



Let's Pretend

Learning Through Dramatic Play

Did you know that children learn through play? Whether you call it *creative play*, *pretend play*, *dramatic play*, or *make-believe*, when children use their imagination and creativity, it helps them develop all kinds of skills, from language and literacy to understanding and expressing feelings.

Acting like magical creatures, making stuffed animals “talk,” and playing dress-up are all ways for children to explore, experiment, understand, and appreciate the world around them. When they direct the imaginary play, as leaders or cooperatively with others, children also gain social skills, including following rules, making decisions, taking turns, and compromising. Play is not “wasted” time—it’s key to your child’s growth and health!

Most children enjoy engaging in dramatic play, such as role-playing and acting out new or familiar stories. Some are natural-born performers who love an audience. But quieter activities, such as daydreaming, are also important. Time spent just thinking and reflecting can reduce stress and gives your child a much-needed break from the demands of today’s hectic world.



Lights, Camera, Action!

Dramatic play can sometimes become boring for grown-ups. Try to be patient. By participating in games and listening closely to your child’s narration, you can learn a lot about their ideas and feelings. Here are some tips to join the fun.

- **Relax!** If you can fully join in without being distracted—admittedly a challenge—your child will appreciate the attention.
- **Ask questions.** Gently help shape the action or the make-believe world. Ask, “What color is your dragon?” or “Where are we now?” or “What happens now?”

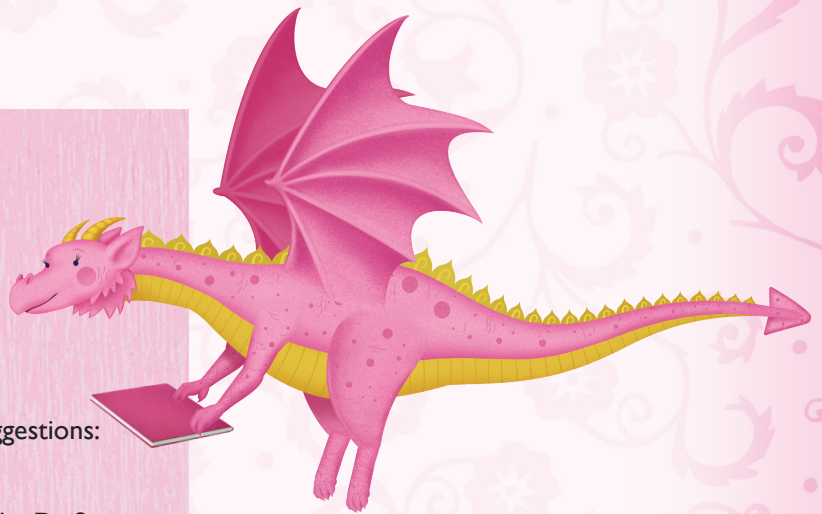


- **Be dramatic.** Use funny voices and big gestures. Make faces. If you're a little uncomfortable at first, try just mimicking everyday activities, such as zipping up a jacket. You'll get better at it eventually.
- **Use props.** Anything can be used in imaginary play. An old toothbrush can be a microphone. A scarf can be a cape or a dress. Even a scrap of paper can become a secret note or the menu of a make-believe restaurant.
- **Be respectful** of imaginary friends. Ask, "Is Rufus coming shopping with us?" or "Why is Rufus sad today?" This not only helps validate your child's imagination, it also offers an opportunity to talk about problems.
- **Get inspired.** Share the excitement of live performances with your child. Visit your local library, high school, or community center for free and low-cost performances by storytellers, actors, or puppeteers. Talk with your child about what you see and hear.

Take a book break!

There are many wonderful picture books about using your imagination, and folk and fairy tales to learn about imaginary worlds and worldwide cultures. Talk about the plot, characters, and dialogue in the stories. Here are just a few book suggestions:

Abuela by Arthur Dorros
And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street by Dr. Seuss
Ben's Trumpet by Rachel Isadora
Chicken in Space by Adam Lehrhaupt
Imagine! by Raúl Colón
Imagine That! by Yasmeen Ismail
Is That You, Eleanor Sue? by Tricia Tusa
Sun by Sam Usher
What do Do with a Box by Jane Yolen
Where the Wild Things Are by Maurice Sendak



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