

Web-Based Radio Show

Symbolic Play and Developing Symbolic Thinking:

Continuation of 9/29/05 show; how we get children to use symbols as a way to understand and master the full range of emotional ideas and experiences in order to reach abstract thinking and understanding what it means to them and what it means to the world


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Good morning, everyone. This is Serena Weider. Welcome back to our web radio program. I will be talking today about symbolic play and developing symbolic thinking, which is a continuation of our program last week, so let's just jump right in.

First, let's go over some of the pointers we had from our first session. There is nothing as important as developing symbolic thinking for later education, for being able to use your own ideas for developing judgment, for figuring out what's right and wrong. As you know, in the DIR model, we really believe it's very important to have a solid foundation for developing this higher-level skill, but it really actually begins at the same time that we begin some of our other foundation skills, which would be to regulate and attend and get engaged, so we can begin to have those two-way conversations and the complex discussions about what things mean in life.

We want to help our children build a symbolic world from the start. I was referring to all the ways we do encourage symbolic interests, beginning with putting that little teddy bear into the crib and how, in our own culture, we continue to offer children symbols as they begin to comprehend language, as they develop favorites, to the toys they themselves choose. Every toy a child shows interest in, always think of it in terms of what it represents. If it's the trains and the cars, it's a way to get places. At the point at which it's more than a label – but has meaning – we know it begins to take on symbolic intent. So whether the child chooses trains or cars or Disney figures or Sesame Street figures, ask yourself, “What does this possibly mean to the child? Why did he choose this particular symbol to fall in love with or to be his transition object or to be the thing that he turns to much of the time?” We can begin to understand what that choice means, because every toy – every favorite character – has symbolic value. It's




when you notice that emotional feeling behind it that you'll realize it's not just a label. Children learn words very quickly the second year of life and even children who have challenges can learn to label things quite easily with enough repetition and reinforcement. But what those words mean and what they represent is what we will talk about today.

How do we get children to use symbols, whether in play or in conversation or in drawings, as a way to understand and master the full range of emotional ideas and experiences in order to reach abstract thinking and understanding what it means to them and what it means to the world?

We start creating the symbolic world very early in life. We also talked about how there are typical concerns children have for which they need to come up with a symbolic solution. If we look at typical concerns or anxieties we know that these reflect growth and development. When a child becomes aware of a stranger it means they know, "Hey! You're not my Mommy. And if my Mommy's not going to be here, who do I hold on to?" and that's where they're clinging to their "blankies" or their teddy bears or their Elmos and they begin to use that substitute – it's not the real thing, it's a substitute for that awareness that they want someone familiar with them to escort them through the next step, in this case, being with someone else, which would be separation.

Similarly, why do some children have separation anxiety and not others? Well, here, too, we can look at how children experience earlier separation. In fact, it's easier to separate when you're an infant than it is when you're a toddler. As a toddler, you're much more aware that someone is leaving and we have all the different ways of reassuring children we'll be back. Very often, children who have mastered separation for sleep will master separation for daycare or a babysitter a little bit more readily because they're developing that sense of security that someone will be back and they can handle themselves until then with the support of a nurturing adult. But, here, too, what would the symbol be for the separation and how will a child cope with it? If they do have a symbol that can be reassuring to them – in some cases it's a picture, in other cases it could be a transition object, in other cases, it's words of reassurance – it tells us the child is growing and having more awareness of their own feelings and what others do and how it affects them.


What is the solution next? We talked about how children, as they become more aware of themselves, become more aware of their bodies and what can happen to their



bodies. Until that point, they're developing their motor systems; hopefully, they're getting lots of good movement experiences down on the floor for crawling, pulling to stand, moving. All the while, while they're learning even to walk, it's something where they are driven by maturation, driven by the parts of development that are pretty automatic in most cases, until you see them becoming concerned that they're hurt. Then we know that they have some fears of body damage or body injury, and we start offering them kisses for their boo-boos or a band-aid if they're not too tactilely sensitive, and we introduce the concept of magic to children with that solution.

Here, this is at the same period where children are taking on other symbols, which relate to being able to take care of their dolls and feeding them or using a doctor kit or a tool kit to repair the broken toys or cars, so that along with the concern of getting hurt or of things breaking, they now are equipped because they can also come up with a symbolic solution. They can pretend to feed or fix and in this way they get the way to practice – a safe way to practice – because we don't want children falling, we don't want things breaking. By helping them become more symbolic they can reenact their own experience, they can reenact things that they do in real life and start to do what others do to them and not only what they do themselves. So, you can put the baby doll into the baby swing – the little pretend swing – and push it and then have the pleasure of, "Oh, here's something I like." Or you can feed the baby or you can heal the baby and if you're really mad you can yell at the baby or not give the baby what it wants. In this way step-by-step children expand their emotional range, so now it moves from everything being very fixable and nurturing and working well, to becoming aware that not everything can always be fixed, not everything that's lost can always be found, and not every disappointment can be compensated.


Well, becoming aware of that triggers more concerns and more fears and we enter another stage of symbolic awareness, but this time it's represented by things that don't exist. I'm thinking of when you first realize your child might be afraid. What is he afraid of? Is there a monster in the closet? Is there a ghost hovering around? This is very timely now, of course, in terms of Halloween coming, but when children become afraid, we understand that their awareness that there are some things out there that they don't understand and that could be, in their minds, harmful and from which they need protection. This is why we have such wonderful storybooks that show Daddy taking that yucky monster and pushing him into a box and tying up the box and throwing it out the window, or Mommy looking under the bed to make sure there is no ferocious lion there.



We listen to the child's fear, but telling him it's not real or it's his imagination doesn't really reassure him as much as giving him a symbolic solution. We give children a symbolic way in which we can get rid of those monsters or those ghosts or those scary lions by acting as if they're real and getting rid of them as if they're real and by doing that we respect the child in that moment believing this is real, because it hasn't quite yet developed into a symbol of fears, a symbol of things that can happen that you don't control and whatever else ghosts and monsters begin to mean. You'll notice that in the beginning children love these monster books – like the silly green monster – because authors have learned to help children make these transitions by making the fearful funny or by finding creative solutions about what to do with that monster. In this way, children learn to act upon their fears until they can do more reasoning, until they can really think through, “Is this real or not?” That takes a while because it's developmental. So you need not rush into telling a child, “It's only pretend,” but offer a symbolic solution. So when that alligator is sneaking around the zoo or the jungle and the child shows fear, make sure you trap the alligator or the lion or the tiger and this usually helps only once the child knows or senses, at least, that the tiger or the alligator is to be feared, that they're different from the kitty-cat or the little lizard or the pet frog. Here, we're talking about what they mean.

So, as long as the child treats these different symbols, these different toys in the same way they're not yet ready developmentally with the understanding of what something represents, but we have to wait for that to emerge. And how do they learn that? Well, it comes through cues, it comes from the way you treat that alligator or that tiger. It comes from the way you notice a T-Rex maybe looks a little different than a Brachiosaurus with its long mighty neck and tail and has a different kind of power, a different way of walking and getting his food. It's through this kind of incidental learning combined with watching other children play, combined with books you might read or videos children watch that they begin to take in the emotional meaning and it's that emotional meaning – it's that affect – that is the bridge – the driving force – to representation or logical thinking, i.e., knowing what it really means.


We are climbing this ladder and with it, as I said before, the choice of the children's symbolic toys or ideas or favorite books tells us where the child is and what they need to practice. We deepen the plot at whatever their level at the moment. Again, it's more a differentiated sense of who they are and what others are about that helps the child grow. This is where the child begins to extract information so they begin to



recognize, “Oh, these animals seem safe. They’re kind of the good guys. These other animals – oh oh. They may be not so safe. They’re going to want to attack the good guys. They are going to want to even eat those good animals!” So they begin to differentiate what the good guy and bad guy animals or dinosaurs or characters are about.

It is encountering aggression that opens the door to the next emotional level for the children because you recognize aggression and you recognize not everyone is so nice, not everyone is nurturing, not everyone takes care of you, but in fact it’s the opposite. Now, children know this from their own emotional state that they get angry, they experience other people being angry; they get impulsive and might want to throw or hurt. So, it is not starting at that cognitive level, it comes much earlier when emotions are felt but not yet differentiated and organized into symbols. At around age three to five, children become much more aware of aggression, of anger, of jealousy, of disappointment, of competition, the whole range of negative emotions comes into awareness and takes a more organized sense, a more organized feeling. So, they have now moved from their earlier emotional themes of dependency and joy and separation or mastery of their bodies to anger, fear, disappointment, jealousy, rivalry, and competition and, of course, this will lead into the next symbols that relate more to power. Before they reach power, often we’ll see a lot of need to be in control because this range of emotions that I’ll call “negative” but are just part of the human condition and part of what all people feel and are developmental in nature, can be more disarming to many children, especially the sensitive child or the helpless child and we will talk about how children with special needs have to work especially hard to master these emotions and to be wooed into the symbolic world because we know that it’s very important not to act out these negative emotions and the place where it is safe to practice is through symbolic play.


How do we get there? Well, last week we talked about the importance of creating a symbolic world for children and the importance of letting children develop themselves on all fronts. It would be very difficult for you, yourself, to encounter aggression if you didn’t have the ability to fight back or you didn’t feel organized and coordinated in terms of where you are in space. So it’s very important to think about that and we’ll turn now to the individual profile of the child – how equipped is he to deal with this? It isn’t that every child has to be equal in all his developmental capacities, but he does have to be good enough to deal with mastering these new areas.



Otherwise, the world can be a very scary place. A child can march to the beat of his own drummer or put his head in the sand because he's not ready to take on what he's beginning to sense and intermittently understand from the behavior of others around him or from all the other input he's getting.

So, when you have these individual differences, it's really important to consider each one and to make sure we are helping children move forward to close some of the gap in their processing challenges. What happens if you're very sensitive and you jump out of your skin with every surprising sound or touch or move? Well, that can be disarming. Think of yourself in a strange situation, whether it's the jungle or a foreign country – when you're not really equipped to understand what's going on around you – if you don't know how to read the signals in the environment, it does feel like a scary place and some people will crave that adventure, while others will avoid it. So, we've got to think about what a surprise means and how do you soothe and reassure a child who's very sensitive to sound? Well, you could say, "Oh! What was that?!" or you could say, "Hey . . . that was a surprise – where did it come from?" The way we respond will help even a child who is sensitive begin not to get too alarmed by the unexpected. If you have a parent who is frightened by something, it's often the case that children will pick up that affect – that anxiety – and also become wary, whereas others won't. But think about how you react to some things. Of course, our children hopefully will not be surprised by totally unexpected things because we're there to protect them, but think of bumping into someone, the unexpected siren, someone touching you to get your attention, can make some children jump and other children turn around and see what's going on. What is your child like?


What happens when you just tell a child that everything is okay or that something is just pretend or just a toy before you give him a chance to figure it out? Are you over protecting your child when they're finally getting curious about some symbols? Being scared, of course, triggers certain responses. If you're fearful, what are you going to do? Are you going to take flight? Are you going to flee? Are you going to fight back? These are the classic responses to fear that we know about from the responses of adults, as well as children. Again, if the child does not have a symbolic solution when he is able either to use words or use play he doesn't have a chance to really practice so that he is more equipped to handle the unexpected in real life because he's got to know what direction to go in – he's got to be able to locate where the sound is coming from to figure out what it was. We need all the processing capacities – auditory and visual-



spatial, in particular, as well as motor planning – so if you see something you know how to act on your idea either to get safe or to fight back when needed. By understanding your child’s individual profile, you can keep strengthening these processing areas so he will be able to deal with a widening range of emotion and symbols.


What I am describing today, then, is a way of moving from the pre-symbolic to the symbolic world. So, what is that ladder? We start with gestures and actions, which first convey those feelings, then the words come, and the words and actions begin to go together so that now we’re also able to talk about the idea or the feeling and we can then move into using only words instead of actions to convey the feeling or the idea. So from gestures and actions, to actions and words, and then using only words so that we don’t actually have to act out the problem or the feeling and we can talk about it. This is, of course, what we hear again and again: “Use your words. Don’t hit and push and bite and shove. Use your words if you want to tell someone to move or that you’re scared or that you want their toy,” and so forth. So, this is what we mean by moving from the pre-representational capacities, which are the building blocks we come back to again and again, to the symbolic level. To do that, double check: Do you have that shared attention flowing? Is the child engaged? Don’t overwhelm or frighten him because you don’t want to scare him and have him back off or become avoidant, but we want him to feel as comfortable being engaged with good feelings as he might be with scary feelings or about angry feelings. The test of a relationship is not just does it work when things are happy and comfortable and bring pleasure, but does the relationship also work when we’re angry or mad or scared or want to retaliate and want to get revenge? Can you handle those feelings through your communication without hurting the relationship? In order to have communication we need a two-way street, we need that long back-and-forth problem-solving flow where we use our interactions to signal and support the continuity of our conversation and make the world symbolic.

As we support our children in this way, then, what are the questions we need to ask? When a child is not moving forward symbolically, of course, we have to wonder if this is part of a larger developmental failure. This is where we go back to those building blocks because the bridging a developmental lapse in engagement, in the flowing of real conversation, in poor self-regulation will have to precede the symbols or be simultaneous with developing and expanding symbols. So, if a child doesn’t learn to self-regulate and control his impulse to hit or push or bite, and he doesn’t yet see the consequences of his behavior and doesn’t understand what it’s going to do others, he



might be very surprised when the world comes down on him. Until he has some form of symbol to convey what he's feeling, to convey what he desires and to understand what someone else wants, it can become very tricky. I think most children, when they do act out, certainly at very young ages between two and three or so, are really struggling with their difficulties in expressing themselves more symbolically and they often are the ones who are not playing symbolically with toys; they're not able to use their play as a way to practice and negotiate and have their battles and they're still acting them out in a very real way.

So, what is the deal? Children don't actually grasp reality in the full sense until they're about eight years old. Obviously, there is some variation. But we do know that this is a symbolic ladder that children climb until they are absolutely sure what is real, what isn't real, and how to deal with reality, which could include all these different issues. Until then it's episodic. By that I mean, they can be very realistic about some things, but not reality-oriented about others. We see that because we'll often see young children be quite realistic around things with which they're comfortable – their comfort zone or the range of feelings that are comfortable for them – but suddenly they can see a tiger approaching and Daddy's roaring and they actually get scared as if that is real. So, they're pretending one moment and reacting as if it's real the next. This is part of the developmental process, which is where you can quickly see what is real and what isn't. When they feel that something that looks frightening really is frightening, or your tone of voice makes it frightening, we know that we have to give them a chance to find a symbolic solution to the scary tiger approaching and then we have to be able to explore what that tiger wants and there, again, we will encounter reality. Well, what, in fact, do tigers want? But children don't understand what tigers do or where their favorite foods come from and how they get their food until they're developmentally read to understand. We don't tell them; we wait for them to give us some indication that they realize what things means. Some children become the scary tiger, instead; they like to take over being the tiger or the scary pirate because then they are able to be in control of that aggression. So, if they're the bad guy – if they're the tiger or the pirate – then they won't get hurt. That's another symbolic solution for them as they work very hard to understand, "Wow! What do these pirates really do? Why do they want to steal everything? Why don't they go to work and buy things?" Well, does the king go to work? How are they going to understand that? This takes some time to comprehend. But if a child is aggressive in real life, one of the things we know is that there is some lag, or some failure, in becoming more symbolic. If a child is aggressive and doesn't anticipate




the consequences, we know there's some failure in being logical, in reasoning. If a child is aggressive but he can reason and can symbolize, then there may be a failure in empathy, in not really caring about or thinking about the person who will be hurt.

So, aggression is very much based in this failure of symbolization and being able to put into words what you want to fight about and being more logical because you understand the impact it will have on both sides, and perhaps a failure in empathy when someone doesn't understand someone else's position or why that person may be fighting and is able to put themselves in the other's place in order to think of ways to negotiate or to stop the aggression. So, when we see aggressive behavior it's very, very important to work towards more symbolic solutions for the aggression and to look at the whole range of feelings the child is or isn't capable of expressing. You can be sure they may be feeling, but not always able to express and communicate in a safe way.

Well, what we have to remember – you see I've been referring to dinosaurs or tigers or pirates – that as the child is climbing the symbolic ladder, he's developing symbols for power. It would be very, very hard to think of a child moving into real life without being equipped in some way to deal with that world out there. I was saying earlier that we have the magic with the boo-boo and the kisses; well, that then moves into the magic or the magicians or the wizards or the fairy godmother or some kind of magical thinking. Selma Freiburg wrote this wonderful book about magical thinking many years ago that really helped us appreciate that we all need some magic to make this transition toward reality. So as long as the child has that symbol, you can say, "abracadabra." You can be a wizard; you can say the words that make that fierce dragon go away; or fix that potion that will defeat your enemy. Magic is a very important transition and one we really want to respect, and even encourage. so that children can begin to deal with what they're growing awareness will bring them to next.


As a child moves out of magical thinking because he's now becoming more logical, he's doing more reasoning, he's understanding more of the "why" questions and causal reasoning, he's also begin to relinquish the magic. Children need another set of symbols to be able to deal with their expanding range of emotions and these symbols include superheroes, for example. So, they move from being kings and princesses to being superheroes or mighty figures you have surely noticed or rescue heroes who are bigger than life and can do things that the ordinary person couldn't do. So we move into rescue heroes as one avenue and other children move more quickly into superheroes and the transition will be Superman and Batman – just ordinary folks who can put on



their capes and their masks and suddenly have these amazing powers and they need their powers to get those bad guys.


We see children wanting to be Superman or Batman and often, when they're first taking on these symbols they have their little outfits on or their pajamas on, and you can be sure that, as far as they're concerned, they are Superman and they can fly and they can always win because superheroes always win! Slowly they will usually shift to smaller figures and show more complexity by bringing in a wider range of characters that cause the trouble that Superman and Batman or Spiderman are fighting. It's very noteworthy that these symbols become and remain very important in our culture. Just think about the recent movies that came out with new versions, new editions of these superhero stories; I assure you they weren't meant for children. They were meant for adults who also can be bigger than life, at least as they enjoy watching these movies and feel the excitement and the tension. Perhaps it just shows a lack of a lot of new symbols or more understandable symbols, compared to some of the other ones that have emerged since then. But it is easier to understand – at least for me – Superman or Batman compared to Digimon and some of the other animated Japanese figures that have emerged. I also actually like those stories because they have more human content and they do help children practice how to get that bad guy into jail or how to stop people from stealing or hurting others. Those usually will last until about six or seven years of age. Children really hold on to these symbols as symbols of power and can enjoy borrowing them again, as they broaden their emotional thinking.

So, it's inevitable that over time there will be some production of more symbols and in each culture there are different symbols that help children master their emerging awareness of reality and find solutions and then finally lead to abstract thinking or emotional thinking where they really can distinguish reality from fantasy. They can distinguish one feeling from another across time and space. Believe it or not, all of this work in typical development gets done by the time children reach school age or are ready for school. One of the things you'll see as a typical example of how this is a developmental process is looking at how children represent death in their play. You will see very often the good guys are fighting and shooting and they just bounce right back and do it again, so dying or killing does not really mean what it means later; it just is some transition where we're going to figure out what we can do and what the effect will be and we'll practice because the actual meaning of death as inevitable, as irreversible, as happening to everyone, really does not take place until about eight or nine years of




age. Then you will often see the play changing and the setting becoming more abstract where children begin to symbolize their battles through chess or through Stratego or other types of games that they can play where they are now strategizing, where they're building a battle scene or they have complex plans accompanied now by much more visual-spatial thinking and logical thinking, which allows them to play at this other level. So, we are continuously strengthening the ability in supporting children's moving on to these emotional levels. How do we get there?

I want to just take a moment to highlight how, as children become symbolic, it's very important to become more symbolic ourselves. So, for the younger child you'll see that introducing language, which represents abstract thinking, can occur much earlier than later. This is where, especially with children who have auditory processing difficulties who are very bound visually to what they see and seeing what they hear is very important as they begin to strengthen these processing abilities, we also want to introduce some words, which you don't see. It could be as simple as starting with a child asking for a drink and asking if he's thirsty instead of what he wants to drink. Slowly children begin to connect this feeling that they have that they want a drink to being thirsty. Well, you don't see thirst, or hunger, for that matter. You don't always see feelings, but we act in response to feelings and we begin to use the description of the motive or the reason for their request and help move them towards abstract words, such as, "Hey, that's a great idea!" "Oh, oh. Do you think we have a problem," rather than just saying, "The car is broken." Introducing the word "problem" before we say what the problem is will help a child recognize that a problem means something is wrong. You could say, "What's wrong?" It could be anything. We want to use words like "idea" "problem" "trouble." Let's say you're reading a story, maybe one about poor Curious George. "Oh, oh. Is he in trouble?" Trouble can mean anything, and it is in this way we begin to help children also think in terms of these more abstract words: "What's wrong?" "Is there a problem? Oh-oh." "What made you feel that way?" And move them into "good news, bad news." Of course, anything could be good news and anything could be bad news. You would be quite surprised how children will begin to pick up the meaning of these words if they're done in a context. They're not bound to content, but it's the process of conveying and heightening the emotional feeling – the affect cue – of the message that will help children begin to know what to call some of these experiences.



So we want to use the language in a more abstract way; we want to combine it to visual-spatial kinds of thinking, so it's not just what you see, it might be what's missing, it might be how you get there, it might be learning about chance. An easy way to help children begin to understand chance might be flipping a coin where they just have to guess if it will be heads or tails. What does that really symbolize? It symbolizes that things are chance. You can use it, then, to make a decision when, let's say, we don't agree or we want to know who goes first. But just even beginning to realize that some things do happen by chance is part of becoming a more abstract thinker. The other thing we do to help children strengthen this capacity is to realize words have different meanings when spoken with a different tone of voice. So how do children begin to recognize when someone really means it or doesn't? Many are very intuitive, but in symbolic play you can help children read these cues by acting deceptive or by being surprising or by having the bad guy talk in a nice voice. We're aiming for cues in your voice or your facial expression or in the way you move the play figure. It could be in your dress up or it could be through your puppets, but we begin to strengthen this capacity by using the affect cuing that we've talked about again and again as the pathway to supporting development and, especially, the meaning of things.


Another way I think that's really important moving from magical thinking to the more abstract thinking is strengthening reasoning. It's very hard to become abstract if you don't know how to reason well. This is how you want to help children become more logical. So here come the "why" questions. What does "why" mean? Are you trying to uncover motive? Are you trying to uncover a solution? Are you trying to uncover a connection? Many children learn to answer "why" by saying, "because," and of course this is why we don't want to flood children with "why" questions because they kind of learn by rote to answer "because" but they don't really give you a reason. But be sure to ask some "why" questions. A three-year old can start answering why questions and you might do it in different forms: "Well, how come you want that?" or "What's that for?" or "If I give you this, then . . ." These are all various ways we can get children to tell us why they want something or what they will do for it. The best practice for why obviously happens in real life. If you're buckling the seat belt, did you ever tell the child why she has to wear a seat belt? Here, too, children are going to learn abstract words. "We want to be sure you're safe." In this case, you don't want them to fall out of the car seat. Being safe can mean anything – it's not picking up a knife, it's not running into the street, it's not jumping off too many steps at once. So, we talk about the real reasons rather than just give the prohibition for being safe.



Similarly, we begin to check and see if children understand what they've been doing all these years. They've come out of the bath – this is again more problem solving thinking – and you don't automatically wrap them in a towel so maybe they'll ask for the towel and we say, "Oh, you don't want to be cold or all wet!" So, again, we introduce the reasoning through what we do in real life. Maybe another time you won't automatically pull the blanket over them and they'll ask for the blanket or they'll pull it up. "Oh, you don't want to be cold!" So we start out by giving children the reasons, and then we shift to asking for the reasons because the same reason can be applied to so many different situations. It's important to give the reasons in real life. If you say, "Honey, put the milk in the cabinet," you'll quickly be able to tell if that child understands either that the milk doesn't go in the cabinet ("You always put it in the refrigerator, Mommy") or that the child prefers cold milk ("Oh, but it has to be cold! I don't like warm milk!" or that he might even know the milk could spoil. So there's always a level of reasoning you can bring to everything you do every single day because there is a reason for everything you're doing. It's interesting that we're so used to doing things automatically for children and I don't think we always take the time to explore the understanding of the reasoning.

The same kind of thing applies to strengthening reasoning. We strengthen reasoning by asking for opinions, by comparing or contrasting things, by finding out why the child loves to wear the red shirt every day or prefers one food more than another. We're always looking for multiple reasons and awareness of someone else's reasons. So, we might say, "What do you think Daddy would like?" or "Oh, my goodness! What will Mommy say when she comes home and sees this or that?" We couple it not only with their own reasons and desires, but moving it into more logical, objective reasons, like safety, and then move it even further to empathic reasoning, where we can see what the children think of someone else's motives. Being able to anticipate and predict someone else's ideas, needless to say, is very crucial, and understanding someone else's feelings helps a child know how to respond and to be prepared and it is in this way that we strengthen reasoning all day in real life that will then move into a child's symbolic play.

Other ways you strengthen reasoning, again, is carrying on more logical conversations. There are some children who tend to shift a lot into fantasy and in a way avoid reality, so you want to be sure you're balancing that out by having these conversations at any point in the day, while driving, during meals, bath time, and



bedtime. You want to play in a way that's not necessarily realistic, so animals can talk and you can have great power, but you want to have logic behind it. There's a reason Superman will do this or that, even though he's going to be able to fly and to get his mission done. Be sure there's a logical reason even if it's not a realistic one.

Another way we encourage reasoning would be by putting children to work because work is done for a reason. There's a reason you're going to sponge off the table; there's a reason you might encourage your child to wash the windows and you not only get all the hand and motor work done and the two-handed work done, but you're also having an opportunity to discuss why you're doing it. You can do the "are you ready" program when you have to get ready for something. You have to think in a logical way. Do you need your shoes to go out? If you're packing your backpack, what goes into it? If you're going to the pool, there's a reason for everything you need in there. "How will you dry off? What if it's very sunny? Oh, oh, do you think you might get thirsty?" Again, by asking these questions we get children to connect to the reasons so that the next time we can move into "why" and going to places and doing things can be more symbolic.

The more experiences children have in real life, the more they can benefit from incidental learning and can figure out the reasons for things. Why do you have to pay for the metro? How come the tigers and the lions are scarier than giraffes or elephants? How come there's a store where the vegetables are all in one place? That awareness provides a lot of information to the child and he'll ask questions and we can see what he notices and see what he thinks about, which will encourage him to do his own thinking. We want to take the time to talk and do different things with children so they can process this information and then they will be more equipped to reason in their play and to move up to the higher symbolic levels.

So, I think I've talked about what I wanted to cover today. Obviously, we have much more to talk about and I would like to reserve the next program to talk about how we build or structure ideas in symbols and some of the common challenges we face, challenges coming from the child and then challenges that come from the caregiver who is not always encouraging the symbolic thinking in a safe way. In a later program we will also talk about what happens with children who have difficulty in symbols in terms of their emotional range.

That's the end of our program for today.

