

Play is further characterized by social and cognitive aspects of children's behavior (See Table 2.1). Stages of social play are often interpreted based on the work of Parten (1932), who viewed play as advancing from solitary to more social play. Advancement through the stages represents an increasing ability to interact with peers. Smilansky (1968) developed a frequently used categorization of children's cognitive play behaviors. Her work, based on Piagetian theory, divides play into functional play, constructive play, sociodramatic play, and games with rules. Each developmental stage reflects increasing representational thinking abilities.

**Table 2.1**  
***Social and Cognitive Aspects of Play***

Aspects of play	Definition	Typical ages
<b>Social aspects</b>		
Unoccupied	No participation in play	All ages
Solitary	Plays alone; not using play material similar to those of peers	All ages
Onlooker	Watches peers play; may talk with peers, but does not enter into the play	1 to 3 years
Parallel	Plays alongside peers with similar play materials; no social interaction	2 ½ to 3 ½ years
Associative	Shares toys with peers; uses the same materials as peers; interacts with peers regarding play activity	3 ½ to 4 ½ years
Cooperative	Plays with peers with a shared purpose to the play activity; children have roles within the play	4 ½ to 6 years
<b>Cognitive aspects</b>		
Functional	Makes simple use of movements to provide exercise; learns about the physical characteristics of objects	Up to 3 years
Constructive	Works toward a goal of constructing things (e.g., stacks of blocks, an easel painting, a puzzle)	Up to 3 ½ years
Sociodramatic	Assumes roles; uses language and play for the purpose of pretending	4 to 6 ½ years
Games with rules	Understands and agrees to the structure and rules of a game	7 years and above

*Note.* Children may choose to play alone at certain times, although capable of more socially interactive behavior.