

# big PLANS in print

Connecting Big Plans' Parents to their Communities

Issue 19 March · April 2016

## Put Your Oxygen Mask on First!

By Krista Forand, M.Ed.

Parents often ask me for strategies to help their children with emotional regulation. One of the best strategies that I can suggest is to develop and model your own emotional regulation strategies and encourage supportive conversations about emotions among all family members. Parents play a very important role in teaching their children how to express their emotions, respond to others' emotions, and manage their emotions in different situations. As adults, we may take for granted how influential our own behavior is on children, but it is important to understand that it starts with us.

**"Parents play a very important role in teaching their children how to express their emotions . . ."**

If you've ever been a passenger on an airplane, you've likely heard the flight attendant's speech about what to do in an emergency. If the cabin air pressure decreases and the oxygen masks are deployed, we are supposed to put our own oxygen mask on first and then assist our child. However, this doesn't feel intuitive to most parents, because when they see their child in trouble they want to immediately help them. But if you fail to put your own mask on first, you may not have the strength or ability to help your child. This also stands true for helping children develop their abilities to deal with tough emotions.

Research has shown that children imitate and internalize ways of managing their emotions by observing their parents and other important adults in their lives. Children learn to gauge how to express emotion and whether their emotions are valid by how adults respond when they are upset, frustrated, or sad. Studies have found that unsupportive reactions to children's negative emotions were associated with poorer emotion regulation. Additionally, studies have shown that when parents worked with their child to use helpful coping strategies (e.g., distraction, changing their perspective about the situation) the child expressed less anger and sadness.

The message here is that, we, as adults need to make sure that we're putting on our own oxygen mask

first and then helping our children. How can we do this? A few questions can get us thinking about our own emotional regulation abilities and whether we are being positive role models for our children:

- Do you have a habit of dismissing emotions or accepting and validating them?
- How do you handle anger? How do you express your negative emotions in front of others? What about in front of your child? Are you able to follow the axiom "use your words," in the same way you expect from your child? Are you able to notice when you are becoming upset and use a strategy to avoid going completely over the emotional edge?
- What creative ideas can you come up with in the moment to help your child think differently about an upsetting situation?
- Consider the overall messages you want to teach your child about expressing emotions, understanding emotions in others, and managing emotions in stressful situations.

Being more mindful of our own emotional regulation habits and strategies (positive or negative) and figuring out whether we need to make some changes for the better is a great first step in helping children develop good emotional regulation skills. Overall, the more we are in tune with how we respond to stressful situations, the more in tune we can be for our children. Talking about and learning strategies together can also be a good way to increase communication and positivity in family relationships.

*Krista has worked in various roles with the CanLearn Society (formerly Calgary Learning Centre) since 2009. Reprinted with permission: <http://www.adhdfamilies.ca/content/put-your-oxygen-mask-first>*



### This Issue:

Put Your Oxygen Mask on First ..... Page 1

Let's Pretend..... Page 2

3 Preschool Busy Bag Ideas..... Page 3

Apple Cheese Tortilla Snack..... Page 4

Cineplex Sensory Friendly Screenings  
..... Page 4

Parents Connecting Support Group -  
Autism Calgary ..... Page 4

Free Education Sessions and More... Page 4

Photo of happy boy: photo.elsear.com



Parents Learning About Needs and Skills

4108 Montgomery View NW  
Calgary, AB T3B 0L9  
Phone: 403-685-4229  
Fax: 403-685-4227

[www.bigplans.org](http://www.bigplans.org)

# LET'S PRETEND!



## Encouraging pretend play in children with social communication difficulties

Pretend play is a critical part of children's development. When a child pretends to be a chef stirring soup or an astronaut going to the moon, he's building many different skills, including:

- Language skills
- Social and emotional skills
- Problem-solving and thinking skills

### What the research says about pretend play

In young children with autism, studies have shown that:

- better pretend play skills at age 3 and 4 are linked to better language skills at ages 8 and 9.
- the more varied and flexible a young child's pretend play, the more advanced his thinking skills are at ages 8 and 9.

Children with autism or social communication difficulties often do not pretend as often as other children, and when they do, their play tends to be less complex. So adults must take some extra steps to provide them with the opportunities and encouragement they need to learn.

### Helping your child learn to pretend

There's a lot you can do to encourage your child to develop his pretend play skills. Here are a few things to think about to help you get started:

### Observe how your child is playing now

- Is he using toys in "expected" or intended ways?

If your child is using toys in the way they were intended to be used (for example, stacking rings or banging a toy drum) and he's combining many different actions together (for example, putting a toy car on top of a car ramp, pushing a lever to make the car speed down, and then putting the car back on top of the ramp) then your child has already developed advanced functional play skills.

This is the stage at which children are ready to learn to pretend. Your child can now learn to pretend using real objects or miniature objects in "expected" ways — for example, he can learn to brush a doll's hair with a comb, or pretend to be a doctor using a toy doctor's kit.

- Does he already pretend with realistic objects?

For example, does he pretend to comb a doll's hair with a real brush or give a doll a drink with a miniature tea cup? If so, he's ready for you to help him expand his pretend play skills by adding more pretend actions to create a sequence — for example, giving the doll a drink and then wiping its mouth with a cloth. And when your child is already pretending with a sequence of actions, you can help him pretend with invisible objects (for example, holding his empty hand up to his ear



### Tip!

If you feel your child may not be ready for pretend play yet, visit the Hanen Autism Corner for other tips and information for how you can encourage your child's learning during everyday activities.

[hanen.org/autism](http://hanen.org/autism)

to talk on a “phone”) and substitute one object for another (for example, pretending a banana is a phone or a book is a birthday cake).

### Join in your child’s play

To encourage your child to pretend, you need to get his attention by joining in the play he’s already doing.

- **Observe your child as he plays** — Make sure you take the time to observe exactly what your child is doing and how he’s pretending. That way, you can include his interests when you join in the play.
- **Join in by imitating your child with your own toy** — For example, if he is “feeding” a teddy bear with a spoon (an early stage of pretend play), you can get your own stuffed animal and spoon and do the same thing. Remember to make a comment, like, “Look, you’re feeding Mr. Bear and I’m feeding Mr. Rabbit!” This will get his attention! Then you can interact with one another by going back and forth feeding your toy animals.

feeding it to him. Model the action by pretending to stir soup in a pot for your stuffed rabbit, making sure to comment at the same time: “Look, I’m making soup for Mr. Rabbit to eat” (as you “stir” the soup with a toy spoon). “He’s very hungry!”

### Give your child a chance to copy the new pretend action

Once you’ve shown your child the action, **wait expectantly** to see what he’ll do. Waiting patiently, without saying anything, is the best cue you can give your child to tell him it’s his turn to do something. If your child doesn’t copy your action by making soup for his own bear, you can give him other cues, like:

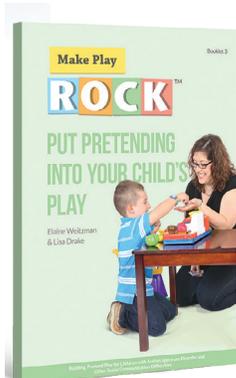
- **Showing him again** — repeat the new action many times, commenting as you do it, to help your child understand.
- **Telling him what to do while pointing** — point to the toy pot and spoon and say, “Mr. Bear is still hungry! Make him some soup.”
- **Using hand over hand help** — you can take your child’s hand and help him stir the soup in the pot, commenting, “Look, you’re making soup for Mr. Bear!”

Make sure to keep the play fun and keep it going by feeding your bears the food you’ve made for them!

©Hanan Early Language Program, 2015

### Show your child a new pretend play action

Now that you have your child’s attention, show him how to extend his pretend play by adding a new action to make a sequence. For example, if he has a toy kitchen set, you can help him learn to pretend to make soup for his bear before



These ideas are from the new Hanan guidebook, *Put Pretending into Your Child’s Play*. In this book, you’ll find many more examples and tips for how you can help your child take the next step in pretend play based on his current stage and interests.

Find out more at [www.hanen.org/pretendplay](http://www.hanen.org/pretendplay).

## 3 Preschool Busy Bag Ideas

Whether you’re trying to keep your preschooler actively engaged while working with your older children or you simply want to offer him some fine motor skills practice, preschool busy bags are a fun, inexpensive, and practical solution.

Preschool busy bags are simply self-contained activities that young children can complete on their own. They’re safe, portable, and typically quiet activities that can be used at home or on-the-go, making them a practical choice for doctor’s offices and restaurants as well.

**BLOCKS** -Stacking blocks is fantastic for hand-eye coordination. Of course, knocking over a block tower is pretty fun, too! Purchase an inexpensive set of blocks or make homemade blocks from sponges.



**PLASTIC CROSS STITCH CANVAS AND PIPE CLEANERS** -One or two pieces of cross stitch canvas (in fun shapes or just square pieces) with a handful of pipe cleaners for weaving can be an engrossing activity for small hands.



**PATTERN GAMES** -Provide the pieces for pattern play. Use colored Popsicle sticks, stickers, or even pom poms along with cards featuring patterns for your preschooler to replicate. For example, place colored stickers on an index card in a pattern, such as blue, green, red, blue, green red. Your child can match the same colored item to recreate the pattern.



Find more a list of 100 busy bag ideas sorted by category visit [powerfulmothering.com](http://powerfulmothering.com) or <http://bit.ly/1VEv43F>



## APPLE AND CHEESE TORTILLA

An Easy and Healthy After-School Snack

### Ingredients

- 1 flour tortilla (6 inch diameter)
- 4 tbsp medium cheddar cheese, grated
- 1/3 cup thinly sliced or cut up apples

**Directions:** Place the tortilla on a plate and sprinkle 2 tbsp cheddar cheese on 1 half of the tortilla. Place the apple pieces over the cheese. Then sprinkle 2 tbsp cheese over the apple pieces. Fold the tortilla over the filling. Microwave on high, for about 30 seconds. Cut the tortilla in half or thirds and serve. Be sure to let these cool awhile. The cheese in the tortillas stays HOT for a few minutes! Try a sprinkle of sugar & cinnamon inside for something different!

(Image by kraftcanada.com)

*Note: If you prefer not to use a microwave: Lay a flour tortilla in the pan and top one half of it with grated cheese (reserving a little extra cheese). Place the apple slices in the slightly melted cheese and let settle. Sprinkle the rest of the cheese on top and fold the tortilla in half. Cook until golden on both sides. Cut into wedges and serve.*

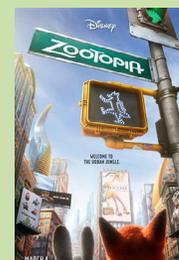
## Cineplex Sensory Friendly Screenings

Cineplex Entertainment, in partnership with Autism Speaks Canada, is delighted to present Sensory Friendly Screenings. This program provides a sensory friendly environment for individuals with autism spectrum disorder and their families to view new release films in theatres across the country. Cineplex Odeon Sunridge Spectrum Cinemas will be hosting these screenings in Calgary, AB.

These screenings are presented in a lights up, sound down environment. These screenings will take place approximately every 4-6 weeks on Saturday mornings at 10:30AM. Ticket price is the child admission price for any guests attending these screenings.



Tickets will be available the Tuesday prior to the screening date. <http://www.cineplex.com/Theatres/SensoryFriendly>



*Zootopia*  
Saturday, March 19, 2016



*The Little Prince*  
Saturday, April 2, 2016

## Autism Calgary Parents Connecting Support Group

This group is for parents of children on the autism spectrum ages 0-18. We aim to help parents connect and share their stories, challenges and successes of living with their special children. All parents welcome. Parents Connecting Support

Groups run every month, on the 4th Wednesday, from 7-9 PM.

Autism Calgary, #174, 3359 27 St NE, Calgary; Phone: 403-250-5033

For more information, please contact [claire@autismcalgary.com](mailto:claire@autismcalgary.com)



## Free Education Sessions and MORE!

Did you know that you can attend a variety of FREE education sessions regarding your children, health and more? The Community Education Service (CES) provides parents/caregivers and other community members with opportunities to access free, evidence-informed education sessions and resource materials to address child, youth, and family health and mental health needs.

CES falls under Alberta Health Services' Child and Adolescent Addiction and Mental Health Programs (CAAMHP) and is housed in the Family and Community Resource Centre (FCRC) on the second floor of the Alberta Children's Hospital.

CES education sessions are hosted at the Alberta Children's Hospital and at various venues in Calgary and nearby communities. Many sessions are also available via telehealth/

video-conference technology for those interested participants located within and outside of Calgary, and where telehealth/video-conference facilities are available.

In design and delivery of its education sessions, CES embraces the Family-Centred Care approach to building family and professional capacity by promoting families as active, fully-informed partners in the care of their children. CES also promotes the role of community partners as a vital support to children and families receiving care.

**For a complete list of upcoming sessions (including the ones listed on the right), visit**  
[frc.albertahealthservices.ca/ces.php](http://frc.albertahealthservices.ca/ces.php)

For more information: email [ces@ahs.ca](mailto:ces@ahs.ca) or call (403) 955-7420

### Circle of Security Parenting Building Secure Attachment

**Wednesday, April 1, 2016**

The Circle of Security Parenting Program answers these and many other parenting questions. It is an attachment based early intervention program designed to enhance attachment security between parents and children. *Session Time: 6:30 pm - 8:00 pm / Sign in: 6:15 pm. Location: South Calgary Health Centre - 1001*

### Understanding Anger in Children

**Monday, May 16, 2016**

This class addresses normal anger issues and responses in children, understanding of the underlying issues of childhood anger, and a healthy, conflict resolution approach to working with these issues. *Session Time: 6:30 pm - 8:30 pm / Sign in: 6:15 pm. Location: Family Connections Parent Link Huntington Hills*  
**FREE - Register by visiting <http://frc.albertahealthservices.ca/ces/login>**