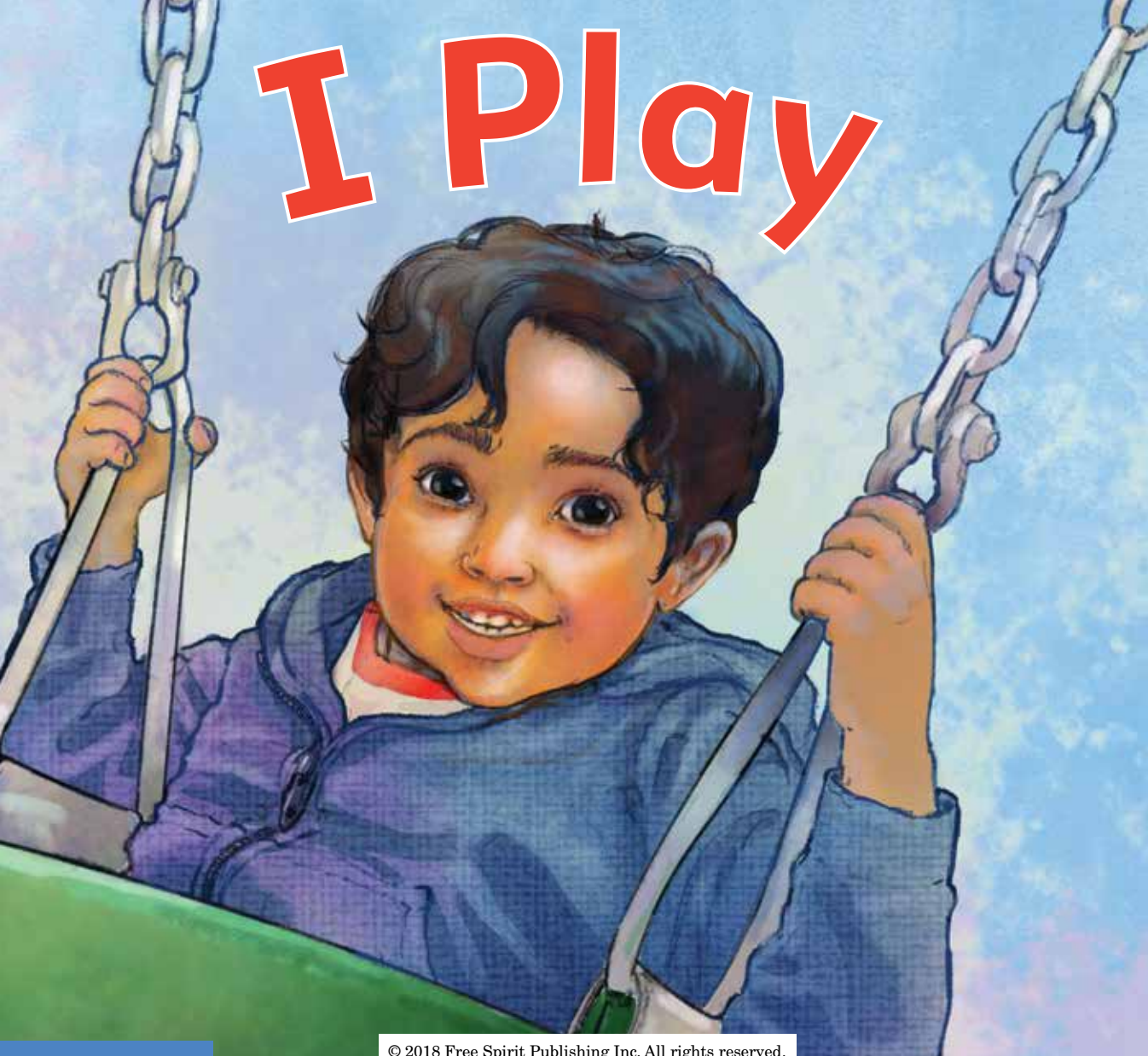


I Play



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PUBLISHING®

Cheri J. Meiners, M.Ed. • Illustrated by Penny Weber

Play is my time to just be me.



I feel **strong**
when I run and
climb outdoors.



Encouraging Social Skills Through Different Phases of Play

Play is a hallmark of childhood that helps children develop their bodies, minds, and temperaments and interact with other children. Unstructured play, especially outdoors, benefits children as they develop motor skills, problem-solve, learn to control emotions, develop confidence, focus on tasks, and learn to share and socialize well with peers. Play is crucial to children's physical, mental, social, and emotional development.

Solitary play: A child plays alone without noticing or interacting with other children. This is particularly characteristic of young children about age two or three.

Prompt: If the child is playing in a rote or repetitive way, you might model other ways to play with a toy. Encourage the child to imitate you at first. At this stage, focus is on the length and variety of play. Social skills can later build on this foundation of play skills.

Onlooker play: A child may watch as others play. Some conversation may occur, but the child observes without joining in.

Prompt: Ask the child about an observed activity, or narrate what's happening for the child. You might explain the rules or goals of the play and how other children typically play with those toys. Observation can help children learn to play as peers do, which can help them fit in.

Parallel play: A child may play near another child. Sometimes the children may use the same materials, but they are generally playing side by side without much interaction or joint play. The child is learning to share space with another child, as well as learning play skills.

Prompt: Let the child play alongside you for a while. Show the child what you are doing and have the child imitate you, for example, building a block tower or coloring with crayons.

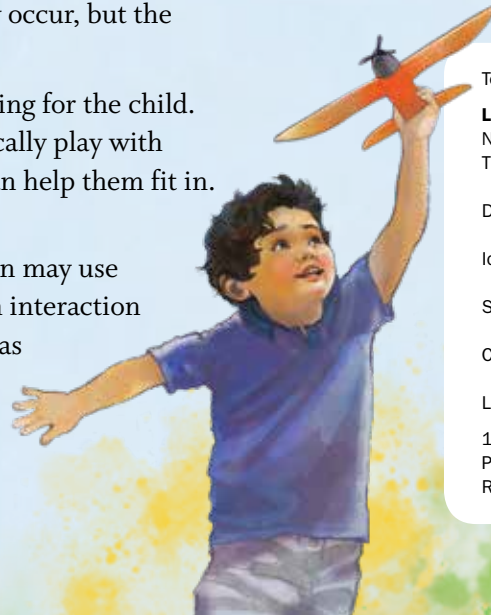
Associative play: Several children play the same type of play. They interact, take turns, and share equipment.

Prompt: Before or during play, you might model or explain to a child how to ask to play, invite another child to join in, take turns, or ask someone to share an item.

Cooperative play: Children play together and work together toward a common goal that requires them to interact and contribute. The play will often have elements of imagination or fantasy, such as role play and dress-up.

Prompt: Help children learn the prerequisites of role play, such as discussing community helpers and their jobs. Help children choose a goal together, and provide them with safe materials for activities such as pretend play, building a large structure, or making a collage.

For additional play activities and ideas, go to www.freespirit.com/2play; use the password **playtime**.



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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Meiners, Cheri J., 1957– author. | Weber, Penny ; illustrator.

Title: I play : a book about discovery and cooperation / by Cheri J. Meiners, M.Ed. ; illustrated by Penny Weber.

Description: Minneapolis : Free Spirit Publishing Inc., [2018] | Series: Learning about me & you | Audience: Age: 2–4.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018007615 (print) | LCCN 2018009810 (ebook) | ISBN 9781631982217 (Web PDF) | ISBN 9781631982200 (board book) | ISBN 1631982206 (board book)

Subjects: LCSH: Sharing—Juvenile literature. | Cooperation—Juvenile literature. | Play—Juvenile literature.

Classification: LCC BF575.S48 (ebook) | LCC BF575.S48 M448 2018 (print) | DDC 155.4—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2018007615>

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in China

R18860718

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