



PRETEND Play Partner Strategies: Cheat Sheet



Modeling:

Demonstrating or describing a play skill so the child can copy or expand on it

How to use: Show or narrate pretend ideas.

- “My doll is driving to the park. Zoom!”
- “This box could be a treasure chest!”
- “This boy is sad that it’s bedtime”



Summary & Reflection:

Restating what’s happened in the story to keep it flowing and show you’re listening

How to use: Briefly describe play actions, emotions, and sequence.

- “First the princess climbed the tower, then she waved hello.”
- “Uh oh, the robot fell down!”



Prompting:

Giving a gentle “nudge” to encourage new skills

How to use: Ask or suggest next steps in play.

- “Show me what happens at the castle.”
- “What could we use as our pretend boat?”



Labeling Feelings:

Naming emotions in play to support social-emotional learning & skills

How to use: Ask about or describe how characters feel, and what they can do.

- “What do you think he is feeling now?”
- “I think she’s nervous about the slide.”
- “Woohoo! I feel excited!”



Active Watching:

Showing you are tuned into the child’s play.

How to use: Use body language and short responses to show your interest.

- “Oh, I see, mmhm!” “Wow!”
- Smiling, nodding, or widening your eyes as the story unfolds.

YAY!

Praise & Encouragement:

Giving positive feedback to encourage behaviors/skills you want to see again

How to use: Use specific praise, physical gestures, or small rewards.

- “Great job making the car drive so fast!”
- Thumbs up or fist bump.