The Child Unplugged

IMAGINATIVE PLAY: CREATE, PRETEND, LEARN

Activity Book



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Introduction

Children love exploring imagination through hands-on pretend play. These activities introduce early concepts of role play, storytelling, creativity, and real-life understanding in a fun and engaging way. Children act out, pretend, and explore different roles and situations while using their imagination to create stories and ideas. It's not about doing things the "right" way, but about exploring, experimenting, and discovering through pretend play.
This builds early skills in communication, creativity, problem-solving, social understanding, and language development simply and enjoyably.







Why Imaginative Play Is So Valuable

These activities encourage:

- Creativity and imagination
- Early language and communication skills
- Social and emotional understanding
- Problem-solving and thinking skills
- Confidence and self-expression
- Understanding real-life roles and routines
- Cooperation, sharing, and turn-taking
- Attention and focus through play scenarios
- Memory and storytelling development
- Independence and decision-making skills

How to Support Play at Home

Create a playful space where children explore imagination through pretend play and storytelling. They act out real-life situations, create characters, and use objects to represent different ideas while staying curious and expressive.

Basic setup:

- Toy animals, dolls, or figures
- Pretend play items (cups, plates, tools, vehicles)
- Blocks, boxes, or fabric for creating scenes

Simple steps:

- Show children how to use toys for pretend play
- Encourage them to create simple stories
- Let them act out everyday situations or make-believe ideas

Helpful tips:

- Start with familiar themes (home, animals, food, transport)
- Keep props simple and open-ended
- Join in to model short actions or words







Ideas

Provide everyday items like cups, spoons, dolls, toy animals, or boxes. Encourage children to pretend, talk, and create their own stories while playing naturally and confidently.

SHOPPING TRIP PLAY

WHATS NEEDED:

- Basket, bag, or small trolley
- Toy food, boxes, or safe household items
- Empty containers or play money (optional)
- Optional: labels or simple “shop” setup

WHAT TO DO:

- Show children how to put items in a basket.
- Encourage them to pretend they are shopping in a store.
- Talk about what they are buying and where they are going.
- Take turns being the shopper and shopkeeper.

BENEFITS:

- Develops imagination and creativity
- Encourages language and communication skills
- Builds early maths skills (counting, sorting, choosing)
- Supports understanding of real-life experiences
- Improves social and role-play skills
- Encourages decision-making and independence



HOW TO ADAPT:

- Start with a few simple items.
- Use familiar objects from home.
- Add labels or picture cards for “shop items.”
- Extend play with pretend money or receipts.
- Include family members or toys in the role play.

STORY ROLE PLAY

WHATS NEEDED:

- Toy animals, dolls, or figures
- Simple props (blocks, boxes, fabric, mats)
- Open play space
- Optional: story cards or picture prompts

WHAT TO DO:

- Choose a simple story theme like bedtime, farm life, or a trip.
- Use toys to act out the story step by step.
- Encourage children to move characters and create actions.
- Talk through the story as it happens.

BENEFITS:

- Develops imagination and creativity
- Encourages language and communication skills
- Builds early storytelling and sequencing skills
- Supports social and emotional understanding
- Improves attention and focus
- Enhances problem-solving and thinking skills



HOW TO ADAPT:

- Start with very simple stories (2–3 steps).
- Use familiar toys and daily routines.
- Add picture cards for story support.
- Let children change or create their own endings.
- Join in to model simple words and actions.

DRESS-UP FUN

WHATS NEEDED:

- Hats, scarves, costumes, or old clothes
- Shoes, bags, or simple accessories
- Mirror (optional)
- Open play space

WHAT TO DO:

- Invite children to try on different dress-up items.
- Encourage them to pretend to be different people or characters.
- Act out simple roles like a doctor, chef, or superhero.
- Support storytelling while they play.

BENEFITS:

- Develops imagination and creativity
- Builds confidence and self-expression
- Encourages language and storytelling skills
- Supports social and emotional development
- Enhances role-play and understanding of real-life roles
- Improves communication and interaction skills



HOW TO ADAPT:

- Start with simple items like hats or scarves.
- Use familiar roles children see in daily life.
- Keep dress-up options safe and easy to wear.
- Add props to support storytelling.
- Let children choose and lead their own roles.

DRIVE THE CAR

WHATS NEEDED:

- Toy cars, buses, or trucks
- Chairs or boxes as “steering wheels”
- Tape or mats to create roads
- Optional: traffic signs or props

WHAT TO DO:

- Let children sit or stand as if driving a vehicle.
- Encourage them to move around the space pretending to drive.
- Make simple sounds like “beep beep” or “vroom.”
- Create stories like going to school, the shop, or a trip.

BENEFITS:

- Develops imagination and creativity
- Encourages language and storytelling
- Builds gross motor coordination
- Supports understanding of real-life roles
- Improves focus and attention
- Encourages social and role-play skills



HOW TO ADAPT:

- Start with simple driving movements.
- Use toy cars before full body movement.
- Add simple road lines or obstacles.
- Introduce different vehicles for variety.
- Join in and model short driving stories.

ANIMAL HOME BUILDING

WHATS NEEDED:

- Toy animals
- Blocks, boxes, or cardboard pieces
- Fabric, leaves, or paper for decoration (optional)
- Flat surface or play mat

WHAT TO DO:

- Give children toy animals to care for.
- Encourage them to build homes using blocks or boxes.
- Talk about where each animal might live.
- Let them place animals inside and act out simple stories.

BENEFITS:

- Develops imagination and creativity
- Encourages problem-solving and planning
- Builds fine motor skills through building and placing
- Supports early understanding of animal habitats
- Improves language and storytelling skills
- Enhances focus and concentration



HOW TO ADAPT:

- Start with one animal and one simple structure.
- Use large blocks or boxes for easy building.
- Add natural materials for decoration.
- Introduce different habitats (farm, jungle, home).
- Join in to model simple building ideas and language.

ANIMAL FRIENDS ADVENTURE

WHATS NEEDED:

- Toy animals (farm, jungle, or pets)
- Small props like blocks, mats, or boxes
- Optional: trees, fences, or natural items

WHAT TO DO:

- Give children a few toy animals to explore.
- Encourage them to move and act out simple stories.
- Create scenes like “animals eating,” “sleeping,” or “playing.”
- Talk about what the animals are doing together.

BENEFITS:

- Develops imagination and creativity
- Encourages early storytelling skills
- Builds language and vocabulary
- Supports social and emotional understanding
- Improves fine motor skills through toy play
- Enhances focus and attention



HOW TO ADAPT:

- Start with 2–3 animals only.
- Use familiar animals like pets first.
- Add simple story prompts (farm, jungle, zoo).
- Join in to model short sentences.
- Let children lead and create their own stories.

KITCHEN PLAY FUN

WHATS NEEDED:

- Toy kitchen set or safe household items (bowls, spoons, cups)
- Pretend or real-safe food items (plastic food, empty containers)
- Pots, pans, and trays
- Optional: aprons or fabric pieces

WHAT TO DO:

- Show children how to stir, mix, and “cook” pretend food.
- Encourage them to prepare meals and serve them to toys or people.
- Create simple stories like making breakfast or dinner.
- Use pretend conversations like “What are we cooking today?”

BENEFITS:

- Develops imagination and creativity
- Encourages language and communication skills
- Builds fine motor skills through stirring and mixing
- Supports understanding of daily routines
- Promotes social and role-play skills
- Enhances problem-solving and thinking skills



HOW TO ADAPT:

- Start with simple actions like stirring or serving.
- Use real kitchen-safe items for realism.
- Add familiar themes like cooking breakfast or tea time.
- Include dolls or family members as guests.
- Extend play by introducing pretend recipes or shopping lists.

DOCTOR OR CARE KIT

SET UP:

- Soft toy
- Toy stethoscope or spoon
- Bandage or cloth
- Small bag or baske

Use simple household items
A spoon can become a thermometer, and a cloth can be a bandage. There is no need for special equipment.

EXTRA TIPS:

Play idea:
Check the toy, listen to its tummy, put on a “bandage,” and cuddle**.**

Keep it gentle and reassuring
Focus on caring actions like listening, cuddling, or wrapping a soft cloth, rather than anything that feels medical or unfamiliar.

Let the child lead
They may want to be the doctor, the patient, or watch. All forms of participation are valuable.

BENEFITS:

- Builds empathy and understanding of care
- Encourages role play
- Supports language and social skills
- Helps children process real-life experiences



HOW TO ADAPT:

- Let the child be the patient
- Use simple household items
- Focus on cuddles rather than tools

EXTEND THE PLAY

- Put the toy to bed
- Feed it after treatment
- Take it for a rest

LANGUAGE

- “Ouch.”
- “Doctor help.”
- “All better.”
- “Gentle.”

DOLL FEEDING

SET UP:

- Doll or soft toy
- Small bowl, plate, or cup
- Spoon
- Pretend food or real snack items (optional)

Place the items together on a small mat, tray, or blanket to create a simple feeding space.

EXTENSION IDEAS

- Wipe the doll's face after feeding
- Offer the doll a drink
- Feed several toys in turn
- Put the doll down for a rest after the meal
- Have a small "picnic" with the doll

LANGUAGE

- "Baby hungry."
- "Yum yum."
- "More?"
- "All done."

BENEFITS:

- Builds empathy and nurturing behaviour
- Encourages early pretend play
- Supports language development
- Strengthens fine motor skills through scooping and feeding
- Helps children understand mealtime routines



HOW TO ADAPT:

- Younger toddlers: Offer one spoon and focus on simple feeding actions.
- Less mess: Use empty bowls and pretend food.
- Sensory seekers: Use soft real foods like mashed banana or yoghurt.
- Children who love movement: Carry the doll to different feeding spots.
- Older toddlers: Add simple routines like feed, wipe, then rest.

TEA PARTY TIME

WHATS NEEDED:

- Toy tea set (cups, teapot, plates)
- Soft toys, dolls, or family members as “guests”
- Small table, mat, or play area
- Optional: pretend food items

WHAT TO DO:

- Set up a simple “tea party” space.
- Show how to pour and serve pretend tea.
- Encourage the child to offer drinks or food to toys or people.
- Let them explore and lead the pretend play freely.

BENEFITS:

- Encourages imagination and creative thinking
- Builds early social and role-play skills
- Supports language and communication development
- Develops fine motor skills (pouring, holding, serving)
- Promotes confidence and self-expression
- Encourages understanding of everyday routines



HOW TO ADAPT:

- Start with just a cup and teapot for simplicity.
- Use real safe household items if toys aren’t available.
- Join in gently to model play, then step back.
- Add more items or “guests” as confidence grows.
- Let the child lead and create their own tea party story.

TEADDY BEAR FEEDING PICNIC

SET UP:

- Setup:
- Blanket on the floor
- Doll or animals
- Cups, bowls, spoons
- Pretend food

Play idea:

- Sit together and “feed” each toy one by one.

EXTRA TIPS:

Keep the setup simple
A small blanket, one or two toys, and a few cups or spoons are enough to create a meaningful play experience.

Follow your child’s ideas
They may feed one toy, line them up, or carry items around. All forms of play are valuable.

BENEFITS:

- Encourages social interaction
- Builds language through routine phrases
- Supports imaginative play
- Develops fine motor skills



HOW TO ADAPT:

- Feed only one toy
- Use real snack time
- Add cups for pouring

EXTEND THE PLAY

- Clean up after the picnic
- Put toys down for a rest
- Take them on a pretend walk

LANGUAGE

- “Time to eat.”
- “Drink.”
- “More please.”
- “All done.”

GROOMING STATION

SET UP:

- Mirror
- Brush
- Soft cloth

Play idea:

- Brush the doll's hair, wipe its face, then look in the mirror and copy.

EXTRA IDEAS

Keep the setup simple
A child-safe mirror, a soft brush, and a cloth are enough to begin.

Model gentle care actions
Show your child how to brush the doll's hair or wipe its face, then allow them to try.

Include the child in the play
You can gently brush their hair, wipe their hands, or invite them to look at their reflection.

BENEFITS:

- Self-awareness and body recognition
- Emotional development and empathy
- Fine motor coordination
- Early independence in self-care routines
- Language development



HOW TO ADAPT:

- Use real snack time as pretend play
- Feed multiple toys
- Let the child be fed by the doll

EXTEND THE PLAY

- Wipe the doll's face
- Give the doll a drink
- Put the doll to rest after feeding

LANGUAGE

- "Baby hungry."
- "Yum yum."
- "More?"
- "All done."

VET CARE

SET UP:

- Toy animal or soft pet
- Small bowl or cup
- Brush or cloth
- Blanket or small basket for resting

Place the items together in a small basket or on a mat to create a simple “pet care station.”

EXTENSION IDEAS

- Take the pet for a “walk” around the room
- Give the pet a bath with a cloth or bowl of water
- Put the pet to bed under a blanket
- Pack a small bag with food and take the pet on a picnic
- Build a small “house” for the pet using a box or basket

BENEFITS:

- Builds empathy and nurturing behaviour
- Encourages early pretend and role play
- Supports language and communication
- Strengthens fine motor skills through brushing and feeding
- Helps children understand everyday routines



HOW TO ADAPT:

- Younger toddlers: Offer one simple action, like feeding or brushing.
- Less mess: Keep it dry with a bowl and brush only.
- Sensory seekers: Add water for washing or different textured brushes.
- Children who love movement: Carry the pet to different “care stations.”
- Older toddlers: Add simple routines like feed, brush, then rest.

BEDTIME

SET UP:

- Setup:
- Small blanket
- Pillow or cushion
- Basket or box as a “bed”

Play idea:
Put the doll or animal to bed, tuck them in, and say “night night.”

EXTRA TIPS:

Create a cosy space
Use a small blanket, cushion, or basket to make a simple “bed” for the toy. Soft materials help create a calm atmosphere.

Follow your child’s rhythm
Some children may tuck the toy in once, while others will repeat the action many times. Repetition is a natural part of learning.

BENEFITS:

- Supports emotional security
- Builds understanding of routines
- Encourages gentle, caring actions
- Develops early sequencing skills



HOW TO ADAPT:

- Use different animals
- Add a pillow or soft cloth
- Rock the animal before bed

EXTEND THE PLAY

- Wake the animal in the morning
- Feed it breakfast
- Take it for a walk

LANGUAGE

- “Night night.”
- “Sleepy.”
- “Shhh.”
- “Soft blanket.”

LAUNDRY STATION

SET UP:

- Small tub or basket
- Cloths or doll clothes
- Pegs or clips
- Small towel

Play idea: Wash, squeeze, hang, and fold clothes for the doll or depending on the age of your child they can also help with the household washing, sorting, folding etc.

EXTENSION IDEAS

Keep the setup simple
A small bowl of water, a few cloths or doll clothes, and a basket are enough to begin.

Follow your child's interest
Some children will enjoy squeezing and pouring, while others may focus on hanging or folding. All responses are valuable.

BENEFITS:

- Builds empathy and emotional understanding
- Encourages early pretend play
- Supports language development
- Strengthens fine motor skills

LANGUAGE

- "Wash wash."
- "Squeeze."
- "Hang up."
- "All clean."



HOW TO ADAPT:

- Younger toddlers: Use one or two cloths and focus on dipping and squeezing.
- Less mess: Start with dry cloths before adding water.
- Sensory seekers: Use warm, soapy water or different textures.
- More movement: Place the washing & drying areas apart.
- Older toddlers: Add pegs, sorting, or simple folding.

EXTEND THE PLAY

- Hang clothes on a low line or rack
- Fold small cloths or towels
- Pack clean clothes into a basket
- Dress a doll in the clean clothes

IMAGINATIVE PLAY ACTIVITIES

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Calm, creative, imaginative play exploration experiences for young children

Using familiar, accessible materials