Concise Symbolic Play Scale

Ages	Theory of Mind	Content Themes (Episodic Memory)	Organization	Decontextualization
17-19 mo	pretend play on self	events personally experienced that happen daily	single activities	realistic props
19-22 mo	pretends on doll (doll passive recipient)	caregiver activities	combines 2 toys or performs actions on 2 people	
2 yr	talks to doll		several actions on a theme (doll in tub, wash, dry)	
2 ½ yr		events personally experienced that happen periodically (associated with emotion)		
3 yr		events child has seen or read about but not personally experienced	short sequences of temporally-related activities; events evolve	low representation toys; object substitutions
3-3 ½ yr	gives voice to dolls/puppets			
4 yr	gives characters multiple roles (mother, wife, doctor)		planned events with cause-effect sequences	language used to set scene
5-6 yr		highly imaginative themes	multiple planned sequences	

Table 1: Developmental Playscale

Phase 1: Presymbolic

PLAY   **COMMUNICATION**

_____   _____

Object Permanence	**Means-End/Problem Solving**	**Object Use**	

Presymbolic Level I: 8 to 12 months

___ Aware that objects exist when not seen; finds toy hidden under cloth, box, etc., associates object with location	___ Attains toy by pulling cloth on which toy is resting ___ Attains toy by pulling string ___ Touches adult to continue activity	___ Explores toys ___ Does not mouth all toys. Uses several different schemes (patting, banging, turning, throwing, etc.); uses some differential schemas on familiar objects	___ Joint attention on toy and person ___ No true language; may have performative words that are associated with action or the total situation ___ Shows and gives objects Exhibits the following communicative intents: ___ Request (instrumental) ___ Command (regulatory)

Presymbolic II: 13 to 17 months

___ Aware that objects exist separate from location; finds objects hidden in first one place and then in a second or third location	___ Understands "in-ness;" dumps objects out of bottle ___ Hands toy to adult if unable to operate ___ Hands toy to adult to get attention ___ Uses index finger to point to desired object/initiates joint attention	___ Recognizes operating parts of toys (attends to knobs, levers, buttons) ___ Discovers operations of toys through trial and error ___ Separation/construction of toy relationships (e.g., takes toys apart; takes puts one toy in another such as figure in car; nests boxes) ___ Functional play: Uses familiar objects appropriately	___ Context dependent single words, e.g., child may use the word "car" when riding in a car, but not when he sees a car; words tend to come and go in child's vocabulary Exhibits the following communicative functions: ___ Request ___ Protest ___ Command ___ Label ___ Interactional ___ Response ___ Personal ___ Greeting

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Summary of Symbolic Playscale

AGE	PROPS	THEMES	ORGANIZATION	ROLES	LANGUAGE USE IN PLAY
by 18 months	uses one realistic object at a time	familiar everyday activities in which child is active participant (e.g., eating, sleeping)	short, isolated pretend actions	autosymbolic pretend, (e.g., child feeds self pretend food)	language used to get and maintain toys and seek assistance operating toys (e.g., "baby," "mine," "help")
by 22 months	uses two realistic objects at a time	familiar everyday activities that caregivers do (e.g., cooking, reading)	combines two related toys or performs actions on two people (e.g., uses spoon to eat from plate; feeds mother, then doll)	child acts on dolls and others (e.g., feeds doll or caregiver)	uses word combinations to comment on toy or action; uses word for intents, needs, feelings ("want that," "mad," "hungry")
by 24 months	uses several realistic objects		multischeme combinations of steps (e.g., put doll in tub, apply soap, take doll out and dry)		talks to doll briefly; describes some of the doll's actions (e.g., "baby sleeping"); uses phrases and markers for ing and plurals/possessives
by 30 months		common but less frequently experienced or especially traumatic experiences (e.g., shopping, doctor)		emerging limited doll actions (e.g., doll cries)	talking to doll and commenting on doll's actions increase in frequency; uses
by 3 years		observed, but not personally experienced activities (e.g., police, firefighter); compensatory play-- Re-enacts experienced events, but modifies original outcomes	temporal sequences of multischeme events (e.g., prepare food, set table, eat food, clear table, wash dishes)	child talks to doll in response to doll's actions (e.g., "don't cry now," "I'll get you a cookie."); brief complementary role play with peers (e.g., mother and child; doctor and patient)	use complete sentences with past tense and future aspect; children may comment on what they have just completed or what they will do next (e.g., "Dolly ate the cake." "I'm gonna wash dishes.")
by 3 1/2 years	miniature props, small figures, and object substitutions			attributes emotions and desires to dolls; reciprocal role taking with dolls (child treats doll as partner--talks for doll and as caregiver)	use dialogue for dolls and metalinguistic markers (e.g., "he said"); use words to refer to emotions and thoughts
by 4 years	imaginary props (language and gesture help set the scene)	familiar fantasy themes (e.g., Batman, Wonder Woman, Cinderella, etc.); violent themes common	planned play events with cause-effect sequences (e.g., child decides to play a birthday party and gathers necessary props and assigns roles)	child or doll has multiple roles (mother, wife, doctor; firefighter, husband, father); child can handle two or more dolls in complementary rolls (dolls are doctor and patient); attributes thoughts and plans to doll	use language to plan and narrate the story line; use of connecting words so, because, but-effect
by 6 years	language and gesture can carry the play without props	create novel fantasy characters and plots	multiple planned sequences (plans for self and other players)	more than one role per doll (doll is mother, wife, doctor)	elaboration of planning and narrative story line; uses sentences with temporal markers, then, when, while, before, first, next

Phase 2: Symbolic

	PLAY			LANGUAGE	
Decontextualization What props are used in pretend play?	**Thematic Content** What schemas/scripts does the child represent?	**Organization** How coherent and logical are the child's schemas/scripts?	**Self/Other Relations** What roles does the child take and give to toys and other people?	**Function**	**Form and Content**
Symbolic level I: 17-19 months					
Child exhibits internal mental representation ___ Tool-use (uses stick to reach toy) ___ Finds toy invisibly hidden (when placed in a box and box emptied under scarf) ___ Pretends using life-like props ___ Does not stack solid ring	___ Familiar, everyday activities (eating, sleeping) in which child has been an active participant	___ Short isolated schemas (single pretend actions)	___ Self as agent (auto-symbolic or self-representational play, i.e., child pretends to go to sleep, to eat from a spoon, or to drink from an empty cup)	Directing ___ Requesting ___ Commanding ___ Interactional Self-maintaining ___ Protesting ___ Protecting self and self interests Commenting ___ Labeling (objects and activity) ___ Indicating personal feeling	Beginning of true verbal communication. Words have following functional and semantic relations: ___ Recurrence ___ Existence ___ Nonexistence ___ Rejection ___ Denial ___ Agent ___ Object ___ Action or state ___ Object or person associated with object or person
Symbolic Level II: 19-22 months					
	___ Activities of familiar others (cooking, reading, cleaning, shaving)	___ Short, isolated schema combinations (child combines two actions or toys in pretend, e.g., rocking doll and putting it to bed; pouring from pitcher into cup, or feeding doll from plate with spoon)	___ Child acts on doll (Doll is passive recipient of action); brushes doll's hair, covers doll with blanket ___ Child performs pretend actions on more than one object or person, e.g., feeds self, a doll, mother, or another child	___ Refers to objects and persons not present ___ Requests information	Beginning of word combinations with following semantic relations: ___ Agent-Action ___ Action-object ___ Agent-object ___ Attributive ___ Dative ___ Action-locative ___ Possessive
Symbolic Level III: 2 years					
		___ Elaborated single schemas (represents daily experiences with details, e.g., puts lid on pan, puts pan on stove; collects items associated with cooking/ eating such as dishes, pans, silverware, glasses, highchair	___ Reverses roles--"I'll play you and you play me."	___ Comments on activity of self (get apple) ___Comments on doll (baby sleep)	___ Uses phrases and short sentences Appearance of morphological markers: ___ Present progressive (ing) on verbs ___ Plurals ___ Possessives

Symbolic Level IV: 2 1/2 years

___Substitutes objects with similar structures/ functions

Represents less frequently personally experienced events, particularly those that are memorable because they are pleasurable or traumatic:
  ___ Store shopping
  ___ Doctor-nurse-sick child

___ Talks to doll
___ Reverses dyadic/ complementary roles ("I'll play x and you play y."), e.g. doctor/ patient; shopper/cashier

Responds appropriately to the following WH questions in context:
  ___ What
  ___ Who
  ___ Whose
  ___ Where
  ___ What...do
  ___ Asks WH question (generally puts WH at beginning of sentence)
  ___ Responses to why questions inappropriate except for well-known routines
  ___ Asks why, but often inappropriate and does not attend to answer

Symbolic Level V: 3 Years

___ Compensatory play: Re-enacts experienced events, but modifies original outcomes

___ Evolving episode sequences, e.g., child mixes cake, bakes it, washes dishes; or doctor checks patient, calls ambulance, takes patient to hospital (sequence not planned)

___ Transforms self into role
___ Engages in associative play, i.e., children do similar activities, may share same role, but no organized goal

___ Reporting
___ Predicting
___ Emerging narrating or story-telling

___ Uses past tense, such as, "I ate the cake," "I walked"
___ Uses future aspect (particularly "gonna") forms, such as "I'm gonna wash dishes."

Symbolic Level VI: 3 to 3 1/2 Years

___ Carries out pretend activities with replica toys (Fisher Price/ Playmobil dollhouse, barn, garage, village, airport)
___ Uses one object to represent another (Stick can be a comb, chair can be a car)
___ Uses blocks and sandbox for imaginative play. Blocks used as enclosures (fences, houses) for animals and dolls

___ Represents observed events, i.e., events in which child was not an active participant (policemen, firemen, war, cowboys, schemas/scripts from TV shows -- Batman, Ninja Turtles, Power Rangers

___ Child assigns roles to other children; negotiates play
___ Multiple reversible roles ("I'll be a and b and you be x"), e.g., child is ticket seller, pilot, and airline steward, but co-player is always passenger

Uses doll or puppet as participant in play:
  ___ Child talks for doll
  ___ Reciprocal role taking-- child talks for doll and as parent of doll

___ Projecting: gives desires, thoughts, feelings, to doll or puppet
___ Uses indirect requests, e.g., "mommy lets me have cookies for breakfast."
___ Changes speech depending on listener
___ Reasoning (integrates reporting, predicting, projecting information)
___ Metacommunicative strategies

Descriptive vocabulary expands as child becomes more aware of perceptual attributes; uses terms for following concepts (not always correctly):
  ___ shapes
  ___ sizes
  ___ colors
  ___ textures
  ___ spatial relations
___ Uses metalinguistic and metacognitive language, e.g., "He said...;" I know...."

Symbolic Level VII: 3 1/2 to 4 Years

___ Uses language to invent props and set scene
___ Builds 3-dimensional structures with blocks

___ Improvisations and variations on themes

___ Schemas/scripts are planned
___ Hypothesizes "what would happen if/"

___ ___Makes dolls/puppets agents in play (dolls/puppets do the acting); gives voice to dolls or puppets
___ Child or doll has multiple roles (e.g., mother and wife; fireman, husband, father)

___ Uses language to take roles of character in the play, stage manager for the props, or as author of the play story

___ Uses modals (can, could, may, might, would)
___ Uses conjunctions (and, but, so, because, if)
NOTE: Full competence for modals and conjunctions does not develop until 10-12 years of age.
___ Some appropriate responses to why and how questions requiring reasoning

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Symbolic Level VIII: 5 years

___ Can use language to set the scene, actions, and roles in play

___ Highly imaginative activities that integrate parts of known schemas/scripts for events child has never participated in or observed (e.g., astronaut builds ship, flies to strange planet, explores, eats unusual food, talks with creatures on planet)

___ Plans several sequences of pretend events. Organizes what is needed -- both objects and other children. Coordinates several scripts occurring simultaneously

___ Engages in collaborative play, i.e., play roles coordinated and themes are goal-directed

___ Uses relational terms (then, when, first, last, next, while, before, after) Note: Full competence does not develop until 10-12 years of age.

Westby, C.E. (2000). A scale for assessing development of children's play. In K Gitlin-Weiner, A. Sandgrund , & C. Schaefer (Eds.), *Play diagnosis and assessment.* New York: Wiley.

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Some Examples of Play Goals
https://iepgoals.net/iep-facts/iep-goals-and-objectives/

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Early
1. _____ will appropriately play with at least __ cause & effect toys by pressing buttons, shaking, turning knobs, pulling levers, etc… in order to produce desired immediate feedback in the form of lights, sounds, music, vibrations, etc… across __ days.
2. _____ will engage in ___ turn-taking exchanges by relinquishing to the other person, waiting while the other person takes a turn, and then requesting a turn (or taking a turn) without prompting in ___ different activities for _____ days.
3. The _____ will imitate _____ functional play actions (number of actions will depend on the toy) by watching the play partner, then imitating the play action within 5 seconds of the presentation of the opportunity. _____ will correctly respond in the first trial of each action with at least ___ toys across ____ days.

Intermediate
1. _____ will independently engage in pretend play sequences (assigns attributes to a toy that is beyond the nature of the toy in a sequence of related actions within a theme or routine) when the toy is presented, but no model is provided with at least __ different types of toys/activities across ___ days.
2. _____ will independently engage in symbolic play (takes one item to represent another during the course of the play activity by giving it an attribute that it does not have, or pretends to have something that is not there) when the toy/item is presented, but no model is provided with at least ___ different types of toys/activities across ___ days.
3. _____ will make one contingent comment following a conversation partner's comment by making a statement that is related to what the conversation partner has just said (e.g. Partner: "I have a car." _____: Child: "I have a truck.") within 5 seconds of the conversation partner's statement. _____ will make appropriate contingent comments for each activity per day for __ days.

Advanced
1. _____ will demonstrate the ability to follow a socio-dramatic play theme and/or initiate novel socio-dramatic play ideas by engaging in play with at least one other person, selecting a theme, assigning roles or taking on roles, and using language and pretend play actions to play out the roles within the context of the theme. _____ will engage in at least ___ sequenced socio-dramatic play actions within at least ___ different play themes.
2. _____ will expand his/her repertoire of social initiations and be able to initiate social interactions in a variety of ways by learning to approach people, make appropriate greetings, ask if they can join an activity, share items, ask questions about the activity, and use language to continue or further the play activity. _____ will make at least ___ different appropriate initiations with teacher, parents, peers, etc. without a prompt, over ___ consecutive for each type of initiation.

Cognitive/Linguistic Dimensions in Play and Literacy

Dimension	Pretend Play	Reading Comprehension
Decentration/ Theory of mind	Pretend act requires awareness of mind; that what one is doing in not reality Role play requires awareness of the thoughts and emotions of the characters one is play	Must recognize emotions of characters and make inferences about characters' thoughts and emotions
Decontextualization	Substitute one object for another Use language and/or gestures to set the scene and carry out the play without props	Create mental models of the texts one hears or reads, i.e., form pictures in one's mind of the situation represented in the text
Thematic	Create play content and topics from familiar daily events to highly imaginative	Recognize content, themes (messages) of text
Organization/ Integration	Organize play activities/ themes into temporal/causal sequences	Recognize temporal/causal relationships among characters and events; make inferences about those relationships