

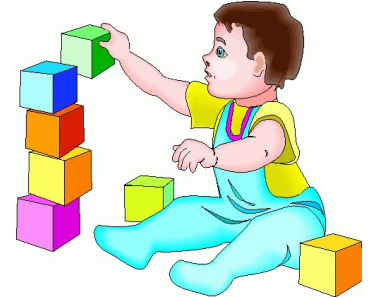
# Stages of Play

Through his observations of children, psychologist **Jean Piaget** identified three categories of play.

## **Functional Play**

(also called Sensorimotor Play)

Infants and toddlers enjoy moving objects and using their **senses** to explore their world. Functional play is commonly seen during the first two years of life but can be observed during the play of older children and adults. This is sometimes called *practice play* because the child (or adult) repeats the play in order to practice a new skill or to internalize new information. Filling and dumping is a favorite with very young children.



## **Symbolic Play**

Symbolic play begins around age two and continues throughout life. Symbolic play is an important task of preschool children. Through symbolic play, preschoolers learn to represent their experiences, feelings and ideas. They master the use of language and develop social competence.



There are two levels of symbolic play. We observe **constructive play** when children use materials to make something – a play dough snowman, a Lego car, a card table house. In **dramatic play** children take on roles as they play out familiar or fantasy experiences. This pretend play may be alone or with others, and often involves real or invented props.

Three-year-olds repeat familiar themes, such as mommies and babies or puppies and kittens. Four-year-old play is both more physical and more social, as children test boundaries and resolve leader/follower struggles. Older five-year-olds value rules and routine, which means tattling is commonplace.

## **Games With Rules**

School-age children have developed the mental and social skills to engage in games that have agreed upon rules. These may be well-known games, such as soccer or Monopoly. These games may also be invented (or adapted) by the players, who create (or modify) and agree upon the object of the game and its rules. Examples of invented games are playground jumping contests and card games with unique “house rules”.



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