DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICES

Rough-and-Tumble Play Themes in Early Childhood



Rough-and-tumble (R&T) play emerges as early as 18 months of age. It peaks again around preschool, typically progressing into early or middle childhood.

LOOKS LIKE

- Wrestling
- Running
- Jumping
- Weapon or tool play
- Chasing/fleeing
- Open-handed hitting
- Laughing
- Superhero play
- War play, etc.
- Power roles



BENEFITS OF R&T PLAY

- Social cognition (Pellegrini, 1987; Pellis & Pellis, 2007)
- Emotion regulation (Flanders et al., 2010)



Play themes involving the use of real or imagined weapons or tools, can be a combination of many play skills, including dramatic, functional-relational, and rough-and-tumble play, depending on how they are used.

EXPAND THE PLAY

Help the child explore play-related roles, such as medical professionals, police officers, firefighters, and more. This will also support empathy building.





TOOLS & WEAPONS

Guns, swords, and other weapons are commonly used tools employed by children across the developmental continuum to act out imaginary play themes.



Examine the cultural and ecological factors that might influence a child's beliefs and understanding of tools when deciding if it is developmentally appropriate for them or not.

ASK OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS:

- What does your gun do?
- Why do you like it?
- Tell me about what happened.
- What other tools can we use to solve this problem?
- Who else can help us?

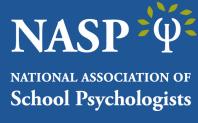
Certainly, there are times when adults should intervene with R&T play. Be mindful of the following behaviors that might put a student at an elevated risk of harm related to R&T play.

- Scowling or crying during the play
- Difficulty recognizing play partners' signs of agitation, which escalates the play into a conflict
- Frequently breaking established norms/rules related to R&T play
- Inability to take responsibility when mistakes are made or play crosses the line;
 Difficulty repairing harm/making amends
- Tactually defensive children (heavy work, firmer touch, and warnings before being touched can be beneficial for these learners)

Watch for reactions produced by students observing R&T play. Ensure all children, even those not directly engaged in the play, feel safe.

Prevent unexpected behaviors related to R&T play by establishing classroom or school-wide practices that are developmentally appropriate.

Reinforce PBIS practices at recess related to good sportsmanship.



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