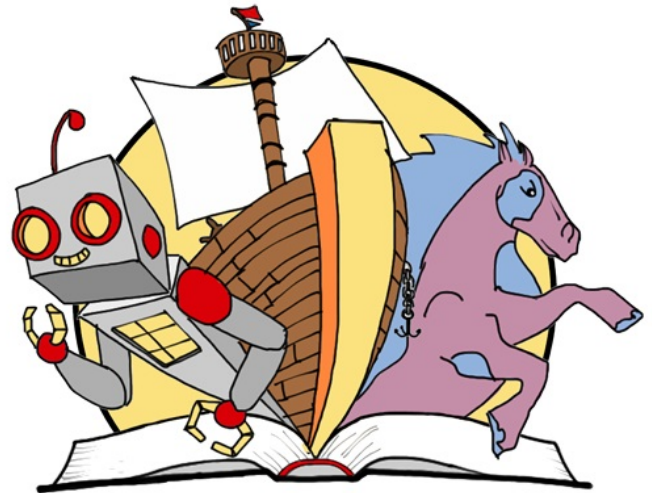
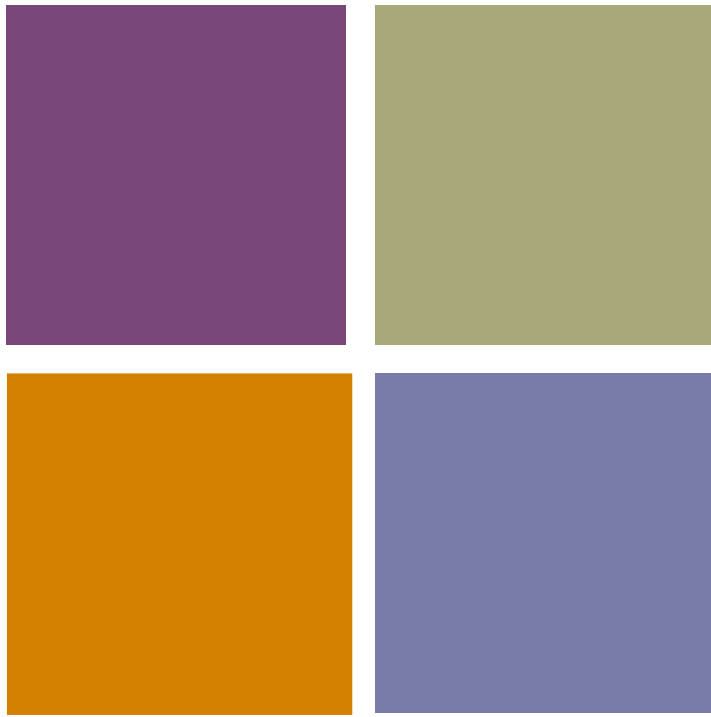


StoryBook Play™:

Teaching Children to Play, one book at a time

Learn more about Kelly's approach to teaching figure play skills to children who struggle to do so naturally.



StoryBook Play™

Fun to Read. Easy to Play.

StoryBook Play was created after witnessing children in the clinical setting struggle with play. It seemed that children with developmental delays became easily overwhelmed by the sensory, mental and physical demands associated with play. After observing these children it was noted that:

- Children with developmental delays often struggle with the process of breaking down complex tasks, such as play.
- These children are often concrete thinkers, so abstract ideas or concepts, such as a piece of molded plastic representing a real object may be more difficult and less of a natural connection than for neurotypical children. As such, figure play is often more difficult for these children to engage in than dress-up pretend play.
- Many of these children struggle with sustained attention, which may make constructing and playing a long story nearly impossible.
- Rigidity in routine and the calming nature of repetitive behaviors makes it difficult for some children to expand on actions or try new ways of doing things. Many kids seem “stuck” in play actions.
- Many children with these struggles benefit from visual supports to reinforce expectations and demands.



Play is fundamentally a request to perform a specific action with an object

It seemed that there were few tools or approaches to teach or model play skills to these children in ways they could easily digest. Seeing the benefit of Carol Gray's Social Stories to model and instruct children on social behaviors, and Stanley Greenspan's Floortime model of building engagement and interaction with children, the concept of StoryBook Play was born. This idea couples a Floortime-style approach of joining children on the floor, and Social Stories' use of visual supports to create simple, easy-to-play narratives coupled with photographs of toys modeling the desired play actions. Equally essential is the approach and philosophy of seeing play from the perspective of these children.

To simplify the multifaceted aspects of figure play, it can be helpful to simply observe it as a behavior. When considering teaching play as a behavior, it is fundamentally a request to perform a specific action with an object. These actions are combined and done in sequence to create a "story." StoryBook Play books differ from many other children's storybooks in that they are written with a specific action in mind on every page. These actions are modeled on each page by a photograph of a toy performing the action. Where Social Stories are used to model socially appropriate behaviors, StoryBook Play stories are used to model figure play sequences. The basic-level stories do not involve complex or metaphorical journeys of discovery, but are simple, sequenced actions forming the basis of a narrative. This simplifies the complexity of play for children who may lack an intrinsic interest in these toys.

For example, many stories may include ideas such as "The boy was sad," or "The boy wanted to play with his friend." These statements, however, have no associated action. What are you requesting the child DO to show that the figure representing the boy is sad, or desires something from another person? These types of statements are rarely, if ever used in StoryBook Play books. Rather than spend time on these ideas, simple

introduction statements or chapter titles such as "It's time to play!" or "Making Friends!" are able to establish these concepts so that the narrative can focus on simple, playable actions.

Similarly, many books include sentences such as "The boy went next door to ask his neighbor to play." If you break down this single sentence you find *at least* 4 actions contained in one statement! In order to play this sentence, a figure would need to leave one house, "walk" to a second house, knock on a door, and ask a question. StoryBook Play books are created based on the play skill level of the individual, and break down these ideas as detailed as is needed. For example, one child may only need the 4 steps outlined above. Other children may need a model that the door opens first, or that when the boy arrives, the neighbor's door opens, the neighbor comes to the door and THEN the boy asks a question. What is essential is that the stories provide clear models of specific actions so that children can understand exactly HOW to play the story.

It is also important to recognize that the ultimate goal is to teach children that play is fun. The books created in StoryBook Play are centered on the special interest of the child. When these interests are directly translatable to toys this process is simple. If a child loves cars- use cars! Cars can do amazing and interesting new things; you can teach children that they can be for more than lining up or looking at. What if a child's interest is less tangible? Make it concrete! If a child loves numbers, numbers can be taped onto toys. StoryBook play narratives then grow in complexity and content as children demonstrate "mastery" of a book. When a child with little previous story-



based play consistently plays a car-based narrative with little support, a story with cars and a "mechanic" can be a bridge to playing with people figures or new actions with the same toys (the cars need to eat some dinner!) can be highlighted to learn new ways to play with favorite toys.

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Essential partners to these books are the attitudes of those who use them. For play to be fun, children need to learn that the people they play with can be fun, and are having fun. This involves an intentional focus on creating an atmosphere that is fun, and in which a child is praised for their work. This starts by setting up a situation in which a child can achieve success. Physically, success is supported by setting up a room with as few distractions as possible. This may be a small space, established as a "play area" without access to numerous toys or screen distractions. There should be little else in the room but the toy, the book and the facilitator (this could be a parent, caregiver, teacher, therapist or other person who is happy and willing to help). This focuses the center of fun and interaction on the toys and the person. Mentally and emotionally this success is set up through StoryBook Play books by carefully constructing the narrative of the story to best fit the abilities and strengths of the child.

The basic steps in building StoryBook Play narratives are: observe, use, and build. Facilitators begin by observing what a child is already doing, and using these existing skills as a starting point to build from. During this observation it's helpful to make note of a child's attention span, interest in toys, interest in people, and beginning play skill level. A basic checklist can be found at <http://www.storybookplay.com/resources>. Essential to this process is first accepting who the child is and where their development is RIGHT NOW. It requires letting go of what they "should" be doing based on their age, or their skills in other areas and trusting they will learn best if they feel accepted and loved as they are.

This acceptance can be a hard journey for all those working with children who struggle. The problem is that we often focus on what a child is NOT doing. They are not playing "normally" they are not engaging "enough." The solution is to let go of expectations and join the child in what they ARE doing. Copy what they do. Join in their actions to understand why they find them so enjoyable. You may be amazed at how interesting a train looks a centimeter from your face, or how exciting watching an object spin around can be. When you understand why a child does what they do, you can learn how to help them build on these actions to create a story.

This can be done at almost all starting play skill levels. Let's say you start with step 1- observe. You watch and see your child just lines up cars and stares at them. You join with them and notice it looks interesting! They are getting some cool visual stimulation from the activity. You may think- how can I use this? How can you teach a child who only lines up object how to play? The answer- this is a form of play! It's exploring a toy. It's investigating an object- next you just need to use this action to make this a story! Give a narration to action they are already doing. Perhaps the cars are lining up for a parade. The story starts with "The cars line up for the parade!"

Next, you think about the ways you can build on this action. Some options are: each car could jump to show they are ready, or because they are excited. The action you are requesting is picking the car up and putting it back down. Another choice might be for each car to say, "I'm ready!" The action here is picking up a car and stating the line "I'm ready." This is a more complex demand. The cars could each drive down the street in the parade. This might be much harder because it deviates more from the preferred activity of having the cars remain in line. It's important to know where the child is able to



Celebrate Achievements, no matter how small

be flexible and how they might respond. If this will be a challenge, end the story quickly after they drive, or have the drive end in a line again. Give the child support and celebrate when they are able to make a big change in their routine!

It is from this conceptual understanding of narrative building that the books are created. Each sentence, each page of the books use photographs of toys to model the actions of the story, The books can then be used in a variety of ways to help give children cues and support. Caregivers can read the story in whole, and then use the book as reminders of what to do next in play. Some children succeed best when the story is read and played page by page. After a page is read together, the child can “match” the toy to copy the picture shown. After repetition and increased understanding of expectations, the hope is that children will gain the confidence to spontaneously change the story or incorporate new ideas. It’s helpful to allow free, open play with the same toys without the expectations of copying a story exactly to observe any development or generalization of behaviors.

When teaching a child to play, there are 5 key tips to keep in mind. The first three are pretty basic: 1. Be BIG! 2. Be EXCITED! 3. Be SILLY! Its important to note that excited doesn’t have to be loud, and big doesn’t have to be jumping. The key is to create an environment of joy and excitement so that this experience is paired with you and the toy. This may be different with every child on the spectrum. Finding this balance is tricky but essential. Areas 4 and 5 are

harder, and probably more important.4. Celebrate achievements, no matter how small. This requires that you can be patient and look for progress. A child picking up a new figure, or making a sound effect he didn’t make before. These are milestones to be celebrated. 5. Be present. This process is about having fun and spending time with this child. Don’t worry about how it’s going, what you have to do next, or what you’ll make for dinner. Take a deep breath and focus on having fun.

For more information on StoryBook Play or Kelly’s work visit www.storybookplay.com or email Kelly at Kelly@storybookplay.com