

# Des Moines Performing Arts at home!

Using Drama to move your body, engage your imagination and bring your story to life!

## Fostering Pretend Play:

A living room can be a jungle, scraps of a paper - pieces of gold, the remote control drives the spaceship and suddenly the floor is lava!

Pretend play refers to a type a play where children accept and assign roles, create rules for their imagined space and act their way into a world of their own creation. Educational research supports this kind of play as valuable for children's development - including their social skills and literacy growth.

Though most kids have the innate ability to create you can encourage reluctant pretenders and harness some of the imagination by adding elements to their play.

- Add print into the mix. Print includes things like newspapers, menus, signs, coupons or labeled items. By surrounding your child with print during pretend play, you are creating an environment in which your child can interact with print. Even children who cannot yet create letterforms can take an order or write a letter by making a few marks. This is a valid step in literacy development. (One recent study showed that environments rich in functional print material inspired more literacy-focused pretend play, which resulted in children achieving higher literacy levels.)
- Re-enact stories. When your child acts out or retells the stories you've read together, they're demonstrating and enhancing their comprehension skills. Remembering the order of a story of different characters and their parts in the book will help them gain an understanding of narrative structure, and consider how different characters have different personalities and motivations. The setting of the story can be created with a few easy embellishments - a scarf, an overturned laundry basket, some discarded pans or blanket tent can add to the fun. You don't need one -but a simple stage can give their stories a place to come to life!
- Choose books that enhance pretend play. Observe what your child likes to do in pretend play. Do they like to pretend to "doctor's office" or to be a firefighter, a teacher, a ballerina, a dinosaur? This gives insight into their interests, you can choose books that not only capture their attention but also their imagination, equipping them with more knowledge, vocabulary, and material to use in pretend play.
- Provide a variety of symbols. During pretend play, a doorstop could become a slithering snake. A slip of paper could become a magic spell or a recipe or a doctor's note. By assigning a purpose to different props, your child develops an understanding of how symbols work. Opportunities to create and use symbols will help your child use other symbols, such as letters and numbers when ready to read but more importantly help to expand the world of the game. Costumes can also be a great way to add to the play - see Props, Puppets and Costume Crafts at <https://desmoinesperformingarts.org/bring-a-story-to-life/> for some costume ideas from Des Moines Performing Arts!
- Role-play with your child. Role-play is a fun and powerful way to expand vocabulary and encourage their language development. Pretending in scenarios involving different characters encourages children to use expressive language. Even young children like the chance to show off their knowledge; what do they have to teach you about what dinosaurs do? What do they know about how to be at a restaurant? What happens at the doctor? When it's someone's birthday?

Having time to inhabit a child's version of the world is an opportunity for grown-ups to see through their perspective and empathize with how tricky it is to learn how to be a person! Adding costumes, props and sets to their play can get you an invitation to their world. The most important thing to remember during pretend play is that it should be fun. Fun matters. It's what motivates a child to stay engaged, curious, and inventive during play, which enables them to gain social, intellectual and imaginative benefits!



Adapted from Reading Rockets and Reading Eggs