

# How to Reinforce Play and Leisure Skills at Home

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# Training Agenda

- **Why this topic?**
- **Parents Role**
- **Set up play and leisure activities or stations**
- **Establish rules and expectations prior to activity**
- **Negotiate reinforcement for appropriate engagement**
- **Give instruction to play**
- **Provide reinforcement!**
- **Conclusions**



# Why this Topic?

- A growing body of research shows a link between play and the development of cognitive and social skills
- This leads to learning more complex concepts as children get older
- Play allows individuals of all ages to learn delaying immediate reinforcement, setting and prioritizing goals, considering the perspectives and needs of others

# Why this Topic?

## Play linked to:

- Growth in memory
- Self-regulation
- Oral language
- Recognizing symbols
- Higher levels of school adjustment
- Increased social development
- Increased literacy skills and other areas of academic learning



# Why this Topic?

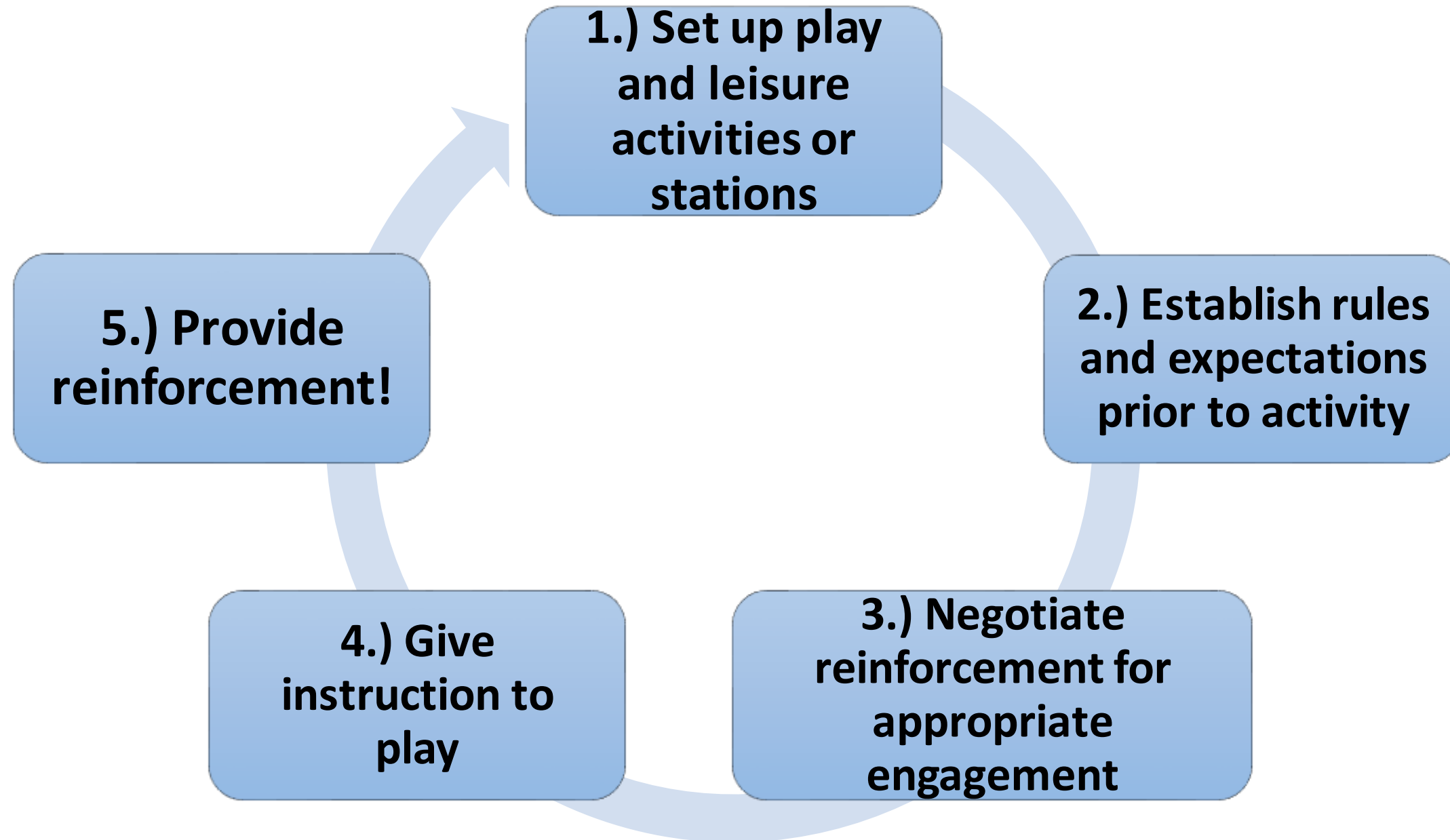
- **Play is a crucial part of development**
- **In recent years, more and more children are losing play skills because of distractions at home with computer and electronic games, TV, and increased academic demands at school**
- **In addition, individuals on the autism spectrum will present with increased difficulties learning appropriate play and leisure skills**

# Parent Role

- **Parents of individuals on the autism spectrum may need to take steps to ensure their child, adolescent, or teenager can independently engage in age-appropriate activities and interests**
- **For the purpose of this training, play and leisure skills should be emerging within the individual's repertoire**
- **Emphasis will be placed on reinforcing play and leisure skills at home**

***We'll learn more about this soon***

# Parent Role



# Set up Play and Leisure Activities

**1.) Set up play and leisure activities or stations**

**\*Play and leisure skills may not just occur, but instead opportunities need to be set up for the individual**

**\*Parents can prepare and set out materials to make appropriate play more accessible than other play**



# Set up Play and Leisure Activities

## Parents Can:

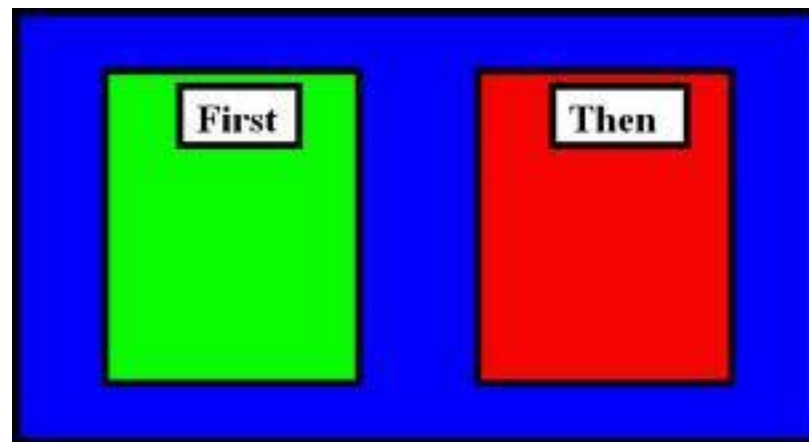
- Use “First/Then” language and visuals
- Set up play stations
- Provide visual schedules including play activities
- Provide choices



# Set up Play and Leisure Activities

## First-Then:

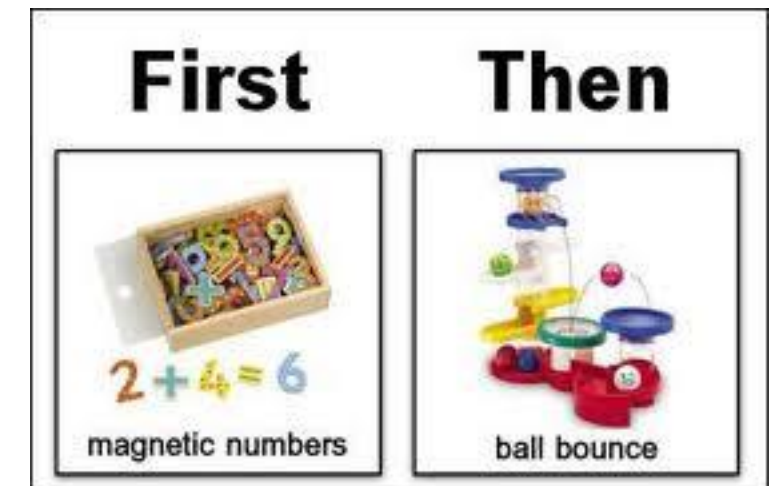
- Prepare First-Then visual statement
- Use pictures or text to represent play activity and reinforcer to follow
- Present First-Then visual statement to child



# Set up Play and Leisure Activities

## First-Then:

- Have the toy set up or guide the child to the location where it is located
- Use prompting strategies if necessary to help the child complete the activity
- After completion, immediately follow up by giving access to the reinforcer
- Fade prompts gradually to increase independence
- Vary the toys and reinforcers that are used



# Set up Play and Leisure Activities

## Play Stations:

- Can be set up with empty toy bins, areas numbered on the floor, drawers or shelves
- Place play activities the child can independently engage with in the bin
- Tell the child to “Go play”, “Do your play stations,” or other natural instruction
- Use prompting strategies to help the child complete the activities



# Set up Play and Leisure Activities

## Play Stations:

- Prompting strategies include
  - Physical guidance (graduated guidance)
  - Gestures
  - Shadowing body movements
  - Visual cues/timers
- Select a highly reinforcing activity or item as the last activity in the play stations
- Gradually fade prompts to increase independence
- Add additional stations when the child is ready



# Set up Play and Leisure Activities

## Visual Schedules:

- Use pictures, icons, or text to communicate upcoming play activities
- Can be placed on a velcro strip, flip book, clip board, dry erase board, or piece of paper
- Present to child with the instruction to “Go play” or “Follow your schedule”
- Child can match picture or text to play activity and complete activity
- Reinforcement provided upon activity completion



# Set up Play and Leisure Activities

## Visual Schedules:

- Schedules can be of various length, and contain any number of items
- Timer, transition cards can be used to help with open ended activities
- Activities can be a mixture of independent and interactive activities
- Schedules can be portable, taken to different locations, set up in a backpack or travel bag
- Child can be involved in selecting the items and the order of activities



# Set up Play and Leisure Activities

## Provide Choices:

- A simple way to give children, adolescents, or teens control over their environment is to provide choices
- Research finds that even when presented with two non-preferred activities, children of all ages respond more positively to the task assigned when given a choice
- Ask the individual:
  - “Do you want to play with the blocks or lacing bears?”
  - “Do you want to play Sorry or Apples to Apples?”
  - “Would you rather *me* read the book or you read it to me?”



# Set up Play and Leisure Activities

## **Provide Choices:**

- **If helpful, a visual choice board can be created which allows the child to see all of the available options for play**
- **The child can be directed to “Go make a choice”**
- **The child approaches the choice board and selects from the array of choices**
- **Can allow for more independence and promote spontaneous engagement in activities without adult involvement**

# Rules and Expectations

**2.) Establish rules and expectations prior to activity**

**\*Discuss play expectations, schedule, reinforcement, and rules ahead of time to avoid miscommunication**

# Rules and Expectations

## Parents Can:

- **Individuals on the autism spectrum may not learn the rules and expectations of familiar games or activities without specific instruction**
- **To reinforce play and leisure skills, parents must set their kids up for success from the beginning**



# Rules and Expectations

## Parents Can:

- Post rules so kids of all ages can see them
- Be prepared to teach rules and expectations for new games, play, or leisure activities
- Refer to written rules rather than verbal reminders to increase independence



# Rules and Expectations

## Parents Can:

- **Make sure to clearly communicate rules regarding behavior and expected conduct**
- **Provide alternative responses or ways to deal with challenging situations**
  - **Winning and losing**
  - **Being flexible with rules**
  - **Things to say and do when frustrated**
- **Can be presented verbally, visually, and also through the modeling of behavior**

# Negotiate Reinforcement

**3.) Negotiate reinforcement for appropriate engagement**

**\*Reinforcement is important to increase or maintain any skills**

**\*Specific to the child's needs, identify and establish reinforcement *prior* to requesting a play or leisure activity be completed**

# Negotiate Reinforcement

- **New skills don't just occur and maintain on their own**
- **Reinforcement is needed!**
- **Young children, school aged children, and teenagers should be a part of identifying reinforcement to ensure motivation to complete the instructed activity is established**

# Negotiate Reinforcement

- **Use preference assessments to identify what your child wants**
  - **What does your child do or play with during down time?**
  - **What has your child been asking for?**
  - **Offer your child choice, what does he select?**
    - 3D objects
    - Pictures
    - Verbal choices



# Negotiate Reinforcement

## Young Child:

- Parent may use established reinforcers immediately following an instructed play activity
- For example:
  - Holly has not finger-painted, her favorite activity, in three days
  - Mom wants Holly to play with the new toy she got for her birthday
  - Mom shows Holly the finger-paints and new toy and says, “After you play with the new toy you can finger-paint”
  - Holly plays with the new toy and is then given time to finger-paint



# Negotiate Reinforcement

## School Aged and Teenagers:

- The same preference assessment strategies can be used with older children
- Parents may need to compromise and allow more flexibility, creativity, or individualization with the activity they want their child or teen to engage in
- Prior to the instruction to do the task, parents should communicate what is an acceptable reinforcer and when it will be provided
- Larger reinforcers may be provided for longer or increased activity completion

*Let's look at an example...*

# Negotiate Reinforcement

## School Aged Children and Teenagers:

- Dad wants Jonathon to play Words with Friends for 20 minutes before he can play a video game
- Before telling Jonathon what to do, Dad asks “What do you want to do after you play on the iPad?”
- After Jonathon decides on video games, Dad sets up a timer, hands over the iPad, and tells Jonathon, “Play Word with Friends with your cousin”
- “When the timer goes off, finish your turn and then you can play video games until dinner”

# Negotiate Reinforcement

- **Overtime, specific identification and negotiating for reinforcement with child, adolescent, or teen should be faded**
- **The goal is for the play and leisure skill to become reinforcing in itself and not warrant additional reinforcement for engaging with it**

*Let's see how this will happen...*

# Reinforcement for Engagement

## 4.) Give instruction to play

- \*Countless play and leisure skills are appropriate in the home environment**
- \*Parents should choose activities based on their child's age, strengths, and interest**
- \*However, parents should consider expanding interests and strengths with new play and leisure activities**

# Give Instruction to Play

- **Instruction to play can take many forms**
  - **Delivery of instruction**
    - Vocal/verbal
    - Visual
    - Text
  - **Generic or specific instruction**
    - “Start your play bins”
    - “Go do your play schedule”
    - “Time to play”
- **Prompting and fading may be necessary to ensure the child responds to the instruction**

# Give Instruction to Play

- **Initially, the adult will need to be present while the child is engaging in play and leisure activities to ensure compliance and follow through**
- **Additional prompts may need to be given throughout the duration of the activities to keep kids on track**
- **Eventually, the adult's role can be faded back, allowing the child to engage in play and leisure skills without immediate and direct supervision**
- **This will free up parents from needing to constantly monitor the child and be more realistic for long term use**

# Reinforcement for Engagement

**5.) Provide  
Reinforcement!**

**\*Now that the instructed activity is complete, reinforce it!**

**\*Providing various amounts of reinforcement will maintain the play or leisure skill over time AND potentially establish the play or leisure skill as a reinforcer for other tasks**



# Reinforcement for Engagement

- **Young children and early learners may require immediately reinforcement following an instructed play activity**
- **Adolescents and teenagers may be able to wait longer for reinforcement to be provided**
- **Parents must reinforce play skills if they wish for them to increase in the home or community**

*Let's learn more...*

# Reinforcement for Engagement

## What is Reinforcement?

- **Increasing behavior by providing desired consequences following the completion of that behavior**

**For example:**

- **Mom wants to increase Jenna's turn taking with her sister**
- **After Jenna takes 3 turns without resistance, Mom gives Jenna tickles and lets her move one game space forward**
- **As a result, Jenna's turn-taking behavior increases and she continues to take turns with her sister**



# Reinforcement for Engagement

## What does it mean to *reinforce*?

- “Reinforcers” are the things or activities people want
- Without reinforcement, desired behaviors will go away
- This is true for everyone

Consider this:

- You call a friend periodically for lunch who either never calls you back, is always too busy, and doesn't ever schedule lunch with you

Eventually, you stop trying

- This is due to a lack of reinforcement; the behavior (e.g., calling the friend for lunch) goes away



# Reinforcement for Engagement

**Parents can apply the same logic to play and leisure skills with their child, adolescent, or teen**

- **To reinforce play skills parents must:**
  - *Provide reinforcers immediately after the completion of a play or leisure activity*
  - *Provide reinforcement every time an instructed play or leisure activity occurs*
  - *Overtime provide less immediate reinforcement; that is increase the delay between the instructed activity and giving the reinforcer*

# Questions

