

## Top tips for developing collaborative play

**Collaborative play is also known as social play and cooperative play. While babies are born to be sociable, successful collaborative play requires sophisticated emotional and social skills.**

**As toddlers begin to become aware of their peers as playmates, they initiate the skills of turn taking and sharing. Anyone who knows toddlers will understand that this is a very difficult stage for the young children to master. While they want to play with others, managing the emotions this causes takes patience and understanding from the adults around them.**

**As children gradually develop their social skills, they learn to follow simple rules (such as who is going to take on which role in home corner) and to negotiate. Social competence continues to develop as children's play becomes more refined, demonstrating cooperation and collaboration.**



Notice when a young child is becoming more involved in social play. They may tolerate a peer playing next to them while engaged in the same activity (such as sharing the train track) but do not talk together or follow any shared purpose. This is a crucial time for developing tolerance and promoting all opportunities to share, take turns and be aware of their own and others' needs:

- Encourage the children to notice each other playing the same activity
- Model social talk such as 'your turn'
- Acknowledge when a child has shared a toy or accommodated another child's needs.

Around this stage, children may start to develop friendships:

- Encourage these to develop by modelling friendly behaviour, such as greeting them in the morning or noticing if their friend needs help
- Find opportunities to them to be together, such as at small group time, jointly tidying an area, and so on.

As children develop communication, emotional and social skills, their play becomes more sociable. It may involve a few peers engaged in the same play, even if for short periods of time. Some children will be able to suggest what to do e.g. "I'll be the seller, you come to my shop." Sometimes an intention will be shared between the children and sometimes this will be lost, as children each contribute their own ideas, which do not necessarily share a joint purpose.

- Continue to engage with the children, modelling rules and supporting negotiation to extend their play
- Support children to manage their own and others' emotions
- Model how to manage situations as they arise, such as when a peer feels aggrieved or left out or unable to take the role they want, to scaffold collaborative play development.

Older children will move onto more sophisticated, highly social and cooperative play with clear purpose, roles and rules. They may seek further resources than those immediately available to support their intentions and are likely to be highly absorbed in their play. Any disagreements are usually managed themselves through problem-solving and negotiation. Adult intervention is rarely needed or sought.

- Acknowledge when children are successfully using these sophisticated emotional and social skills by reflecting with the children how they resolved issues or achieved a shared goal.

## **NDNA products to support you with this activity**

[Online training – Characteristics of Effective Learning](#)

[Live virtual classroom training - Positive Behaviour in Early Years](#)

**Find more resources at [www.ndna.org.uk/hub/myndna](http://www.ndna.org.uk/hub/myndna)**