



Stages in Block Play

Children move through the stages of block play at different ages and occasionally vary the order of stages. Sometimes they move back and forth between stages. With increased exposure to blocks and block play, children move through and within stages more quickly. (A 5-year old who is exposed to quality block play for the first time may play in all 6 stages in a year or less.) Here are some generalities about stages of children's block play:

Stage 1: Exploring Blocks (ages 1-3)

Toddlers love to carry, move, touch, hold, drop and feel blocks, generally exploring their properties. They like a variety of containers in which to pack, repack, and haul blocks.

Stage 2: Building Rows and Towers (age 2-4)

In this stage, children line up blocks horizontally and stack blocks vertically. Children begin to use simple 2-dimensional patterns, gradually moving to more complex patterns, some of them 3-dimensional.

Stage 3: Building Bridges and Passageways (ages 3-4)

Children form a space between two blocks, and then span the space with a third block. Eventually, children in this stage build stacks and rows, adding bridges and creating passageways.

Stage 4: Building Enclosures (age 4)

Children close up space between blocks with other blocks. Children begin to plan ahead about how to close up a space and solve problems to reach their goals. After enclosing a space with blocks flat on the floor, children begin constructing stacked enclosures. They include passageways. They often add storylines, incorporating miniature animals, people, signs, etc.

Stage 5: Adding Symmetry, Detailed Balance and More Involved Design to Structures (ages 4-5)

Children's structures include deliberate efforts to achieve symmetry and balance, and prominent, often decorative patterning. They sort and match shapes and sizes, and find equivalences.



Stage 6: Planning and Building Elaborate Structures (ages 5 and older)

Children work individually – but also cooperatively – to plan and build elaborate structures, revising their plans as they work. When building together, they often assign each other builder roles. They use a variety of materials to achieve desired effects. They spend much time sorting, matching, and arranging. They incorporate dramatic play around their block structures.