

SOCIAL INTERACTION IN THE PLAYGROUND

Playtime at school can be difficult for children who experience difficulties with social interaction and communication. Reasons include:

It is unstructured time – it may be difficult to know what to do with this time

It is a sensory overload

It is socially demanding and the rules keep changing or the child may not be aware of the rules of the game.

How to help:

Build in some structure – work with the child to find ways of structuring the playtimes, e.g. having a choice of toys/games, set up a game with a partner, organise group games

Give them some time/space to be alone – inside if necessary.

Assess how anxious playtime is making the child – This will indicate what you may need to do. If anxiety is high, don't ignore it. Staying in, or letting them have a break from interaction may be the best thing you can do to help them regulate their anxiety. For others, an adult to support them might be what they need and that makes them feel safer and happier. For others, supporting them and the other children to play together well might be what they need.

Involve Sensory Movement Activities – e.g. running, climbing playground equipment

Traditional playground games

Red Letter - A person is picked to be the leader. They stand with their back to the rest of the players who stand 10 metres back from them.

The leader calls a letter of the alphabet (for example "a").

If a player's name contains that letter the player can move a step forward. The number of steps forward depends on the number of that letter in their name. The leader continues calling out letters until someone reaches the leader.

Please Mr Crocodile - One person is 'Mr Crocodile' and the other people say: "Please Mr Crocodile can we cross your Golden River?"

'Mr Crocodile' replies with something like "Only if you are wearing something blue". If you are wearing that colour you can move on one step.

When you reach the other side, you are then the next 'Mr Crocodile'.

Farmer, Farmer May We Cross Your Golden River? - One player is named the farmer and stands in the middle of a designated area of the playground. The other players stand behind a line, in a row about ten metres away from the farmer. A designated 'home' area is agreed, usually the opposite end of the play area.

The players call out, 'Farmer, Farmer may we cross your golden river?'

The farmer replies, 'Not unless you have the colour... on.'

The players wearing that colour may cross the playground safely to the designated home area.

The farmer then counts to five and on five the other players must walk or run 'home' whilst the farmer tries to catch them. Anyone who is caught helps the farmer to choose what colour the players should be wearing next to be able to cross the river.

The game continues with a different colour each time until the last player is caught and they becomes the farmer.

Duck, Duck, Goose - The players sit in a large circle facing inwards.

One player is chosen to be the 'tapper' and walks around the outside of the circle. As they walk around, they touch each child gently on the head whilst saying, 'Duck, duck, duck.'

At some stage they will tap a child and say, 'Goose,' instead.

The goose then jumps up and chases the tapper around the circle.

The tapper in turn tries to get all the way back to the geese's spot, 'home', without getting caught.

If the tapper gets home safely, the goose becomes the new tapper and the game starts again.

If the goose catches the tapper, the game starts again with the tapper being on again.

What's the Time Mr Wolf? - One player is chosen to be Mr Wolf.

The other players stand in a line on the opposite end of the playground about 10-12 metres away from Mr Wolf. This line is referred to as 'home'.

Mr Wolf stands with his back to them.

The players chant, 'What's the time Mr Wolf?'

Mr Wolf replies (for example), '3 o'clock.'

The players advance the same number of steps, that is, 3 steps for 3 o'clock.

The game continues until Mr Wolf thinks the players are close enough to catch and after being asked the time again he replies, 'Dinner time,' then turns and chases the players. The first child caught becomes Mr Wolf.

If Mr Wolf does not catch anyone, they have to be Mr Wolf again.

If a player reaches Mr Wolf before dinnertime, they tap Mr Wolf on the shoulder and run for home. If the player gets home then she is safe. If they are caught then they become Mr Wolf.