
Training Module:

Children's Levels of Socialization

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Group Play

As children's primary occupation is play, group play is integral to their development. Group play helps children build social and language skills by copying members of their group and develop interpersonal relationships with their peers. It can help children learn rules, develop negotiation skills, problem solve, and learn what is expected of them (Anderson-McNamee & Bailey, 2010). Importantly, group play teaches children how to work as a team. However, placing children into play groups that are not within their social levels can lead to disruption and fighting. This makes the group less successful, detracting from any therapeutic benefits of social interaction and group activities (Lehman, 2014).

Group Play (continued)

A group leader's role is to make sure the group dynamic is conducive to productive learning. This is particularly important in a setting where there are children of differing ages and developmental stages. Also keep in mind that abuse and neglect can disrupt neurodevelopment and psychosocial development in children (Putman, 2006). Children who fail to form a strong attachment with parents or guardians at a young age tend to have difficulty with relationships and have poor peer interactions. It is imperative that these children's developmental stages and social interaction skills are taken into account.

Purpose

This training module, through the use of The Social Profile's Levels of Socialization, will help you recognize different group levels of participation and interaction, thus helping you to design activities that are right for the group. The levels serve as a foundation to orient children to appropriate age- and skill-level activities. Indeed the goal is to create opportunities to be playful which improves the children's functional and social skills.

The Social Profile

The Social Profile is an assessment tool developed by Mary V. Donohue, PhD, OT, FAOTA to measure the level of social participation of individuals in group settings (Donohue, 2013). Group interaction can be organized into five social levels, mostly depending on the maturity of the group. As individuals age and mature, they further develop each level of socialization and will combine the levels during their interactions.

The following information on group levels, leader's roles, and activities have been adapted with Dr. Donohue's permission from *Social Profile: Assessment of Social Participation in Children, Adolescents, and Adults* by M. Donohue, 2013, Bethesda, MD: American Occupational Therapy Association, Inc.

The Social Profile's Levels of Socialization:

Parallel Play

Typical age of development: 18 months to 2 years

The child does not directly play with other children but often is engaged in the same activity and plays adjacent to others; there is minimal exchange of verbal and nonverbal communications. At this level the child engages in pretend play by himself and develops the concept of ownership. (Donohue, 2013; Anderson-McNamee & Bailey, 2010).

Leader's Role: Select activity to meet safety, love, and esteem needs; reinforce parallel skills; provide task assistance

Activities: Little or no sharing of tasks; sufficient materials for all; make activities familiar to encourage interaction

View parallel play:

[Video 1](#)

[Video 2](#)

Example 1: Two children playing with dolls next to each other but without interacting.

Example 2: Two children playing Legos independently, but side by side.

The Social Profile's Levels of Socialization: Associative Play

Typical age of development: 2 to 4 years

The child begins interacting with others and understands give-and-take in helping roles but is focused on the short-term task. At this level of play the child may seek guidance or assistance with an activity and will begin to learn to share, problem-solve, and cooperate with others. (Donohue, 2013; Anderson-McNamee & Bailey, 2010).

Leader's Role: Select activity that reinforces desired behaviors; encourage subgroupings or pairs; help groups select tasks; encourage trial and error; foster cooperation and competition

Activities: Short-term tasks (less than 30 minutes) that promote enjoyment, can be shared, and engage the child

View associative play:

Video 1

Example 1:

Children playing telephone for a few minutes.

Example 2: Children stacking wood blocks to build a tower together.

Example 3: Children working together to create a train track.

The Social Profile's Levels of Socialization: Basic Cooperative Play

Typical age of development: 5 to 7 years

Children in this level have moved from a self-centered world to being part of a group with expected group goals, norms, and rules.

Children experiment with roles and at least one leader has been established. Membership is perceived as a right and group inclusion and exclusion is formed (Donohue, 2013; Anderson-McNamee & Bailey, 2010).

Leader's Role: Role model love and safety need fulfillment; give minimal assistance; serve as resource person; take on missing roles

Activities: Tasks are longer and more complex; activities reflect norms and goals and can be completed; the task encourages group problem solving

View basic cooperative play:

[Video 1](#)

[Video 2](#)

Example 1: Children playing Simon Says or Hide and Seek.

Example 2: Children building a Lego castle together.

Example 3: Children participating in team sports such as soccer, baseball, etc.

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