

Development of creative thought

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Birth to 9 months

Children use observation, exploration, and social interaction to learn about objects, actions, and people. Children observe and interact with their surrounding environment, and begin to build the skills needed to manipulate objects and materials in different ways. Children are building the foundation for problem solving through active exploration and social interaction. Children build the beginnings of creative expression through everyday interactions with their caregivers. Children begin to form memories from their experiences and will begin to anticipate certain patterns for occurrences. Children begin to build awareness and use simple actions to have an impact on objects and people in their environment.

Indicators for children include:

- Uses senses to explore objects, e.g., observes, mouths, touches
- Physically manipulates objects - twists, turns, shakes, bangs, drops...
- Combines objects in play
- Locates an object that has been partially hidden
- Observes materials, objects, and people with curiosity
- Actively explores new objects found in the environment by touching, patting, and mouthing
- Reaches for objects in close proximity
- Imitates and participates in interactions -sounds, movements, and facial expressions
- Focuses on getting a caregiver's attention through the use of sounds, cries, gestures, and facial expressions
- Communicates the need for assistance through verbal and/or nonverbal cues, e.g., pointing, reaching, vocalizing

Strategies for interaction

- Create an inviting environment for the child to explore; change materials and toys in the child's environment on a regular basis
- Interact and socially engage the child often throughout the day, e.g., use diapering and feeding times to playfully communicate with the child
- Follow the child's lead during play
- Provide toys and experiences that have a variety of colors, textures, sounds, and smells
- Create an inviting environment for the child to explore; change materials and toys in the child's environment on a regular basis
- Follow the child's lead during play
- Engage with the child while he or she is exploring, e.g. demonstrate what the object or toy does
- Provide toys and experiences that have a variety of colors, textures, sounds, and smells
- Respond thoughtfully and promptly to the child's attempts for attention

7 months to 18 months

Children use social interaction to continue to gather meaning from objects, actions, and people. Children move from exploring objects to learning how to play with objects in ways they are intended to be used. Toward the end of this age period, children begin to use one object to represent another object. Children first begin using most objects and materials for their intended use. As they develop, children begin to experiment with using these objects and materials in new and unexpected ways. Children begin to discover that certain actions and behaviors can be solutions to challenges and obstacles they encounter. Children also recognize how to engage their caregiver(s) to assist in managing these challenges. Children increasingly engage with their caregiver(s) and show enjoyment in activities and interactions that focus on music, movement, building, and play. Children combine specific actions to have an effect on people and objects, and interact with people and objects in different ways to discover what will happen.

Indicators for children include:

- Demonstrates object permanence, e.g., realizes objects and people still exist, even when they are not physically visible
- Imitates adult's actions, e.g., bangs a drum with a rattle, after observing an adult complete the action
- Engages in simple pretend/symbolic play, e.g., pretends to drink tea from a pretend tea cup, pretends to feed baby doll with toy bottle, uses a toy block as a phone, pretends to talk to mama
- Recognizes familiar people and/or objects in photographs
- Imitates a peer's actions, e.g., bangs on table with cup
- Uses objects as they're intended to be used, e.g., rolls a toy car
- Spends increasing amounts of time exploring and learning about objects, e.g., will attend to a new toy for longer periods of time in order to make sense of it
- Begins to use objects in new and unexpected ways, e.g., places a basket on head
- Imitates actions of other people in a playful manner, e.g., wags finger at baby doll and says, "no, no, no"
- Repeats actions over and over again to figure out how an object works
- Begins to recognize that certain actions will draw out certain responses, e.g., laughing and smiling will often result in an adult responding in the same manner
- Attempts physical strategies to reach simple goals, e.g., pulls the string of a toy train to move it closer or crawls to get a ball that has rolled away
- Enjoys familiar songs and rhymes, , movements to music engages with simple art experiences and block play - stacking

Strategies for interaction

- Respond enthusiastically when the child demonstrates new uses for objects he or she has discovered
- Play with the child often; follow his or her lead
- Imitate the child during play, e.g., hold up a pretend phone to ear
- Name objects and people found in the child's environment
- Respond enthusiastically when the child demonstrates new uses for objects he or she has discovered
- Provide materials that can be used in more than one way
- Change objects and toys frequently for the child
- Play with the child often and encourage creativity
- Imitate the child in a genuine manner during play

16 months to 24 months

Children demonstrate the beginning of symbolic thinking as they start to label objects in everyday life. Children also use more complex social interactions and engage in imaginary play to make sense of the world around them. Children begin to expand how they use creativity, imagination, and inventiveness through the use of symbolic representation in play. Children have an enhanced capacity to solve challenges they encounter through the use of objects and imitation. Children may take on a more autonomous role during this stage. Children continue to show increasing ability as they engage with their caregiver(s) in music, movement, building, and play activities. Children recognize and anticipate the series of steps in familiar activities. Children understand how purposeful actions can affect different objects and people. Children also begin to connect objects and ideas based on repetition and experience.

Indicators for children include:

- Pretends one object is really another by using substitution, e.g., a napkin for a baby's nappy, banana a phone
- Finds objects after they are hidden in close proximity
- Engages in pretend play with familiar objects and experiences, e.g., places baby doll in stroller and pushes the stroller
- Identifies or names his or her drawings, e.g., points to scribble and says, "mama and dada"
- Communicates labels to familiar objects and/or people, e.g., says "dog" when seeing four-legged animals Pretends one object is really another by using substitution, e.g., using a toy car to brush hair
- Engages in pretend play with familiar objects and experiences, e.g., places baby doll in stroller and pushes the stroller
- Engages familiar adults in pretend play, e.g., hands the adult a play cup and pretends to pour "tea" into it
- Communicates in creative ways, e.g., plays with words by rhyming, chanting, or making up songs; uses movement and dance
- Increases ability to recognize and solve problems through active exploration, play, and trial and error, e.g., tries inserting a shape at different angles to make it fit in a sorter
- Uses objects in the environment to solve problems, e.g., uses a pail to move numerous books to the other side of the room
- Uses communication to solve problems, e.g., runs out of glue during an art project and gestures to a caregiver for more
- Placement and arranging with objects and materials
- Enjoys the process of art activities, engages with simple instruments

Strategies for interaction

- Engage and play with the child; follow the child's lead
- Narrate the child's play, e.g., "Are you taking the baby for a walk to the store?"
- Repeat words that child is attempting to attach meaning to, e.g., say, "yes, baby," as the child points to a picture of a baby
- Encourage and praise the child as he or she shares accomplishments
- Play with the child; follow the child's lead
- Narrate the child's play, e.g., "Are you taking the baby for a walk to the store?"
- Encourage the child's creative and inventive attempts
- Actively engage with the child while playing; demonstrate enthusiasm/delight
- Provide the child with opportunities to solve problems with and without help; minimize the possibility for the child to become frustrated
- Respond to the child's communication efforts

21 months to 36 months

Children use their ability to label and think symbolically to engage in increasingly complex social interactions, exploration, and play. Children use these skills to recreate experiences, problem-solve, and explore relationships and roles. Children incorporate their use of creativity, inventiveness, and imagination in a more complex manner while they play, communicate, and problem-solve. Children begin to discriminate which solutions work, with fewer trials. Children increasingly become more autonomous and will attempt to first overcome obstacles on their own or with limited support. Children initiate and engage in music, movement, building, and play activities to interact with others and express ideas, feelings, and emotions. Children anticipate the steps in experiences and activities and understand the sequence of events. They may also remember and recall past events and translate knowledge of past experiences to new experiences. Children have a greater understanding of causation and can predict and choose specific actions to attain a desired result. Children also begin to apply past experiences and knowledge to form ideas.

Indicators for children include:

- Assigns roles to peers while engaged in imaginary play
- Builds in sequencing while engaged in play, e.g., beginning, middle, and end
- Communicates descriptors of people or objects that are not present
- Projects feelings and words onto stuffed animals, e.g., “The horse is sad”
- Uses gestures to reflect mood – eg: jumps up and down when excited
- Takes on different adult roles during play and uses appropriate mannerisms, e.g., pretends to be the teacher
- Expands use of objects and toys in new and unexpected ways; makes a road out of a few blocks; or substitutes an object for another to solve a problem
- Takes on familiar roles during play, e.g., cooks in the pretend kitchen
- Expresses inventive ideas to peers while playing; becomes directive, e.g., “You will be the police officer and you have to wear this.”
- Creates an art project and creates a simple story to accompany the artwork
- Begins to solve problems with less trial and error
- Refuses assistance, e.g., calls for help but then pushes a hand away
- Shows pride when accomplishing a task
- Uses increasingly refined skills while solving problems
- Identifies and discusses characters that are meaningful to him and her
- Builds increasingly complex structures, e.g., uses smaller blocks to build taller towers, lines up materials and adds other components to create a “road” leading up to the tower
- Uses imaginary play to cope with fears, e.g., puts monster in a closet
- Plays dress-up and invites caregiver(s) to play along

Strategies for interaction

- Interact with the child during pretend play and follow his or her lead
- Ask open-ended questions while playing with the child in order to expand on thoughts and language
- Continue to label and narrate actions, objects, and experiences for the child
- Encourage the child to use objects in creative ways to help problem-solve, e.g., using a towel as an apron
- Interact with the child during pretend play and follow his or her lead
- Ask open-ended questions while playing with the child in order to expand on thoughts and language
- Encourage the child to think of new ideas, e.g., “What do you think happens after the butterfly flies away?”
- Follow the child’s lead and pay attention to their cues when assisting in a task
- Share in the child’s joy and accomplishments
- Model and narrate problem-solving skills through play
- Provide the child with blocks of uninterrupted time to work on activities