# **Parenthesis : Do your kids seem destructive? They probably want to play**

**Source: Akhila Das Blah, Storyteller & Content Writer**

One of my sons loves to climb. From the moment he could stand up on his own two feet, he was off exploring the world, trying to find various pieces of furniture to climb. As he grew older, I would find him climbing doors, bookshelves, cupboards…you name the furniture and he would have found a way to climb up. A million times a day, I would find myself telling him to climb down from the furniture. It’s not a playground. No matter how many times I told him not to, he would still climb. Finally, I realised that he had an urge or a need to climb. Living in a big city, finding trees to climb was a challenge but we found indoor rock climbing walls and play zones instead. By redirecting his need, I was able to protect my furniture and provide him with a safe place to expend his energies.

Babies and toddlers learn through repeated patterns of behaviour. When your toddler wants to play peek-a-boo all the time, he is just satisfying his urge or need to play in a specific way.

By spending time observing your child, you can determine what patterns of play help your child develop. Identifying and understanding these urges to play in a certain way can help you guide your child to fulfil those needs but in a safe way. Your child may have a developmental need to throw things. By identifying that need, you can teach him to throw balls outside in a park or stones into a pond, rather than wooden blocks at a playmate in school. Some patterns of play have been listed below to help you observe, identify and understand your child and his needs.

## **Positioning**

When we have guests over for dinner, I find myself spending time arranging the cutlery in different positions. I like the process of organising. If you find your child lining up his cars in a row or placing his stuffed toys in neat little arrangements around the room, he’s fulfilling his need to position or organise objects to make sense of the world around him. Cluttering his room with too much furniture and taking away floor space will deter him. Make sure you provide him enough designated, empty space to meet his need.

## **Orientation**

Some children have the need to look at the world from a different perspective or position. They’ll put their feet on the bed and dangle their arms onto the floor. They’ll hide under a table or climb on top of a dresser. We all remember what it’s like to hang from the hanging bars in the playground, some of us even hung upside down. We too were meeting our developmental need.

## **Forming Connections**

Some children have the urge to form connections. They love playing with trains, connecting tracks. They like to build with Lego or blocks. They like linking objects. But, they also like disconnecting. They like to dismantle the blocks immediately after having built them up. In some cases, you might find your child constantly breaking down blocks that another child has built or destroying a sand castle at the sand pit. He is reacting to his urge to urge to disconnect and dismantle and see what happens.

## **Trajectory**

A pattern of play is to throw or drop objects and see what happens. Babies drop food and objects from their high chair all the time and giggle when they do it. When my older son was a toddler, we had to put a net across our balcony railing as he went through this phase of throwing things down from our balcony. Every day, the watchman would bring a spoon or some other item that had found its way down. By identifying his need to throw or drop objects, we were able to play games that facilitated this particular developmental need and stop him from throwing items at people and causing them harm.

## **Enveloping**

Some children like to wrap themselves up or wrap objects up. Hiding under a pile of pillows or wrapping yourself up under bedsheets can endlessly amuse and delight your child. Peek-a-boo is a type of enveloping pattern of play.

## **Rotating**

Your child loves merry-go-rounds. They love being picked up and swung round and round. They spin on their own. They also like watching things go round and round – washing machine, wheels on a car etc.

## **Enclosure**

Your child likes to add boundaries to play areas. He will crawl into a cardboard box. He loves tents and tunnels. He loves making forts and castles. He will put all his toys inside a fence created with blocks. When you’re packing for a vacation, he will often climb into your suitcase.

## **Transporting**

This pattern of play involves carrying objects to and fro. They love to carry things in their hands or in containers or even pulled across in a cart with wheels. They enjoy the process of transporting. If you find objects around the house missing and turning up in unexpected places, it’s just your child exploring his need for transporting.

## **Transforming**

Your child pouring water into his food, or squishing fruit with his fingers, playing with dirt, or wanting to play with flour dough in the kitchen is his need to test and work with raw materials at his disposal.

How does knowing about patterns of play help us? For example, your child may be behaving in an inappropriate manner, throwing sand in the sandpit. It is not about the action, it’s about meeting the urge. You can redirect your child to a more appropriate activity of throwing balls, once you’ve identified his developmental need. As parents, if you are able to observe, identify, understand and support your child’s developmental needs, you can organise his environment and play to meet his needs.