Play Conference 2026

Curriculum, Learning Objectives, and Speaker Information

Overall Learning Objective:

- Identify the role of play as a foundational occupation in childhood and how modern factors such as reduced free play and increased screen use impact sensory, motor, communication, and social-emotional development.
- Describe introductory methods for assessing play, including observation of participation, sensory–motor foundations, communication within play, and family or environmental supports and barriers.
- Recognize evidence-informed strategies for embedding play-based interventions into daily routines, educational settings, and family home programs to support regulation, motor skills, communication, and overall participation.

Overarching Curriculum Points:

- **Play as a Developmental Foundation:** Understanding the essential role of play in childhood development and how the modern world contributes to the Experience Gap and reduced opportunities for meaningful exploration.
- **Assessment of Play and Participation:** Identifying strengths and needs through observation and informal assessment of a child's play, including sensory, motor, communication, and environmental factors.
- **Play-Based Intervention and Family Programs:** Implementing practical, evidence-informed play-based strategies and caregiver coaching approaches across home, school, clinic, and community settings to promote participation and development.

Session 1: Holly Peretz, OT (hostess)

Understanding Experience Poverty Through a Developmental Lens

Speaker Bio: Holly Peretz is a Pediatric Occupational Therapist with 14+ years of experience working with children and parents as a therapist and parent educator within hospitals, NGO's preschools, hydrotherapy, and online. Through her work at Precision CPD she aims to better the services provided to children through quality professional development events, content, and courses for professionals working with children.
Website: https://precisioncpd.com/, https://toddlerplayconference.com/
Email: info@precisioncpd.com
Resume: linked

Curriculum:

- **Experience Poverty & Digital Childhood:** An overview of experience poverty and emerging research on digital childhood, and how reduced real-world experiences affect development.
- **Developmental Foundations & Theories:** Key developmental theories explaining how children gain skills through real-world exploration, movement, play, and interaction.
- **Interdisciplinary Scope of Practice:** How OT/OTP, PT, and SLP practitioners identify and address experience poverty within their respective scopes to support participation and development.

Learning Objectives:

- **Identify** developmental areas (sensory, motor, communication, social-emotional) commonly affected by limited real-world experiences.
- **Recognize** assessment and intervention strategies used by OT/OTP, PT, and SLP practitioners to address experience poverty in daily routines and play.

Session 2: Rachel Gebers, BSC OT

"But Roblox Is His Only Interest": Navigating Screens in Therapy

Speaker Bio: Rachel is an paediatric Occupational Therapist with over 10 years' experience supporting inclusion for children with special educational needs, including work across diverse international contexts. Her practice is grounded in neurodiversity-affirming approaches, with advanced training in DIR Floortime, Neurodevelopmental Therapy, and SOS Feeding, alongside a strong focus on the mental wellbeing of parent-carers. She is

currently completing an MSc in Public Health to deepen her understanding of how to improve access to care for children with SEN and their families.
Website: https://www.linkedin.com/in/rachel-gebers/?originalSubdomain=uk
Email: growingjoyot@gmail.com
Resume: linked

Curriculum:

- **Understanding Screen Preference:** Factors contributing to the preference for screen-based activities among neurodivergent children, including sensory, cognitive, and regulatory considerations.
- **Integrating Digital Interests Into Intervention:** Methods for incorporating a child's digital or online interests into play-based therapeutic activities to support engagement and participation.
- **Establishing Clinical Boundaries With Screen Use:** Guidelines for determining appropriate therapeutic boundaries around screen use, including decision-making processes and case-based application.

Learning Objectives:

- **Identify** factors that contribute to neurodivergent children preferring screen-based activities and how these factors relate to participation and engagement in therapy.
- **Recognize** strategies for integrating digital interests into play-based therapy and setting appropriate therapeutic boundaries around screen use.

Session 3: Claire Heffron, MS OTR/L and Lauren Drobnjak, PT

Rebuilding Foundations Through Everyday Play

Speaker Bio: Claire Heffron and Lauren Drobnjak are practicing pediatric occupational and physical therapists near Cleveland, Ohio. They are the co-authors of the online child development resource, The Inspired Treehouse and they run a non-profit organization called The Treehouse where they bring the activities and ideas from their website to life by implementing them during developmental play groups with local children. Their goal is to build a healthy community and overcome health disparities by providing affordable play opportunities critical to healthy development.
Website: https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/
Email: theinspiredtreehouse@gmail.com
Resume:
Claire linked

Lauren linked

Curriculum:

- **Differentiating Play/Experience Poverty From Disability**
- **Everyday Play-Based Intervention Strategies**
  Practical play activities clinicians can use to build sensory, motor, communication, and social skills.
- **Referral, Outcomes, and Case Application**
  When to refer, what outcomes to expect, and real case examples for planning intervention.

Learning Objectives:

- **Identify** key developmental domains (e.g., motor, sensory, social, communication, play skills) that clinicians should review when differentiating play/experience poverty from disability in children receiving therapy.
- **Recognize** everyday play-based strategies and referral indicators that support clinical decision-making for children with limited real-world experiences.

Session 4: Sydney Bassard, MSP, CCC-SLP and Melanie Batista, OTR/L

Multidisciplinary Approaches to Assessing Play

Speaker Bio: Sydney Bassard is a speech-language pathologist, global consultant, international presenter, and children's book author. Sydney frequently presents on assessment and treatment of DHH children, literacy, social media ethics, and health literacy. She has had the privilege to present to speech-language therapists in other countries on these topics.
Website: https://www.thelisteningslp.com/
Email: sydney@thelisteningslp.com
Resume: linked

Speaker Bio: Melanie is an Occupational Therapist with over 25 years of experience dedicated to supporting children and families in diverse environments. As the founder of Growing Little Brains, LLC, she provides consultation, innovative AOTA-approved courses, insightful blogs, and personalized mentorship for Early Intervention therapists wanting to enhance their caregiver coaching practice.
Website: https://growinglittlebrains.com/

Email: melanie@growinglittlebrains.com
Resume: linked

Curriculum:

- **Foundations of Play Assessment:** Key components of assessing play across disciplines, including observation of play behaviors, caregiver interview, and understanding developmental, sensory–motor, and communication indicators.
- **Assessment Tools and Frameworks:** Formal and informal assessment tools commonly used by OTs and SLPs to evaluate play skills and participation, and what information each tool provides.
- **Clinical Importance of Play in Evaluation:** How including play in the assessment process informs clinical reasoning, goal setting, and meaningful intervention planning for children across settings.

Learning Objectives:

- **Identify** key components of multidisciplinary play assessment, including observation targets and caregiver interview information.
- **Recognize** common formal and informal tools used to assess play and how play-based findings inform goal development and intervention planning.

Session 5: Cari Ebert, MS, CCC-SLP

Neurodiversity-Affirming Play in the Early Years

Speaker Bio: Cari Ebert is a pediatric SLP specializing in the birth to 5 population, author, professional speaker, defender of play, and parent to an autistic young adult.
Website: https://cariebert.com/
Email: cari@cariebertseminars.com
Resume: linked

Curriculum:

- **Foundations of Neurodiversity-Affirming Play:** Core principles of neurodiversity-affirming practice and how they apply to play-based interactions in early childhood.
- **Therapeutic Support for Affirming Play:** Strategies therapists can use to support neurodiversity-affirming play during sessions, including honoring communication styles, sensory needs, and child-led interests.
- **Caregiver Coaching for Home Environments:** Approaches for guiding families to foster neurodiversity-affirming play at home through responsive routines, accessible play setups, and strengths-focused interactions.

Learning Objectives:

- **Identify** core principles of neurodiversity-affirming play that guide therapeutic interactions in early childhood.
- **Recognize** strategies therapists can use to support neurodiversity-affirming play during sessions and within home environments.

Session 6: Dr. Anne Wolfe, PT, DPT, CLC

Utilizing a Strengths-Based Framework That Is Child-Centered and Play-Focused

Speaker Bio: Dr. Anne Wolfe is a pediatric physical therapist with over 13 years of experience, as well as, a Certified Lactation Counselor. She has spent the last 10 years working in several sensory based outpatient pediatric clinics. She enjoys working with children of all abilities using a strengths based lens.
Website:
https://thetherapeuticedge.com/courses/strength-based-therapy-approach-for-physical-therapy/
Email: elevatepediatricpt@gmail.com
Resume: linked

Curriculum:

- **Strengths-Based Foundations:** An overview of strengths-based, child-centered therapeutic frameworks applicable across pediatric populations.
- **Play-Based Intervention:** Approaches for using play to highlight strengths, build engagement, and support participation across sensory, motor, communication, and social domains.
- **Clinical Application Across Populations:** Case-based examples demonstrating how strengths-based, play-centered strategies can be applied with diverse pediatric clients.

Learning Objectives:

- **Identify** key principles of strengths-based, child-centered therapeutic frameworks used across pediatric practice.
- **Recognize** play-based strategies that leverage a child's strengths to support engagement and participation across developmental domains.

Session 7: Joanne W. Cazeau, SLP

The Power of Pretend Revisited: Building Language and Cognition Through Imagination

Speaker Bio: Joanne Cazeau is a pediatric SLP, play enthusiast, and lover of all things early language. She helps little ones find their voice and supports parents in feeling confident along the way.
She is the owner of Koze Speech Therapy, her New Jersey private practice, and the creator of Beyond Babbles, where she shares simple, supportive strategies that make early communication feel lighter for families and providers.
Website: https://www.beyondbabbles.com/
Email: joannewcazeau@gmail.com
Resume: linked

Curriculum:

- **Pretend Play Foundations:** An overview of how pretend play supports language development, cognitive flexibility, and social understanding across pediatric populations.
- **Therapeutic Use of Pretend Play:** Evidence-informed strategies for incorporating pretend play into multidisciplinary intervention to promote communication, problem-solving, and participation.
- **Case-Based Application:** A case example demonstrating how pretend play principles can be used therapeutically, including assessment considerations and goal-focused intervention planning.

Learning Objectives:

- **Identify** how imaginative and pretend play support language development, cognitive flexibility, and social understanding in early childhood.
- **Recognize** strategies for integrating pretend play into multidisciplinary therapeutic activities to promote communication and participation.

Session 8: Rachel Williams, DPT, PT

Movement Matters: Reclaiming Development

Speaker Bio: Rachel Williams, PT, DPT, is a pediatric physical therapist with over 18 years of experience specializing in infant and early childhood motor development. She is the founder of Sandy Toes Pediatric Physical Therapy, where she partners with families through in home, and community based services. Rachel is passionate about empowering caregivers

through play-based, movement-rich strategies that are easy for caregivers to incorporate in everyday life.
Website: https://www.sandytoespt.com/
Email: Rachel@sandytoespt.com
Resume: linked

Curriculum:

- **Brain–Body Foundations:** An overview of how early movement supports brain development, regulation, attention, communication, and participation across multidisciplinary practice.
- **Increasing Access to Movement-Based Play:** Strategies for supporting children who face barriers to movement—whether due to disability, executive function challenges, sensory needs, or initiation difficulties.
- **Case-Based Application Beyond Therapy:** Case examples illustrating how therapists coach families and educators to embed movement opportunities into daily routines outside of therapy sessions.

Learning Objectives:

- **Identify** ways early movement supports brain–body development related to regulation, learning, communication, and participation.
- **Recognize** strategies for increasing access to movement-based play for children with barriers such as disability, sensory needs, or initiation challenges.

Session 9: Kristine Deworocki, MS, SLP

Cooking in Therapy: Why It Works, How to Get Started & A Case Study in Action

Speaker Bio: Kristine Deworocki, MS, SLP, is a speech-language pathologist, author, mom, and the small-business owner of Live Love Speech. For the last 13 years, she has been creating visual recipes and practical resources for SLPs and families, including her published product, Visual Recipe Cards. Kristine specializes in early childhood development and language-based intervention with a unique focus on using cooking activities to help children build communication skills. She presents on hands-on learning and brings her Cooking Up Communication™ classes to preschools and community groups throughout New Jersey.
Website: https://livelovespeech.com/
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Resume: linked

Curriculum:

- Therapeutic Value of Cooking Activities: An overview of how cooking supports developmental, sensory, motor, communication, executive function, and participation goals across disciplines.
- Implementing Cooking in Therapy: Foundational steps for safely and effectively integrating cooking tasks into pediatric therapy sessions across settings.
- Case-Based Application: A practical case example demonstrating how cooking activities can be used to address individualized goals and increase functional participation.

Learning Objectives:

- **Identify** developmental and functional skills that can be targeted through cooking activities in pediatric therapy.
- **Recognize** essential steps for safely and effectively integrating cooking activities into therapy sessions.

Session 10: Dr. Quiara Smith, OTD, MOT, OTR/L, CEIM

Groundwork: Play Therapy That Starts on the Floor

Speaker Bio: Dr. Quiara Smith a Pediatric Pelvic Health Occupational Therapist who is the CEO/Director of Aloha Integrative Therapy, the first boutique private OT practice exclusively created to treat children with pediatric pelvic floor dysfunction and bowel and bladder disorders. Quiara is passionate about creating and holding safe and inclusive space, in order to provide holistic and integrative approaches to pediatric clients and their families.
Website: https://alohaintegrativetherapy.com/
Email: quiara@alohaintegrativetherapy.com
Resume: linked

Curriculum:

- **Role of Floor-Based Play in Development:** An overview of how full-body, floor-level play supports posture, core strength, pelvic health, sensory regulation, and participation.
- **Integrating Floor Play Into Therapy:** Foundational strategies for incorporating floor-based play into multidisciplinary pediatric practice, including positioning, activity selection, and goal alignment.

- **Case-Based Application:** A detailed case example demonstrating how floor-based play was used therapeutically to support posture, pelvic health, and functional engagement.

Learning Objectives:

- **Identify** developmental and physical health benefits of full-body, floor-based play related to posture, core strength, pelvic health, and participation.
- **Recognize** strategies multidisciplinary therapists can use to integrate floor-based play into pediatric intervention.

Session 11: Dr. Sigourney Weathers, PT, DPT

Trampoline in Therapy: Why It's Effective, How Therapists Can Get Started & A Case Study

Speaker Bio: Dr. Sigourney Weathers is a pediatric physical therapist specializing in therapeutic trampoline and gymnastics. She blends play-based, child-led movement with neurodiversity-affirming practices to support strength, coordination, communication, and regulation. Her work guides parents and therapists in creating spaces where every child feels accepted and valued, building confidence and a true joy of movement.
Website: https://balancedcreationspt.com/
Email: info@balancedcreationspt.com
Resume: linked

Curriculum:

- **Therapeutic Benefits of Trampoline Use:** An overview of how trampoline play can support sensory regulation, motor coordination, balance, communication, and participation across pediatric disciplines.
- **Implementing Trampoline Activities in Therapy:** Foundational steps for safely and effectively integrating trampoline activities into therapeutic sessions for OTP, PT, and SLP practice.
- **Case-Based Application:** A case example demonstrating how trampoline use was incorporated into intervention to support individualized goals and promote functional participation.

Learning Objectives:

- **Identify** therapeutic benefits of trampoline play related to regulation, motor skills, communication, and participation.
- **Recognize** essential steps and safety considerations for incorporating trampoline activities into pediatric therapy sessions.

Session 12: Holly Peretz, OT (hostess)

Water-Based Play Therapy

Speaker Bio: Holly Peretz is a Pediatric Occupational Therapist with 14+ years of experience working with children and parents as a therapist and parent educator within hospitals, NGO's preschools, hydrotherapy, and online. Through her work at Precision CPD she aims to better the services provided to children through quality professional development events, content, and courses for professionals working with children.
Website: https://precisioncpd.com/, https://toddlerplayconference.com/
Email: info@precisioncpd.com
Resume: linked

Curriculum:

- **Therapeutic Benefits of Water Play:** Explore how simple water-based play—sink, bath, buckets, sprinklers, or outdoors—supports sensory regulation, motor development, breath control, and communication through natural, embodied experiences.
- **Practical Strategies for Everyday Water Play:** Identify safe, accessible ways OTPs, PTs, and SLPs can integrate water as a therapeutic tool in homes, schools, and community settings, including handling ideas, language opportunities, and real-world case examples.

Learning Objectives:

- **Identify** key sensory, motor, and communication benefits of incorporating everyday water play into pediatric therapy.
- **Apply** at least two practical, developmentally appropriate water-based strategies to support regulation, movement, or engagement in home, school, or community settings.

Session 13: Alonna Bondar, M.S.-CCC-SLP and Erin Clarelli, OTR/L

Play to Praxis: Building Motor and Speech Planning Through Real Play

Speaker Bio: I am a PROMPT certified and DTTC trained, and listed on the Apraxia Kids directory. I am pediatric speech language pathologist with 25 years of experience. I specialize in apraxia and other speech sound disorders. I enjoy working with children with various diagnoses, especially those with down syndrome and autism.

Website: https://www.bondarspeech.com/
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Resume: linked

Speaker Bio: Erin Clarelli, MS, OTR/L is an occupational therapist who helps caregivers and professionals understand apraxic autism through a motor-based, competence-presuming lens. Her work blends authentic play, intentional motor coaching, and collaborative practice to support regulation, confidence, communication, and deeper connection across environments.
Website: https://www.sunrisetherapiesinc.com/
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Resume: linked

Curriculum:

- **Differentiating Apraxia and Praxis:** An overview of childhood apraxia of speech and whole-body praxis, including key differences, areas of overlap, and signs the multidisciplinary team can observe during play and daily routines.
- **Screening and Referral Across Disciplines:** Indicators that help clinicians recognize when apraxia or praxis may be present, and when cross-disciplinary referral between OT/PT and SLP is warranted.
- **Play-Based Intervention Across Disciplines:** Core treatment approaches used by OTs and SLPs to support motor and speech planning, including play-based handling strategies and modifications that promote carryover across settings.

Learning Objectives:

- **Identify** key differences and shared features of apraxia of speech and whole-body praxis, including observable signs that may appear during play or routine-based activities.
- **Recognize** play-based strategies and modifications that clinicians across disciplines can use to support motor and speech planning and improve carryover during therapy.

Session 14: Cassidy Kutchma, SLP, MA, CCC-SLP

Play-Based Therapy for AAC Users

Speaker Bio: Cassidy Kutchma is a speech-language pathologist and owner of Around the Spectrum Therapy. She specializes in AAC and play-based communication support, helping children and families build authentic, connected communication through child-led interaction.

Website: https://www.speechwithcassidy.com/
Email: hello@speechwithcassidy.com
Resume: linked

Curriculum:

- **Access Barriers in Play for AAC Users:** Key physical, sensory, and environmental barriers that limit AAC participation during natural, movement-rich play.
- **Choosing Vocabulary for Play:** How to decide between core words and activity-specific words to support meaningful communication in play routines.
- **Modeling & Responding During Play:** Practical strategies for modeling AAC in active, child-led play and supporting "unexpected" button presses productively.

Learning Objectives:

- **Identify** access barriers that affect AAC use during natural, movement-based play.
- **Apply** appropriate vocabulary and modeling strategies to support communication during child-led play.

Session 15: Anastasia Bach, PT, DPT

Play-Based Therapy for Children With Physical Disabilities

Speaker Bio: Dr. Anastasia Bach or on socials "Stasia B the PT" is a pediatric physical therapist, where she blends evidence-based milestone support with humor and practicality for real families. She specializes in early development, school-based mobility, and developmental disorders. Dr. Bach has created "Tummy Time Texts" with the goal of creating a community for parents to get answers without the Facebook mom group spiral.
Website: https://www.tummytimetexts.com/
Email: stasiabpt@gmail.com
Resume: linked

Curriculum:

- **Identifying Barriers to Play:** How physical, sensory, and environmental factors limit access to play for children with physical disabilities, and how the multidisciplinary team can quickly identify them.
- **Simple, Accessible Play Adaptations:** Practical positioning, environmental setups, and material adaptations that make play more accessible using tools therapists already have.
- **Case-Based Application:** Real examples demonstrating how small adaptations and team collaboration improve a child's ability to participate in meaningful play.

Learning Objectives:

- **Identify** common play barriers experienced by children with physical disabilities across settings.
- **Apply** simple positioning and activity adaptations that increase participation in play.

Session 16: Allison Mell, PT, DPT

Play-Based Therapy in Early Intervention

Speaker Bio: Dr. Allison Mell is a pediatric physical therapist and founder of Tots On Target, specializing in early developmental milestones. Through her online membership The Tot Spot, her continuing education course Milestone Mastery, and her global social media community (@totsontarget), she teaches parents and clinicians how to support healthy motor development.
Website: https://www.totsontarget.com/
Email: allison@totsontarget.com
Resume: linked

Curriculum:

- **Experience-Rich Play in EI:** How everyday, natural play experiences support sensory, motor, and communication foundations in infants and toddlers.
- **Confident Parent Coaching:** Practical strategies for guiding parents to use simple routines and household materials to build developmental skills through play.
- **Case-Based Application:** Real examples showing how shifting to natural play, paired with parent coaching, accelerates progress toward milestones.

Learning Objectives:

- **Identify** key experience-rich play opportunities that support sensory, motor, and communication development in infants and toddlers.
- **Apply** simple parent-coaching strategies to embed developmental practice into everyday routines.