

## How to Use a Dollhouse to Encourage Language Skills

Dollhouses are a great toy for encouraging language skills. Both boys and girls can enjoy playing with a dollhouse. Dollhouses may include a variety of different pieces such as people, chairs, tables, beds, a television, a sink, a toilet, shelves, a stove, and a fridge.

### **Ideas for beginning social skills:**

- Pretend play skills- Dollhouses are wonderful for practicing pretend play skills! Children can re-enact the activities that they see everyday, such as going to bed or taking a bath. You can also pretend to cook dinner, sit at the table to eat, or watch television. You can model the actions first and then prompt your child to imitate the actions. Use lots of language during play to describe what you are doing!
- Pointing to make a choice- Hold up two different toys, for example a bed and a chair, and ask your child which one he/she wants to put in the house. You may have to model pointing for your child to imitate or take your child's hand and help him/her point. If your child reaches for the book instead of pointing, just say "point to tell me what you want" and move his/her fingers into a pointing position.
- Joint Attention- Take all of the furniture out of the dollhouse and then give the pieces to your child one at a time. After you give a piece of furniture to your child, point to the spot in the house that you want him/her to put the piece. Your child will have to pay attention to your pointing to learn where he/she needs to put the furniture.

### **Ideas for receptive language skills:**

- Receptive Vocabulary- Ask your child to identify the household items by having him/her point to the furniture when you name it. For example, you could say, "show me the sink" or "where is the bed?" If your child is having difficulty finding the correct household items, then just set out 2-3 different items for him/her to choose from.
- Identify household items by attributes- Ask your child to identify different household items when you describe them. You could say "show me something you can sit on" or "show me something that feels soft."

- Practice following 1-step directions- You can give your child directions about what to do with different household items. You could say “open the door,” “put the mom in the bed,” or “put the dad under the bed.”
- Practice following multi-step directions- After your child has mastered following 1-step directions, you can make the directions more difficult by adding steps. You could say “put the mom in the chair and then make her eat” or “put the dad in the bathtub and then wash his hair.”

### **Ideas for expressive language skills:**

- Have your child ask for different pieces of furniture:
  - If your child is using sign language, have him/her imitate the sign for the desired household item. You could also have your child point to a picture symbol of the desired household item to request it.
  - If your child is beginning to use words, have him/her imitate the name of the household item that he/she wants.
  - If your child is beginning to use sentences, prompt him/her to say “I want \_\_\_\_\_” or “put \_\_\_\_\_ in the house.”
- Expressive vocabulary- Work on household vocabulary by naming the different furniture items and accessories (table, chair, bed, bathtub, toilet, sink, T.V., door, window, floor, roof, etc.) You could also work on naming the different body parts on the dolls.
- Practice using different verbs- Encourage your child to use different action words during play. You can model the action words for your child by describing what you are doing. You could use words like “eat, drink, cook, wash, open, close, climb, sit, sleep, stand, watch, turn on, go, stop, run.”
- Practice using position words- Have your child tell you where the dolls should go. Encourage your child to use position words such as “in, on, under, behind, in front, and beside.” For example, your child could say, “put the mommy under the table” or “put the daddy behind the shelf.”
- Practice making a narrative- Have your child tell you a short story about what the dolls might do. Your child could tell a story about playing outside, getting ready in the morning, making dinner or having a birthday party. You can ask your child questions to help add more information to the story. You could ask “What happened next?” or “How did she feel?” or “Then where did he go?” Encourage your child to act out the story with the dolls.