

AVP Weapon Play Toolkit

Supporting Safe & Respectful Play

Purpose

To guide families in understanding and responding to weapon-themed play or heavy words like “kill” or “dead.” This toolkit mirrors the language and strategies we use at AVP so that children experience consistency between school and home — building safety, empathy, and understanding through shared expectations.

A Foundation for Safety and Respect

At Ark Valley Preschool, children learn about their world through play. They act out what they see, what they wonder about, and what they’re trying to understand. Sometimes that includes themes like heroes, police officers, hunters, superheroes, or soldiers — all of whom may carry weapons in stories and media.

At AVP, we **do not provide toy weapons** or allow them from home. However, children often create or imagine them in dramatic play — shaping a stick into a sword or using their hands as “blasters.”

Rather than banning this completely, we treat it as a **teachable moment**: an opportunity to guide children toward safe, respectful, and imaginative play while setting clear, consistent boundaries on aggression.

Why This Matters Developmentally

- **Play as Processing:** Children use play to explore big ideas and make sense of the world’s messages about power, safety, and good vs. bad.
 - **Imagination vs. Aggression:** Pretend play can be healthy and creative, but it needs clear limits to stay respectful.
 - **Social-Emotional Learning:** Ages 2–5 are critical years for learning empathy, cooperation, and self-regulation.
 - **Guided Play Builds Understanding:** When adults stay curious instead of punitive, children learn to balance imagination with empathy.
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Our Approach at AVP

- **No Toy Weapons:** None are provided or permitted from home.
 - **Imagination is Welcome:** Children may still pretend or build, but within respectful boundaries.
 - **Clear Limits:** Pretend “killing,” pointing weapons at others, or calling friends “dead” are not allowed.
 - **Pause & Reflect:** When heavy words come up, we stop and say, *“That’s a strong word — how are we using it?”*
 - **Teach Empathy in the Moment:** Teachers guide play toward cooperation and problem-solving, reinforcing kindness and emotional awareness.
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Tips for Home Conversations

- **Follow Their Lead:** Don’t introduce the topic unless your child does. Listen for the meaning behind their play — it’s often curiosity, not aggression.
 - **Keep It Simple:** Explain that words like “kill” or “dead” are powerful and not for play.
 - **Share Your Values:** Families approach topics like weapons and death differently — some through faith, others through science or nature. All perspectives are welcome here.
 - **Validate Feelings:** Death and power are real parts of life. It’s okay for children to feel sad, confused, or curious.
 - **Model Respect:** Show through your tone and body language how to use words gently and play safely.
 - **Redirect, Don’t Shame:** “It’s okay to pretend to be a superhero — let’s make sure everyone feels safe in the story.”
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How to Support Regulation Through Play

- Offer safe outlets for energy and imagination — blocks, dramatic play, building forts, or outdoor exploration.
 - Create space for calming after big, active play — reading, sensory bins, or breathing together.
 - Narrate emotions: “You looked really excited during that game — let’s take a breath together to slow down.”
 - Encourage creative storytelling: “Tell me what your superhero does to help others.”
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Suggested Resources

For Children

- *Go Away, Big Green Monster!* — Ed Emberley
- *When Dinosaurs Die: A Guide to Understanding Death* — Laurie Krasny Brown
- *What Do You Do With a Problem?* — Kobi Yamada
- *The Rabbit Listened* — Cori Doerrfeld

For Parents & Caregivers

- *Raising Good Humans* — Hunter Clarke-Fields
- *The Whole-Brain Child* — Daniel J. Siegel & Tina Payne Bryson
- *Hunt, Gather, Parent* — Michaela Doucette (a Carmel favorite!)

Podcasts

- *Janet Lansbury: Unruffled* (behavior & boundaries)
 - *Parenting Beyond Discipline*
 - *Ask Lisa: The Psychology of Parenting*
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Why It Works

- **Respects Imagination:** Children remain free to explore ideas safely.
 - **Protects Safety:** Clear boundaries prevent aggression from escalating.
 - **Builds Empathy:** Children learn how their words and play affect others.
 - **Teaches Reflection:** Adults help children think about the power behind their ideas, not just act them out.
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Standards & Science

Aligned with:

- **Colorado Early Learning & Development Guidelines (Ages 0–8):** Emphasize safety, belonging, and emotional regulation.
 - **NAEYC Developmentally Appropriate Practice:** Supports imaginative play within safe limits.
 - **Child Development Research:** Guided play builds empathy, self-control, and resilience.
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A Yearly Commitment

Each year, we revisit our approach to play, safety, and respect with both children and families. These aren't one-time reminders — they're ongoing commitments.

By facing big topics together with openness and care, we ensure AVP remains a place where imagination, safety, and kindness *all belong*.

Together — with your partnership at home — we help children learn to play with creativity, empathy, and respect.

