



CENTRE FOR AUTISM  
MIDDLETOWN

# There is no right way to play



Play is an important part of children's learning and has long been considered 'children work'. It is important to recognise that there is no 'right way to play'. There is an assumption made that Autistic people are not good at play, either because of a belief that they 'lack' imaginary play skills or have difficulty playing with others.

However, from listening to autistic voices, we know this is not the case at all. Autistic people may show difference in how they play, but this is no less important than the 'neuro-normative' way of playing.

## Some differences may include:

- Preferring to play with toys and objects in a specific manner e.g., lining up and arranging items. This may be due to a specific sensory preference, enjoying looking at shapes from different angles or taking apart a toy to figure out how it works.
- Enjoying messy play and the sensory experiences this involves.
- Acting out a scene from a preferred TV show because they are trying to work out a similar experience through play or because there is a clear start, middle and end to this type of play. It may also be a way to bring a passionate interest into their school day.
- They can also prefer to play the same games over and over. This can be because they enjoy the routine and structure or because they know exactly what is expected of them and their friends while playing.
- Some autistic people prefer to play with one other person or alone. While others prefer to be in a larger group. This may be due to a range of factors including: difference in their social battery, sensory and environmental factors or even past experiences of play with others.



*"I love to make up games to play with my friends. We were told that we couldn't play a chasing game where we cast spells like in Harry Potter because one of my friends got upset. I was upset because it was lots of fun and we changed the game and the rules so we could play a different game where we jinxed each other instead. It was a different game but my teacher told me we couldn't play this game too. I was very annoyed because every time we made a new game up, the teachers told me it was still the same game. It would help if my teachers talked to us and helped us come up with games that we were allowed to play." - Noah, autistic student*