

dear grown ups,



Have you ever asked your 3 year old who they play with at preschool or child care and they say, 'nobody'. This makes grown ups uncomfortable. We place high value on friendships and playmates and we think that in order for our child to be happy, they need to play with other children. Here is the real deal. A child that is 3 years old may be in a stage of play that doesn't include socially interacting with another child in the way most adults view young childrens' friendships. There are stages most typically developing children move through in social play. A researcher named Mildred Parten observed young children at play and proposed 6 stages of play. You can refer back to these as your child grows to better understand their social capabilities when they are at play. We need to take off our own adult preconceived ideas about what young friendships look like, and recognize that a child that says, "nobody plays with me" could be in a stage of play that has minimal social interaction. We (your child's teachers) recognize these stages, help guide children to level up to the next stage when they seem ready to take that next step, and then offer social and emotional support once they get to the final stage of play (cooperative play) as they navigate new friendships. Keep in mind that these stages are linear but children may revert back to prior stages of play once they have reached a new stage! The ages are suggestions but everyone learns and grows at different paces!

PARTEN'S STAGES OF PLAY

UNOCCUPIED PLAY

BIRTH TO 3 MONTHS



random movements
non-objective
no social interaction



SOLITARY PLAY

3 MONTHS TO 2.5 YEARS



plays alone
no interest in others
focused on task



ONLOOKER PLAY

2.5 YEARS TO 3.5 YEARS



watches others play
starts showing interest in what others are playing

PARALLEL PLAY

3.5 YEARS TO 4 YEARS



play near each other with same items
may copy each other
minimal communication with each other



ASSOCIATIVE PLAY

4 YEARS TO 4.5 YEARS



interacts socially with others
task is not coordinated with others
task is not organized with others



COOPERATIVE PLAY

4.5 YEARS +



socially interacts with others
activity is organized
common goal with others

