Pretend Play Glossary
Developed for ACM by Jennie Ito, Ph.D.

**Cognitive development:** The development of the ability to imagine, perceive, reason and problem solve. ¹

**Correlation:** The association between two variables. ²

**Dual representation:** Thinking about one thing in two ways at the same time — as both an object and a symbol. ³

**Executive functioning:** Cognitive processes that aid in the monitoring and control of thoughts and actions (such as self-regulation, planning and inhibition). ³

**Free play:** Play that is child-led, without the constant interference or involvement of an adult. ⁴

**Imaginary companion:** A type of role-play in which children impersonate characters by creating pretend identities and interact with stuffed animals and invisible characters. ⁵

**Imitation:** Purposeful reproduction of another’s body movements, whether novel or familiar. ⁶

**Individual differences:** The aspects of people’s personalities that make them different from other people. ⁷

**Metacognition:** One’s knowledge of his own cognitive processes or anything related to him. ⁸

**Metarepresentation:** Representing how oneself or another represents the world. ⁹

**Narrative:** A sequence of events and/or states of affairs. ¹⁰

**Narrative absorption:** “Seeing” or experiencing a fictional scene as vividly as if one were personally experiencing it. ¹¹

**Object substitution:** A type of pretend play in which an object (real or imagined) can be used “as if” it were another object (e.g., pretending a block is a car or pretending with an imagined car). ¹²

**Parallel play:** When children play alongside others but do not interact. ¹³

**Perspective taking:** The ability to step outside one’s own perspective and adopt the perspective of another person. ¹⁴

**Play therapy:** A therapeutic model that uses the benefits of play to facilitate treatment with an emphasis on the relationship between therapist and client. ¹⁵
Pretend play: Acting “as if” something is real when it is not. The term is also used interchangeably with other related terms such as dramatic play, make-believe play, imaginative play, and fantasy play. The fact that pretend play goes by so many names highlights its complexity and the numerous interpretations of this behavior. xvii

Pretense: See pretend play.

Representational insight: The realization that something is a symbol that stands for something else. xvii

Role play: A type of pretend play in which children create imaginary roles or characters, and act “as if” they are another character or animal (e.g., Batman or a cat). xviii

Scaffolding: A process in which more competent people provide a temporary framework that supports children’s thinking at a higher level than children could manage on their own. ii

Script: A well-rehearsed and remembered set of actions and remarks that is associated with a particular character or context. xviii

Sensorimotor play: The exploration of sensations and movements through play. xix

Social development: The ways in which individuals’ social interactions and expectations change across the lifespan. i

Structured play: Play which is adult-led, -guided and -planned. iv

Theory of mind: The understanding that behavior is guided by unobservable mental states, such as beliefs, intentions and desires. xx

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