



Family and dramatic play offers children opportunities to build social skills and explore their own culture. Children can try out interactions within the safety of play. They build language, emotional skills, social skills and problem solving. This sort of role-play is often held up as the pinnacle of play in Playcentre because it can integrate so many other types of play within an imaginary context.

Family and dramatic play can be relaxing play for adults

During lockdown children will be missing their peers. Adults can fill this gap when they play like peers in a fantasy play situation by playing a role. This play can also help adults relax. Lie down and relax while ‘the doctor’ treats you. Be a cat and relax in the sun. Play cafe and be brought a pretend coffee. Being part of the play will help adults build strong relationships with children through the play.

Inspirations for family and dramatic play

Dramatic play can take place in situations children have experienced, or situations they are curious about. For example:

- Shops, Cafe, Restaurant
- Aeroplane / airport
- School / Playcentre
- Doctor / hospital / vet / giving birth - exploring health, illness and human bodies
- Spaceship, bus, car, train - transportation, preparation for journeys, destinations
- Marae, church
- Work environments
- Role play - goodies, baddies, superheroes, police, firefighters, pirates.
- Family play including tea-parties, Babies / Mummies / Daddies

General tips on enhancing the play

- Provide props, dress-ups, face-paints, dolls, and craft materials
- Build their social skills and teamwork - help children think about their needs, the needs of others and how to work together as a team.
- Provide language for the jobs, equipment and challenges of the job.
- Ensure physical and emotional security of children.
- Talk about feelings. Use family and dramatic play to express your feelings and talk about the needs of other people and animals. Demonstrate to children how to ask for consent and express when they are uncomfortable with situations or behaviour.
- Acknowledge strong emotions and name the emotions. If a child is missing going to a special place or spending time with a special person then let them explore their feelings.
- Suggest play based on familiar books, places or jobs.
- Animal stories, wildlife programmes or real animals can help children be more curious about animal play.
- Read books on areas of interest e.g. space, animals, bodies.
- Encourage children to make their own props. Fantasy play can be the trigger for elaborate and creative making.

*Welcome to
our Village*



Adults can help initiate family and dramatic play

Adults can help create a place for family and dramatic play and provide resources. Adults can also supervise within earshot while children play together. While keeping children physically safe and emotionally safe is important, so is the opportunity for children to solve their own challenges in play. If children can't solve their disputes, an actively involved adult can intervene to prevent hitting, bullying or exclusion.

Additional resources

<https://education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Early-Childhood/Play-ideas/Family-and-dramatic-play.pdf>

Family and dramatic play ideas

Shops, cafes and restaurants

It's easy to set up a simple shop with some empty packaging (egg cartons, tea boxes, plastic milk bottles). Be careful of potential choking hazards e.g. lids and pretend money. Offer money tokens written on paper, handwritten signage and shopping bags to complete the setup. Shopping will help children explore their ideas of everyday social routines and exchanges

Adults can initiate or enhance shop play

- Very young children may prefer playing shop with adults - it's normal to be more interested in play with adults before play with peers.
- Equipment: shopping bags and empty food packaging for shopping being part of the play e.g. buying products.
- Adding numeracy to the play by talking about prices and quantities of products, count products.
- Adding literacy - helping to write shop signs, making paper money with handwritten numbers, creating visual shopping lists with words and pictures, menus.

Family Play

Offer dolls, dolls clothes, blankets, pushchairs. Sing a lullaby then put baby to sleep on a cushion. Demonstrate gentle

hands, dress and care for dolls, take dolls for a walk, improvise a baby/doll sling from a scarf.

Children who choose to play the role of the baby may be seeking emotional security or reassurance. Children with a new sibling may seek support by playacting the baby or adult.

Medical play : Doctors / hospitals / vets

Safety: Never give children packaging or bottles from real medicine for play - children must be taught to only take medicine under adult supervision.

Safety: Tight bandages can cut off blood supply and should only be used loosely and under close supervision.

Doctor play is a fantastic role reversal opportunity - tired adults may want to take the opportunity to initiate play by lying down and resting being the 'patient'. Children like to express their caring skills while exploring health, illness and human / animal bodies. Soft toys can also be excellent patients

Children may be exploring their concerns about

Covid-19 or illness happening in their families. This is their safe place to explore big emotional topics like fear, death, illness and pain. Adults need to be kind to themselves as these topics can be hard for adults too.

Family and dramatic play provides great emotional and language development opportunities. Children can learn about informed consent and bodily autonomy, parts of their bodies, feelings and pain from adults. Children love the opportunity to use a pretend doctors kit with pretend uniforms. Plasters, slings, homemade stethoscopes, printed or drawn 'x-rays' and children's books can all enhance the play

Camping and hut making

A hut made from chairs and fabric is a perfect invitation to fantasy play. Adults can help set up the shelter / huts / tents ready for play.

To extend the play consider cooking dinner on a real or pretend fire or camping stove, have a picnic, or sleep together in a tent in the backyard.

Role Play

- Start with a piece of fabric used as a cape
- Or an imaginary "fire" and an adult who calls for 'firefighters'
- Pirate play can be started with an imaginary boat (e.g. cushion, piece of fabric, cardboard box) and a call of "oy there, me hearties)
- Games of tag between goodies and baddies
- Dressing (e.g. in a single colour for the day)

Superheroes, police, firefighters, pirates allow children to explore what behaviour is accepted in their community. Adults can help ensure children are physically safe as children explore their big feelings and test their superpowers.

Adults' roles in role play

- If adults can be the "baddy" then children are able to play positive characters and protected emotionally from being labelled "bad".
- Use the opportunities to talk about the roles of heroes in society. Introduce heroes from your culture and family.
- Talk about fire safety and evacuation plans.
- Provide props. Discuss safety for props and especially weapons. Help children set their own rules and boundaries.



Aeroplane/airport, spaceship, car journeys, train, bus

Colouring pens and a cardboard box big enough to sit inside makes a great starting point for transport play. Other equipment / taputapu might include maps, suitcases, tickets, model planes, lunchbox meals, holiday photos, soft toys (passengers), control panels, home-made steering wheels.

Adults can help children to get into the fantasy and identify their particular interests

- Destination and planning exploration: Talk about places you've visited or where your family comes from. What would you take on holiday? Where would you like to go? How would it feel to visit?
- Social roles: Play roles e.g. pilot, check-in staff, cabin crew, passengers. Discuss Who would come with?
- Technology: how will we get there?

Animal play : farms, zoos, pet shops or vets

Toy animals (plastic or stuff toys) are a great invitation for fantasy play or construction. Children may pretend to be animals, look after animals, build habitats for their animals.

Other materials can include coloured fabric scraps, wood, leaves, grass, or cushions. Hairbrushes, blankets, soft toys can enhance nurturing play. Dress-ups, bought or home-made masks, or face paint can help children become animals.



Adults can enhance animal play

- Encourage kind treatment of real or pretend animals - help children learn how to care for animals.
- Offer sensory experiences to touch and taste - fake fur, soft blankets, sunshine, pretend pet food.
- Supervise children with real pets. Teach children to ask the owner and only pat dogs if they have a familiar adult with them.
- Read animal books.
- Give children opportunities to experience real animals. Auckland Zoo is doing virtual tours during lockdown. Many families can explore their gardens for insects, watch birds or see passing dogs from home.