

Stage 5: Emotional Ideas

18-36 Months

Goal – Using symbols or ideas to convey intentions or feelings.

Now is the time to help your child tell you what he wants or thinks, and to become a partner in his emerging make-believe play. You can pretend to be a puppy, or talk for a puppy puppet, and ask your child for a hug or a kiss or a dog bone, for example. You can also open up conversations with him about his desires and wishes, and ask, “What do you want to drink, milk or juice?” His reply of “juice” could be met by your eager head nod and response of, “Let’s go and get it! Show me where to go.” As he answers, “There, Mommy,” while pointing toward the refrigerator, he’ll know that he can get his needs met by interacting with you.

Stage 5 Do’s and Don’t

- Don’t rely on puzzles, books, structured games, DVDs, or TV to spark your child’s use of ideas.
- Do get down on the floor and become a character—such as a bear or wizard—in a pretend drama of your child’s own choosing. Ham it up! Interact, talk, and emote through your character.
- Do hold long conversations about anything that interests your child, from a new toy to his favorite or most despised food. Use games, TV, and videos as a basis for long back-and-forth conversations rather than as ends in their own right.

Games to help your child master Stage 5:

- **Let’s Chitchat**
Using your child’s natural interests, see how many back-and-forth circles of communication you can get going using words, phrases, or short sentences. You can even turn your child’s single-word response into a long chat. For instance, when your child points to the door and says, “Open,” you might reply, “Who should open it?” He is likely to say “Mommy do it,” and you could shake your head from side to side and say, “Mommy can’t now. Who else?” He’ll probably turn his head to his father and ask, “Daddy do it?” Daddy might reply, “Do what?” When your child once again points to the door and says “Open, open!” Daddy can walk toward him saying, “Okay, can you help me push the door open?” With his eager head nod, your little boy will be closing this long sequence of back-and-forth words and gestures.
- **Let’s Pretend**
Become a dog or cat or superhero in a drama of your child’s own choosing. Ham it up and see how long you can keep it going!