

Play Tip of the Week

- Imaginative play is a great way to expose your child to new vocabulary that they may not be exposed to in everyday life (or lockdown!). Look to include words for people such as "pirate", places such as "castle", actions such as "rescue" and objects such as "telescope" and "treasure". Search for pictures of the words together online, to make them come to life.
- Provide detail to enrich your child's play. For example, if playing 'animal hospital', make comments about different types of equipment or medical devices that might be useful to help the stuffed animal patients. You could model how to use a stethoscope and a thermometer and discuss what they are for.
- If your child shows interest in a certain topic through play, find some ebooks that relate to that topic or educational videos on YouTube. This can help your child to be more engaged with reading and allow them to add more details to their play when they next come back to it.
- Incorporate real life reading and writing experiences into your child's play. For example, shoppers write lists, shop workers give receipts, police officers issue tickets, astronauts write logs, firefighters write reports and party hosts send invitations. These add authenticity to playtime while secretly encouraging literacy. All you need is paper and crayons or markers.
- Encourage children to use toys in new and creative ways, in which they don't always need to follow the instructions. Once your child has built their Lego according to the manual, encourage them to mix and match parts from different sets to create their own designs and scenarios. Try not to say, "no" or "that wouldn't work." Even if your child's suggestion is silly or doesn't make sense, try to find a way to use it somehow - play doesn't have to be realistic. Let your child know you love their creations and ideas.
- Although we recommend letting children lead the play, they can sometimes get stuck in a rut and act out the same scenario repetitively. If they are struggling to move on, introduce a new element that may not have occurred to them. Maybe the money in the till could go missing or something go wrong with the spaceship engine. Remember to think outside of the box, and let your child take the lead on fixing the problem.
- Take turns. If your child is finding it difficult to pretend, it's easy to take over the play in an attempt to show them what to do. This can teach them new ways to play, but after you have done something with your toy, pause and wait so that your child can have a turn too. In this way, your play together will be a back-and-forth 'conversation', in which each of you has a chance to say or do something.

