Expanding Pretend Play Skills

**Pretend Kitchen**

**Initially:** Have your child participate in real cooking experiences with real food. Have your child help you cook. Use simple directions and have him physically participate as much as possible (stirring, adding ingredients, rolling dough, cutting with cookie cutters).

**Next Step:** Create opportunities for your child to play at a pretend kitchen center with realistic pots and pans, and realistic pretend food. Try to engage your child to stir food in a pretend pot, fry food in a pretend pan, and serve the food onto play dishes. Have a pretend meal if possible. Enjoy your pretend food with exaggerated eating and drinking noises.

**Next Step:** Have your child pretend to cook imaginary food. Encourage your child to take out pots and pans, and pretend to put food in them. Fry the food, stir the pot, take things out of the fridge, or put things in the microwave or over. Set the timer. Serve food onto plates. Talk about the smells and tastes, temperature, ask what your child is making, and what he is putting into the pot. Show your child how to do this first. Pretend to spill something on your child or on yourself. Have them get an imaginary towel to clean it up. Wash dishes and clean up after eating. Make sure that they are doing it too, not just watching you.

**Next Step:** Create opportunities for your child to put steps together in pretend kitchen play and imaginary cooking scenarios and start to incorporate play with peers. Invite friends over and encourage your child to participate with them instead of yourself.

**Tea Party**

**Initially:** Have your child participate in a real tea party with real food and drinks. Make a special table for your tea party. Decorate it or put a small table someplace special and different. Get out the itty bitty tea set. Pour out real juice and put real snacks on the plates (bite size or miniature snacks are really cool!). Enjoy your tea!

**Next Step:** Create an opportunity for your child to participate in a tea party with realistic toy food. Use realistic looking pretend food, set up your tea party and pretend to eat. Having your child do the
"pouring" and choose the food to engage him. Enjoy your pretend food with exaggerated eating and drinking noises. Remember to say "Excuse me" if you burp!

**Next Step:** Have your child participate in a tea party with imaginary food. Have your tea party, but now pretend that there is food on your plate, and beverage in your cup, when there isn’t any.

**Additional Step:** Have your child offer food and tea to stuffed animals and dolls/action figures who are invited to the tea party. Set up extra chairs for play friends. Encourage your child to feed the dolls or animals and treat them as if they were real.

**Next Step:** Create an opportunity to have a tea party with real friends. Encourage your child to offer food and be served by friends. Have a good time!

**Vehicle Play**

**Initially:** Show your child or have your child push the car or train and make the appropriate sound. This is easiest taught to a child with some imitation skills using the teaching technique of modeling. If pushing a car around, say "Vrrrrm, Vrrrrrm" and encourage your child to do the same.

**Next Step:** Create obstacles in the vehicles’ path. Set up obstacles in the path and encourage your child to crash into them, making appropriate sounds. You can also set toy animals, other vehicles and blocks in the direct path of your child's vehicle and encourage him or her to say, "Move!" or "Get out of the way!"

**Next Step:** Show your child how to communicate with animals or action figures placed in his path. Have plastic animals or action figures block the way of the vehicle and make them say simple things to your child (e.g., Make a cow say, "Moo!" and "Hi there. Can I play?" Or "I'm hungry! I want to eat. I'm going to find some grass."). Encourage your child to respond to the figures as if they were real.

**Next Step:** Have your child manipulate the vehicle and give a "voice" to his vehicle while talking to another toy. This target encourages your child to pretend that his toy is talking to your toy, and manipulating the toys to pay attention to each other's conversation. The child can use a normal voice or a character voice. He should make his toy talk to the other toy, in a play conversation. The "face" of his vehicle should be paying attention to the "face" of the other toy--with the toy moving appropriately as it speaks. **Note:** It helps to use vehicles which have faces to start with. A play conversation may sound something like this, "Hello, Mr. Car." "Hello, Cow." "How are you today?" "My tummy hurts." "Oh, no. Are you OK?" "No, I think I need some medicine. Will you get me some?" "Yes, here it is." This is a
chance to practice conversational skills in a social setting. This will expand pretend play, imagination, conversational skills development.

**Re-enacting TV shows or Movies**

The purpose of this is build pretend play scenarios. We take something familiar and motivating to the child and re-enact it, using video dialogue your child has memorized, to help him build functional play.

**Initially:** Have your child manipulate the action figure from his favourite movie or TV show and say a single lines of dialogue from the show. You can watch a video together, then you can re-enact 1 or 2 lines from the video, encouraging your child to do the same (e.g., Bob the Builder might say, "It's time to go to Farmer Pickle's Barn."

**Next Step:** Have your child say lines for more than one character in the TV show or movie. Encourage your child by showing him how to repeat multiple lines of dialogue spoken by multiple action figures. Encourage your child to hold the appropriate character whose dialogue they are saying. You don’t have to repeat things word-for-word and encourage your child to be flexible and say “new” things for the characters.

**Next Step:** Encourage your child to use new/unfamiliar dialogue and change plot scenarios. Build your child’s comfort with unfamiliar dialogue and unpredictable plot scenarios. Work through their insistence that play scenarios follow the video or episode script. Help your child to pretend that his toy is talking to your toy, and manipulate the toys to attend to each other's conversation.

**Next Step:** Bring other children into the play scenario. Encourage your child to share his action figures and to direct his attention and conversation to the peer. Model to your child how to go with the flow and accept the unfamiliar dialogue and new play scenarios created by the peer.