



Inclusive Play Guide

DECEMBER 2015

Supported by:



Landsforeningen LEV was founded in 1952 by parents from all over Denmark. The mission for LEV was and still is to advocate for all people with intellectual disabilities and their families and inclusion for all in the society

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FOREWORD

Persons with Autism in Ghana are amongst the forgotten and voiceless people of our country. They are often faced with discrimination and denied their right to education. Like all other children, Inclusion Ghana believes that children with autism have a right to education and therefore government of Ghana must support them with the needed educational environment in mainstream schools to exercise this right. As Ghana begins the implementation of the Inclusive education policy, IG believes that no child or learner should be left behind.

Inclusion Ghana recognizes that the cultural stigma and challenges faced by parents of persons with autism in Ghana is so strong that many parents hide their children or are reluctant to take their children to school. Being part of the technical working group that supported the development of the inclusive education policy and its implementation plan, Inclusion Ghana saw a need to develop this Play Guide based on evidence of an inclusive education project focused on learners with autism in mainstream schools.

This Play Guide is first and foremost designed for teachers and parents/caregivers of persons with autism. We hope this Play Guide will inspire teachers on the kind of activities to include learners with autism in the mainstream schools. It is also expected that parents/caregivers will also utilise the information in this book to support their children in school.

We wish to thank a variety of people who contributed to the development of this Play Guide. We would like to thank our member organisations, who contributed their expertise. We are grateful to the Danish Disability Fund through Landsforeningen LEV who gave us financial support for the development of this Play Guide. We also express our gratitude to the parents/caregivers who generously shared their experiences, feelings and hopes for what inclusion can achieve for their children with autism. Finally, we would like to show special appreciation to Sarah Palshof and the entire staff at Inclusion Ghana for the great support in the development of this Play Guide.



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INTRODUCTION

Children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) enjoy playing, but they can find some types of play difficult. It is common for them to have very limited play, play with only a few toys, or play in a repetitive way. For example, your child might like spinning the wheels on a car and watching the wheels rotate, or might complete a puzzle in the same order every time.

Autism Spectrum Disorder affects the development of social and communication skills. It can also affect the development of important skills needed for play, such as the ability to copy simple actions, explore the environment, share objects and attention with others, respond to others and take turns.

A child with ASD can learn and develop the skills needed for play if assisted. They can run and jump, kick a ball and throw it as well. They can play catch, dance and even swim. Of course all of this varies from each child but the potential is always there. They just need to be taught the right approaches and have the right support, as they often lack imagination and therefore it can be difficult for them to start and participate in a game. They often don't know how to play with a specific toy such as a toy car. A child with autism might pick up a toy car to play with but not necessarily because they want to race with it. They might pick that specific toy car because they like the colour or the fact that the wheels spin. Playing with your child is also a great way to connect with her at her level.

Risk and challenge are integral parts of play and exercise experience and it has been said that children with disabilities have an equal if not greater need for opportunities to take risks, since they may be denied the freedom of choice enjoyed by their non-disabled peers. Children need opportunities in their play to learn to judge their own capacities and extend them, explore limits and to experience excitement, nervousness, courage, daring, thrills and real spills.

PLAYS

Play helps children develop gross and fine motor skills, language and communication, thinking and problem solving, and social skills. Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) can impact on how play develops, but there is a lot one can do to help develop his or her child's play skills.

Previous research has shown that inclusion can best be promoted in places where people both have an understanding of inclusion and some experience with disabled children. Inclusive play is also more likely to take place in inclusive settings, so the views of adults with different roles should also be taken into account and valued. Staff is therefore the most important resource in facilitating inclusion and time is needed to allow for regular discussions and debriefings.

Children with autism often lack imagination and are therefore not able to start and initiate games/playing on their own. Therefore they often need help from caregivers, teacher, parents or others persons close to the child in order to start or engage in play activity. Make observations of the child to find out what he/she likes and use that as a way of starting/interacting in a play activity. Play itself has crucial and wide-ranging benefits to children and the people around them. Good quality play will help gain many benefits to their well-being, happiness and further development.

Ultimately it is the nature of play that there is no right or wrong. It is therefore an arena in which children with additional support needs can be themselves, making their own meaning, gaining their own satisfaction from play in their own way and at their own pace – like everyone in an inclusive play setting will be doing.

TYPES OF PLAYS

Children with ASD engage in six main types of play, which develop in stages.

Exploratory play

This is when children explore objects and toys, rather than playing with them – for example, feeling a teddy bear, mounting a block or looking at a doll's hands. At this stage of play, children are learning about their world through different shapes, colours, sizes and textures.

You can help your child with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) by modelling this type of play and by encouraging her to explore objects around her. For example, you could encourage her to splash water in the bath and rub soap between her fingers.



Cause-and-effect play

This is when children play with toys that need an action to produce the desired result – for example, pressing a button to play music, or winding up a jack-in-the-box.

This type of play teaches children that their actions have effects and gives them a sense of control in their play. Children might learn to operate toys on their own, through exploratory play, or you might need to show them.

Praising your child with ASD when he does the right action will encourage him to keep doing it. It will also encourage him to interact with other toys in a cause-and-effect way as well.

This is also a good opportunity to teach your child how to ask you for help, and to play by taking turns. For example, you could take turns pressing a button to make something pop up and take turns pushing it back down again.

Toy play (or 'functional' play)

This is learning how to play with and use toys in the way they were designed – for example, pushing a toy car, bringing a toy phone to the ear, or throwing a ball.



If this is an area of challenge for your child with ASD, the following ideas might help:

- Sit in front of your child so she can look at you, communicate with you, and see what you're doing. This also makes it easier to engage her in play.
- Offer two or three toys your child enjoys. This gives your child a choice without overwhelming him.
- Join in with what your child is doing, rather than trying to guide her play. You can start by copying what your child is doing, then add to the activity. For example, if your child is spinning the wheels of a car, you could spin them too. Then turn the car the right way up and run it along the floor saying, 'Brrm, brrm'.
- If your child doesn't copy you, you can encourage him to play. You could do this by saying, 'Your turn to drive the car', taking your child's hand and placing it on the car, then moving it across the floor together.

- Reward your child. Use praise and positive feedback such as, ‘You’ve built a big tower. Good job!’ You could also add other rewards, such as a couple of turns of blowing bubbles.
- Knowing when to stop or change is also important, so look out for signs of boredom or lack of interest.

Constructive play

This is when children build or make things, and involves working towards a goal or product – for example, completing a jigsaw puzzle, making a tower out of blocks, or drawing a picture.

Some children with ASD might have delays in this area of play, whereas others will progress much like typically developing children. Sometimes children with ASD excel at a skill like completing jigsaws or drawing.

For children with ASD, you can encourage constructive play by showing your child what to do. You could try building a tower with blocks to show your child how to do it, or you could use pictures that show how to build a tower.



Physical play

This is rough and tumble play, running around, and other physical play that provides whole-body exercise and teaches the child gross motor skills.

Physical play gives all children the experience of interacting with other people and objects in their surroundings.



Pretend play

This is when children make believe or pretend and use their imaginations during play. Examples of this type of play include pretending to feed a teddy bear, dressing up like a superhero, pretending to be driving the car, or pretending the couch is a sailing boat.

Pretend play happens later in development (usually around two years of age in typically developing children) and is the most sophisticated form of play.

Pretend play is particularly important for developing the skills needed for social relationships, language and communication. This type of play is often delayed in children with ASD, but many children with ASD can and do ultimately develop pretend play. There are lots of simple, everyday pretend actions your child can learn to use in pretend play, such as driving a car, riding a horse or banging a drum.



Once your child can do some pretend actions, you can develop her imaginative and pretend play skills by breaking the pretend play activity into steps. You can also use written or picture instructions to help your child understand what to do. You might want to make it funny – for example, try using a hair brush instead of a spoon to feed a teddy bear. You can also encourage your child to join in with a fun game of ‘let’s pretend’.

This type of play also includes role-play. You can encourage role-play by taking your child’s favourite story and getting him and others to act it out. You can give the children costumes and suggest changes to the characters’ voices and gestures. By slowly introducing new themes and gradually changing parts of the play, you can guide your child towards independent creative dramatic play.

Playing alone (solitary play)

This is when children play alone and independently, when they don’t try to get close to other children and don’t pay attention to what others are doing.

For children with ASD, you can encourage solitary play skills by starting with activities that have a clear goal and ending. Keep the play short to begin with, so your child can finish the activity quickly and feel successful. For example, you might choose a simple jigsaw puzzle.

Playing alongside (parallel play)

Children at this stage of play start to play alongside other children, and might use



the same or similar toys as those around them.

You can promote play in this stage by encouraging your child to play at an activity on his own but alongside other children. You can encourage your child to imitate the other children's play while he's playing on his own.

Playing and sharing with others (associative play)



In this stage of play, children interact with other children – giving, taking and sharing play materials. This usually starts at around three years of age in typically developing children.

You can help your child with ASD learn skills for associative play by encouraging her to swap things while she's still playing on her own – for example, swapping bikes, trikes or scooters when cycling or scooting with other children.

Playing and cooperating (cooperative play)

Playing cooperatively with others includes playing games with rules, making up rules, and working together on something, such as working together to build a cubby house or make a sandcastle. Cooperative play can become quite complex and requires communication skills.

Many of the social rules in this stage of play can be difficult for a child with ASD to understand. You can help your child by using clear instructions to simplify the rules of games. For example, 'First you hide somewhere in the house. Then Sam counts to 10. Then Sam comes to find you. When Sam finds you, it's your turn to count while Sam hides'.

Making the most of play with your child with autism spectrum disorder

Once your child with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) can play with you and is playing with toys, you can use play to build skills in other areas. For example, you might focus on rewarding certain skills like taking turns, playing for longer periods of time, or choosing a variety of toys to play with.

Here are some tips for making the most of play in this way. These tips apply to all kinds of play – toy play, playing with others and pretend play:

- You can build language by talking about what's going on while your child plays. If you're playing a pretend game such as a tea party, use the names of objects, such as cup, spoon and

plate. You can also give words to the things you and your child are doing, such as ‘pour drink’ or ‘feed teddy’.

- If your child is speaking only in single words, you could try using two words. If he’s using three-word sentences, you can use four words, and so on. This way you’re not using language that’s too hard for your child, but you’re building up his language and vocabulary.
- Encourage play skills in different environments. Reward your child for using her play skills in different places and with different people.
- Use everyday activities as opportunities for play. Any time there can be joint activity between your child and another person is a potential chance for play. You can also build playtime into everyday routines like bath time.
- As your child’s play skills develop, you can begin to use play to help your child respond appropriately to social situations that he might find challenging, such as understanding social rules like sharing, turn-taking, compromise and negotiation. For example, you could use a tea party game to help your child understand sharing food and taking turns to pour a drink with the jug.
- Play can also help children with ASD develop everyday skills. For example, dressing a doll can help your child learn to dress herself.

Rough play: why children do it

Rough play is probably a basic human instinct, something that has developed in us through evolution.

In modern society, rough-and-tumble play helps children develop many skills – but mostly children play rough because it’s fun!

Climbing over one another and rolling around also help young children:

- Understand the limits of their strength
- Explore their changing position in space
- Find out what other children will and won’t let them do
- Work out social relationships as they play roles, take turns and sort out personal boundaries.



BENEFITS OF PLAY

Play creates:

- A better understanding of the world around them such as similarities and differences between people.
- The development of attitudes such as tolerance, appreciation of difference, acceptance of perspectives and perceptions other than their own.
- A richer play environment, which includes different language and methods of communication ways as well as a wider range and use of play materials.
- A positive sense of self, self-esteem and positive reinforcement of their sense of identity.
- Experiences linked to curricular goals, in particular in the realms of social and emotional development, language development, knowledge and understanding of the world and citizenship.
- Positive relationships between children and adults in which adults show respect for the culture of children's play and in which individuals are welcomed and valued.

EXERCISE

Children with Autism and Exercise

Researches have shown that exercising regularly can help improve behavior issues, thinking skills and school performance. Exercise is one of the most effective ways of working with persons with autism. Studies show that regular exercise is associated with decreases in stereotypic behaviors, hyperactivity, aggression, self-injury, and destructiveness.

BENEFITS OF EXERCISE

- Creates new opportunities for a child with autism, as playing often involves less verbal interaction.
- Helps moderate some medication side effects.
- Helps moderate children with autism greater and earlier tendency towards obesity.
- Decreases stereotypic behavior.
- Improves behavior issues, thinking skills and school performance.
- Can help deal with depression.
- Can reduce stress and anxiety as well as improve sleep.
- Can improve reaction time and memory.

Exercise and physical activity fall into four basic categories—endurance, strength, balance, and flexibility. Most people tend to focus on one activity or type of exercise and think they are doing enough. Each type is different, though. Doing them all will give you more benefits. Mixing it up also helps to reduce boredom and cut your risk of injury. Though the different types are described

separately, some activities fit into more than one category. For example, many endurance activities also build strength. Strength exercises also help improve balance.

ENDURANCE

Endurance, or aerobic, activities increase your breathing and heart rate. They keep your heart, lungs, and circulatory system healthy and improve your overall fitness. Building your endurance makes it easier to carry out many of your everyday activities.

- Brisk walking or jogging
- Yard work (mowing, raking, digging)
- Dancing



STRENGTH

Strength exercises make your muscles stronger. Even small increases in strength can make a big difference in your ability to stay independent and carry out everyday activities, such as climbing stairs and carrying groceries. These exercises also are called "strength training" or "resistance training."

- Lifting weights
- Using a resistance band
- Using your own body weight

BALANCE

Balance exercises help prevent falls, a common problem in older adults. Many lower-body strength exercises also will improve your balance.

- Standing on one foot
- Heel-to-toe walk
- Tai Chi





FLEXIBILITY

Flexibility exercises stretch your muscles and can help your body stay limber. Being flexible gives you more freedom of movement for other exercises as well as for your everyday activities.

- Shoulder and upper arm stretch
- Calf stretch
- Yoga

Many children with disabilities have few areas in their lives in which they feel able to exercise real choice and control. It may be because of change or disruption in their lives, because they spend a great deal of time having treatments or therapy, or simply because they have to rely on adults to get them around.

Regular exercise means a 20-minute or longer aerobic workout, 3 to 4 days a week; mild exercise has little effect on behavior. Many autistic children gain weight if they have an inactive lifestyle, and weight gain brings another set of problems. In general, exercise is important for both physical and mental health.

A number of studies have shown that regular exercise is one of the best treatments for depression. Exercise can reduce stress and anxiety as well as improve sleep, reaction time, and memory. Since stereotypic behaviors interfere with teaching, an exercise program might improve the student's attention in the classroom. Parents and teachers should consider including a rigorous exercise program in the student's Individualized Education Program

INCLUSIVE PLAY

A culture of participation is important to the development of inclusive play in our settings. Inclusion is an ongoing process, and in inclusive play we need to make sure we are continually acting on our observations and responding to the individual needs within groupings of children.

Each child's experience is unique. For children with disabilities or additional support needs, their perception of the world and experience of it may not be like our own and we cannot act on assumptions or on assumed models of ages and stages.

The participation of some children may depend to a degree on support from adults. This can include permission to participate, help with attending, support with communication or care needs. Adults closely involved with supporting the participation of children (through communication, for example) should be sure not to influence the child's views or present their own views as the child's. Children

with autism often don't see a purpose in playing/doing exercise. Whilst some disabled children will undoubtedly need extra support – it is not always necessary to have a „one to one worker“ – as this tends to reinforce the belief that the child is the problem.

Both play and exercise are processes through which they can regain a sense of control or work through difficult or challenging experiences. That is why play environments, which have elements that can manipulate, and that can cope with processes of creation and destruction, are of great importance to children.

Working inclusively with all children and all adults and developing respectful relationships is a key issue – So is working in partnership with staff, children and parents.

BODY AWARENESS

Body Awareness refers to one's awareness of their body parts or dimensions. Children who do not have adequate body awareness often appear clumsy or awkward, and they frequently have difficulty with gross & fine motor activities that require subtle changes in posture, strength, force or dexterity.

Children with autism often lack body awareness and a simple gesture as reaching for a something or throwing a ball can be a big challenge for these children.

A child with autism might not be able to make judgment of distance if for example they are reaching for a glass. They might close their hand too early as they think they have already reached the glass or knock it over as they think it's further away.

Throwing a ball might not be the challenge itself but knowing how hard to throw it can be. Children with autism often do not know how much “power” to put into a throw for the ball to reach a specific point/place.

Body Awareness is the foundation upon which children learn to coordinate their body parts and move through space and about objects in their environment.

SUGGESTED EXERCISES FOR A CHILD WITH ASD

- Have your child close their eyes and touch body parts on command: Knees, Hips, Fingers, Mouth, Wrist, Toes, Nose, Elbows, Thumbs, Chin, Ankles, Eyes, Ears, Neck, Shoulders, Stomach.
- Play Simon Says and have your child imitate your movements or respond to verbal directions. Suggestions include: Nod your head, Close your eyes, Turn your head, Wiggle your toes/fingers, Shrug your shoulders, Bend your knees, Bend your elbows.

- Have your child touch body parts with other body parts. For example: Nose to knee, Chin to chest, Ear to shoulder, Hands to hips, Wrist to ankle, Wrist to ear, Elbow to leg, Chin to wrist, Fingers to shoulders.
- Have your child touch body parts to objects such as: Head to the wall, Hands to the door, Knees to the floor, Nose/Ears/Mouth to the chair, Elbows/Fingers/Wrists/ to the..., Feet/Toes to the..., Back/Stomach/Shoulders to...
- Have your child do actions such as: Stomp the right foot, Wave the right hand, Hop on the right foot, Wiggle the toes on your right foot, Wiggle the thumb on your right hand, Slap the right thigh, Point your tongue to the right, Shake the right leg, Bend the right elbow, Slide to the right. Repeat the actions using the left side, or if the child is very young, do not specify a side.
- Have your child assume an all 4's position on the floor, and ask him to raise an arm or leg as you command it. As the child's balance and strength improves, ask the child to raise opposite arms and legs. For example, Raise your right arm and left leg; put your right hand on your left hip and raise your left leg.
- Play Hokey-Pokey and include parts such as ears and chins, as well as hands, feet, elbows, etc.
- Make a body puzzle - Have your child lie on a large sheet of paper and you trace around their body. Then ask your child to help you fill in the body parts, name them, and colour the picture. Finally, cut the body parts to form a puzzle and have your child re-arrange the pieces.
- Use physical response in a Q and A Body Game. Play it with one child or a group. An adult stands in front and asks a question such as: "What body part wears socks?", "What body part is used for walking?". The child answers by moving or pointing to the specific body part that answers the question. Continue asking questions to allow the child to move all body parts.

OTHERS FUN GAMES

- **Indoor basketball.** You cannot be too little for this version of basketball. All you need is a bucket and a rolled up socks (or a small, light ball). This game helps the child develop body awareness on how to throw the ball in order to get it in the basket.
- **Obstacle Course:** Set up different obstacles for the child, using furniture and whatever is available. Have the child climb over, under and through things. The different obstacles should let the child use his/her whole body as well as his/her brain to figure out how to overcome the specific obstacles. Such activity then both challenges the child physically and mentally.
- **Throw or Kick a Ball:** Very simple play activity where the child trains their ability to throw and catch. Through this the child learns about the amount of pressure he/she needs to throw the ball to a specific place. They also learn to be better at measuring distance such as when the ball is being thrown to them.

- **Indoor Bowling:** A great way to reuse water bottles. Line them up, for example forming a triangle (use 10) and then have the child throw/roll a ball to hit and knock over the bottles. The bottles can also be lined up in any other way. Here the child practices his/her throwing skills and learn to measure the distance from their standing point to the bottles.
- **Treasure Hunt:** This is a fun game where the players get to use their head when searching for hidden objects by using a series of clues that leads from one clue to another clue. These clues will in the end lead to the treasure. Make sure the clues match the child's age and intellectual level so that they are neither too difficult nor too easy to figure out.
- **Hide and Seek:** This is an easy game to play, which does not need much. All you need in order to play this game is a spacious area to hide in. One person closes his eyes and counts to a predetermined number while the other players hide. When the person counting reaches the specific number he/she must open his/her eyes and start looking for the other players hiding.
- **Balance Beam:** This is a way to practice balance skills. Usually the beam will be a thin and raised from the floor for children to walk on. The thickness and height of the beam should match the child's age and balance skills. If the child is not able to balance on a beam raise from the floor, start by drawing a line on the floor and then have the child walk on that. When the child gets used to that have the beam placed on the floor for the child to practice walking on it and then later it can be raised.
- **Racing.** Have children race each other by running from one point to another. This is a great way for the children to get their pulse up and exercise in a fun way.
- **Doing puzzle** is an excellent way of testing a child ingenuity and knowledge. It allows the child to use and practice their logic skills in order to get the correct solution as fast as possible. Puzzles come in all sizes and forms to match all needs and abilities.
- **Play catch:** Pick one child to be "it" and have him/her catch the other child within a frames' area. The child that is "it" runs after the other children and as he/she catches them they leave the framed area. The game ends when the last person in the field has been caught by "it".
- **Another variety of catch:** One child is still "it" and is to catch the other child within a frames area. The child that is "it" runs after the other children and as he/she catches another child that child must stand still with legs open. The child that has been caught is to stand still with legs open till another child comes and frees him/her. A child that has been caught can be freed by another child who crawls through his/her legs. Once the child is free he/she can run around and free other children who has been caught. Both ways of playing catch allows the child to run around but also to think fast of how best to escape "it" or free the other children captured.
- **Tin Can alley** is a fun game where children get to practice their throwing and kicking skills. Line the can in any way you want (preferably stacked on top of as a triangle using 10 cans) and then have children hit them with a ball or another object. If the child is throwing a ball the cans can be lined up on a table and if they are kicking a ball the cans can be on the ground.
- **The orange-dance:** This is a game where the children are paired up two and two. Each pair gets an orange (can also be a small ball or a balloon) to place in-between their heads resting on their foreheads. This is the starting position of the game and when the music starts the children

has to “dance” (move around) without dropping the orange/ball/balloon. When you drop the object, you are out. Last pair standing wins the game. This helps the children to work together and gives them a better understanding of their own as well as others movements.

- **Balloon dance:** This is fun way of running around chasing each other. Each child has a balloon tied to their foot (ankle) and then it is all against all. The children then run around in a framed area, trying to pop the other children’s balloons by stepping on them. The last one with a balloon on his/her foot wins.
- **Another way** of playing balloon dance is to pair the children up two and two. Each pair has one balloon, which is tied to one child’s leg (ankle). The child with the balloon defends it as his/her partner tries to pop the other balloons. Last pair standing with a balloon wins. This game a great way for children to socialize and work together as a team.
- **Traffic light game** is most of all a game where children get to learn the meaning of the different colours represented on a traffic light. Make a simple traffic light out of some paper and paint it black - make sure to make holes for the red, yellow and green colours. This should be done with the child(ren). When the traffic light is made explain to the child(ren) what it is and what is used for. Then go through the different colours and explain the meaning. When the child(ren) understands this you can make it into a game, pretending that the child is crossing the street. This game can also be done in a more simple way without making the traffic light but simply just show the child the different colours (red, yellow and green).