourage an understanding of spatial awareness while playing with smaller toys which can improve fine motor skills, giving the muscles in the hands a workout. Play can also encourage a child to respond to instructions, helping to develop their concentration.

Hand-Eye Coordination

Hand eye coordination is an important factor in your child's overall physical development. It is the use of the eyes to direct muscles towards a task, such as reaching out for a toy or object of choice. This is developing your child's eye tracking, creating the ability to read and write. This later develops into carrying out everyday tasks such as eating or brushing teeth and hair, which are all interlinked with fine and gross motor development.

Fine Motor Skills

Little fingers love exploring and discovering - toys that can be touched, flicked, spun and tugged create endless pleasure, allowing your child to discover the joys and surprises of interactive toys.

Show your child how much fun it is to pull, flick, press and spin the various toys, and allow them to copy you. Do they have a particular finger or hand they like to use? Encouraging them to use different parts of their body to cause the same effect can be fun and really beneficial.



Gross Motor Skills

Certain physical toys can help your child to get a sense of balance, whether balancing on their hands, kneeling or standing can provide a challenge to a child as it can alter their sense of stability and children learn to develop their receptive senses. Balance boards can be great fun and can also encourage rocking.

Balls are great for encouraging early catching skills, as they are just right for small fingers to hold. Take the time to show them how to hold out their hands, and count down to the moment you release the ball for them to catch. Make sure you allow them to process the instructions before repeating the activity.

The whole family can get involved with ball games. Simple throwing and catching is great but with a little imagination you can



invent new games like catching with different hands or not letting the ball bounce more than once. There are endless rolling games you can use the ball for, which will improve visual tracking and hand-eye coordination. Make a goal out of cushions and roll into them to score a goal. Encourage your child to try different angles and distances to keep them interested and involve siblings or other family members to demonstrate turn-taking.

HINTS & TIPS

- You could hide objects to encourage children to search – even hiding small items in one hand and getting your child to guess which hand it's in, is a fun simple game to play.
- Giving young children simple household items to explore can be fun. Simple pots and pans with a wooden spoon can create a very satisfying musical experience. Even using different sponges and materials can provide a treasure basket of textures to explore.
- Whilst playing with a jigsaw you can help your child to make the correct choice of jigsaw piece by covering up the incorrect puzzle holes with your hand/ arms, giving the child less choices and making the activity easier to achieve. Jigsaw puzzles are also very portable so can be played with anywhere!
- During a painting activity the parent or caregiver can associate a sound to a specific colour of paint, for example, every time the child uses the blue paint you can make a 'pop' sound, when using a red colour you can make a 'woo' sound. This is a way of encouraging your child to do something to cause a sound.
- Create your own cause and effect- when your child achieves something or completes something that you want them to do, give praise or make a sound / gesture that you can repeat each time they do this. This will help to engage them and give them the want to keep doing it to see your positive reaction.

COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

There are many ways to encourage a child to communicate that can be incorporated into their play. Using objects such as particular toys as points of reference, making hand gestures like Makaton, or using expressive language will help some children, whereas others may benefit from alternative communication systems, including low tech ones such as books or visual aids through to high tech eye gaze systems. Increasingly Ipads and tablets are becoming a useful communication aid with specific applications being developed to support communication.

Using Gestures or Signs

Makaton is a unique language program that provides a basic means of communication for children and adults with learning difficulties and communication problems. Makaton combines speech, symbols and signs to offer a functional method of communication that can be used in day to day life. Makaton pulls out key words in the sentence and uses signs in word order as well as incorporating spoken words and signing at the same time.

Objects of Reference

An object of reference is any object which is used systematically to represent an item, activity, place, or person. Understanding real objects is the first stage of symbolic development, so using objects is considered the most concrete way of representing a word. Objects of reference can help a child's understanding of spoken language. The object can be a real item, or a miniature object.

Objects of reference were originally used with people with multi-sensory impairment. Today, objects of reference are used with a range of people who find it difficult to access other systems of communication (e.g. spoken language, signing and symbols). Children who often benefit from this system have:

- **Visual impairment**
- **Hearing impairment**
- **Autistic spectrum disorder (ASD)**
- **Learning disabilities (often severe or profound and multiple disabilities)**

Getting started with objects of reference is simple, examples to start with could be:

- **A nappy – For toilet/changing time**
- **A Cup/plate – For snack times/ mealtimes**
- **An item of clothing for going outside (coat, wellies) – For outdoor time**
- **A car or bus – For going home**
- **A rubber duck / Face cloth – For bath time**

Objects of reference will be different for each individual child and should be used regularly to help reinforce the idea.

Using Pictures

Picture Exchange Communication Systems, or PECS, use visual symbols to encourage and teach communication with parents, carers, teachers and peers. The aim is to help the child to learn intentional communication that they can actually use in practice in order to express their wants and needs. The card can be exchanged for the item your child wants.

Eye Gaze

Eye gaze or eye tracking is a way of accessing your computer or communication aid using a mouse that you control with your eyes. The Tobii systems follow your eyes with amazing accuracy to see where you are looking on the screen. You can then select the item you are looking at by staring at the screen for a length of time, blinking or clicking with a switch.

All of these communication strategies need to be initiated by a speech and language professional, but can be actively supported through play.



HINTS & TIPS

- When using objects of reference, start with one object at a time. Make sure that your child is engaged & understands what they have to do before introducing other objects into their communication.
- When communicating with your child, be aware of your immediate environment and position yourself so that you can see each other and are at the same level.
- If looking directly into your eyes is too invasive for your child, look into a mirror together to see if they can look at you this way. You could place a sticker on your forehead too as a place for them to focus on. Using video conferencing functions (FaceTime, Skype, Video calls etc) can also aid communication because the child looks at the device rather than into someone's eyes.
- Read stories or sing familiar songs using objects, puppets or cuddly toys that relate to the story or song. This may help to engage your child in this activity more.



FOLLOWING DISCUSSIONS WITH SARAH'S NURSERY, IT WAS IDENTIFIED THAT SHE NEEDED A FUNCTIONAL SEAT TO BE ABLE TO SIT UP RIGHT AND ACCESS PLAY OPPORTUNITIES. WITH SUPPORT FROM NEWLIFE WE WERE IN A POSITION TO NOT ONLY SECURE FUNDING BUT FEEL LIKE WE WERE ABLE TO CONTRIBUTE TOWARDS HER FUTURE."

EQUIPMENT MATTERS

Newlife can fund essential disability equipment such as beds, portable hoists, wheelchairs, seating systems, and much more. Equipment can improve child health, reduce risk of injury and pain, as well as support delivery of care – while enabling positive childhood development and encouraging independence. Equipment needs should be considered alongside a child's opportunities for development through play, so liaise with local health and social care services to ensure that the equipment is appropriately assessed prior to application. Apply online for the funding of essential equipment at:

<http://newlife.support/EGSApply>



SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Put simply, play impacts on what happens in a child's brain and helps them to develop and learn new skills. Through play, children with disability are often able to develop an understanding of how things work and compare the characteristics of different materials, triggering associated development as they learn repeated behaviours and sequences and how they feel about them.

As well as helping to develop cognitive skills, play is also an effective distraction from pain and can help with managing challenging behaviour. For example, using certain play techniques can help distract a child with Autism who may be showing signs of going into a meltdown or displaying other challenging behaviours.

Playing games and using specialist toys can also enable children to learn how to demonstrate awareness and anticipation of things happening around them. The ability to understand cause and effect can also be learned through play as well as encouraging children to display their emotions about the 'effect'.

Understanding Cause and Effect

Understanding 'cause' and 'effect' is an important stage of development. It involves understanding the connection between an action and a consequence. For children with complex physical disabilities it is particularly important

that they understand that they can have control and make things happen. It is an essential part of communication and a prerequisite for many learning experiences such as making choices.

Cause and effect begins early in development when a child learns to influence their environment. For example, looking at and reaching for their cup then looking at their parent, and repeating this until their action (looking and reaching) results in the consequence (being given their drink). It is an intentional action.

Children love to make repetitive movements and while exploring this basic skill they will be rewarded with lots of different effects from many different simple toys, for example, pressing buttons on toys to gain a reaction and/or shaking a rattle (producing sound). During bath time your child can also learn cause and effect by dropping a toy into the bath water to cause a splash or ripple.



EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Play has an important role in a child's emotional growth, and research has pointed to three areas where play helps children develop emotionally:

Building self-confidence and esteem. Building children's self-esteem is very important, this helps to support the rest of their overall development.

Experimenting with various emotions. Allowing children the freedom to do this is incredibly important as well as teaching them about different emotions and the appropriate use of these emotions.

Releasing emotions from pain or trauma. Play allows children in a non-verbal way to communicate their feelings of pain or trauma. Often allowing those that are close to them to understand better what the child is feeling and how to support them.

SOCIAL SKILLS

Play brings children together enabling them to interact, copy and share ideas and engage with other children and adults. Children can learn how to share and how to express their emotions through role play and in using characters and shapes. Play can also teach a child self-awareness, helping them to understand what materials they like and don't like, increasing their understanding of themselves.

Mirroring

Mirroring is when the behaviour of an adult caregiver imitates the gesture, speech pattern, or attitude of a child. Mirroring children's actions, rather than expecting them to copy you, can help them to become aware that there is someone close by, leading to them wanting to interact with you. This can be as simple as the way they play with a toy - for example if your child is building a tower, start building your own tower next to them, or if a child is

pressing a button on a cause and effect toy, do the same either at the same time or just after. You can also do this with writing activities by copying the movements that are made by the child and the marks that they create.

If your child moves from one activity to another, wait for them to become involved in what they are doing before starting to mirror them, otherwise there is the risk that the child may become irritated by this behaviour.

Involving Others

Involving as many familiar people into your child's play will greatly support their social development, as they will start to learn and notice the different reactions that people give and also gain skills around turning taking and sharing. A simple activity of taking it in turns to change pens/ pencils when drawing, or rolling a ball to each other can enhance a child's social skills.

HINTS & TIPS

- Simple turn taking activities such as rolling a ball to each other can build up social skills and get siblings involved.
- Singing songs such as 'row, row, row your boat' - sit facing each other and hold hands rocking to and fro as you sing.
- Children are fascinated by mirrors and how reflections happen. Mirrors can be positioned almost anywhere for maximum reflective fun. You can also try using these at bath time, bubbles can be twice the fun when reflected in the mirror. Why not squirt some shaving foam on the mirror and let your child make marks with their fingers and toes.
- Positive modelling, praising your child and positive reinforcement are essential in how children learn new things and gain awareness of the appropriateness of behaviour. If your child sees you sharing, being helpful and sharing feelings, your child will have a good understanding of how to interact with other people.
- You may find it helpful to have cards with recognisable emotions on that your child can show you when they are feeling such emotion. For example a sad, happy and angry face. This helps the child to release their emotions but also learn to understand what it is they are feeling.



AHMED HAS A SHORTENED LIFE EXPECTANCY BECAUSE OF HIS HEALTH NEEDS AND AS SUCH WE WANT TO MAKE THE MOST OF OPPORTUNITIES TO ACCESS OUR LOCAL COMMUNITY AND MAKE MEMORIES. NEWLIFE PROVIDED A SPECIALIST BUGGY THAT NOT ONLY MET HIS HEALTH NEEDS, BUT PROVIDED ACCESS TO PLAY EQUIPMENT IN THE LOCAL PARK."

EQUIPMENT EMERGENCY

Newlife understands that some children just don't have time to wait for assessments and urgently need equipment to maintain their health and keep them safe.

Newlife provides the UK's only rapid response equipment loan service for children who are at significant risk of injury or in urgent need because of their shortened life expectancy. We can act immediately, often delivering equipment within 72 hours of terms and conditions being agreed, to meet the short-term crisis.

Where appropriate, we will then offer to work with your family and local health and social care services to make sure your child receives long-term, permanent provision. Families can make multiple applications as is necessary – we don't put limits on your child! Apply online at:

<http://newlife.support/EELApply>



HINTS & TIPS

Consider ways to access play in different surroundings by taking your child on a day trip that plans to visit different opportunities for play. There are many regional websites you could visit, such as:

- https://www.londonplay.org.uk/content/29719/play_in_london/find_a_place_to_play (London)
- <http://www.specialneedsfamilyhub.co.uk/> (Isle of Wight)
- <https://www.sensorytrust.org.uk/resources> (Cornwall/Devon)
- <https://www.play-ability.org/> (Warrington)
- <https://www.fair-play.co.uk> (North Derbyshire)
- <https://www.kids.org.uk> (England)
- <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/playforall/> (Wales and Northern Ireland)
- <http://www.playengland.org.uk/> (England)
- <https://www.playscotland.org/> (Scotland)
- <https://www.playwales.org.uk/> (Wales)
- <https://www.playboard.org> (Northern Ireland)

In addition to Newlife's Play Therapy Pod Service, you may want to consider loaning specialist toys from:

- <http://www.tabithastoys.org/> (North East of England)
- <https://www.cerebra.org.uk/help-and-information/library/> (UK Wide for Children with any Brain Condition)

There are a number of funding organisations who may consider funding sensory toys for you to use in your home. Although you will need to look at their individual terms and conditions, and your eligibility to access funding from these organisations, you may wish to consider contacting:

- <https://www.caudwellchildren.com/>
- <https://www.childrentoday.org.uk/>
- <http://www.lifeline4kids.org/>
- <https://www.variety.org.uk/>
- <https://www.familyfund.org.uk/>

Alternatively, consider visiting <https://www.turn2us.org.uk/> to search for other organisations that may provide financial assistance for the purchase of indoor and outdoor toys/play equipment.

If you are finding it somewhat difficult to find enough time to commit to play, why not reach out to the following organisations to see if they can offer additional support in and around the family home to free up your time to create quality moments:

- <https://www.gov.uk/find-sure-start-childrens-centre>
- <https://www.home-start.org.uk/>
- <https://rainbowtrust.org.uk/>

For more information regarding supporting purposeful play with a child that has a specific sensory impairment, then consider approaching local or national charities/support groups for additional creative ideas. For instance, RNIB, NDCS and Sense have excellent online resources readily available.

Our dedicated team of nurses can be contacted through our national FREE helpline. Newlife's Nurses routinely receive helpline calls about the challenges parents face when trying to prioritise quality family time while also being expected to become an expert on their child's health.

If you want caring support and individualised information that could help improve quality of life for your whole family on any of the points below:

Call the Care Services Team on **0800 902 0095** (free from UK mobiles and landlines) or dial **01543 468 400** (normal call charges apply) Monday – Friday, 9.30am – 5pm and until 7pm on Wednesdays.

Alternatively you can email **nurse@newlifecharity.co.uk** or go to the website, **newlifecharity.co.uk/contact** to use our 'Live Chat' service.

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