



Playful Caregiving Behavior

Playfulness is an important ingredient in joyful classrooms and a powerful way to improve behavior and relationships at home, too. When children are misbehaving or entering into power struggles, they are typically trying to communicate, “I need some positive connection.” Even when children are misbehaving, we can meet this need for connection in a simple way by being playful right then. Playfulness relaxes the stress centers in the brain and communicates an important message: “I am here for you, I like you!” You can state a limit with a smile to communicate: We need to do something different. Include a playful voice to gain cooperation moving to an acceptable choice.

Playful behavior comes easily to some and is more unfamiliar for other adults. If you grew up with caregivers who were playful, this will likely come more naturally. If not, here are some ideas about what playful behavior looks like:

- Pretend to be an animal that the child likes or a character from a book or film.
- Make up a simple song with rhyming words to accompany routines.
- Songs that include silly faces or dance make it easier for children to cooperate with behavior requests and transitions.
- Make up a rhyme, emphasize the rhythm, and use it consistently to make routines fun.



- “Play the fool”- pretend like you forgot how to do something obvious. If a child is refusing to put their socks on, say something like “Aw man, I guess I have to help you put your sock on!” and then put it on their head.
- Be the voice of a stuffed animal, doll, or other toy to make a behavior request.
- If the child is small, pick them up and fly them through the air to transport them somewhere in a fun way.
- “Gossip” with a stuffed animal, puppet, or doll about what is happening with your child. “Mr. Bear, this is a little bit confusing. It seems like Jacob forgot how to use his fork! Do you think you can remind him how to do it?”
- Bring some pretend into daily activities: pretend to sprinkle magic dust onto areas of the room to “turn them into” something exciting or appealing.
- When offering positive reinforcement such as a high five, pretend like your body is getting thrown across the room because the child is so strong.
- Break out into dance during chaotic moments to diffuse tension.

