



## Block play

Block play is important for the development of mathematical skills, for girls as well as for boys. It provides experiences which support children's learning in many areas:

- Science - gravity, stability, balance, weight, trial and error, discovery
- Maths - shape, space, number, fractions, symmetry, size, classification, measurement, volume, area, depth, width, height
- Physical skills – hand/eye coordination, manipulation, muscle development
- Language – labelling, directions, questions, planning, stories, exchange of ideas
- Art – patterns, symmetry, balance
- Social and emotional - confidence, self esteem, respect for others' work, cooperation, autonomy, initiative

### To set up the block area you will need:

- Space - block play needs a lot of space, out of the way of traffic
- Flooring – a large mat or carpet is ideal
- Storage – low shelving where blocks can be stored lengthways so children can see the size of block they need. Alternatively, low boxes on castors can be used if blocks need to be packed away after each session.

### Ideas for blocks and accessories

- Multiple unit blocks are mathematically designed and available in full, half or quarter sets for large or small groups. These are available from several educational equipment suppliers. Sets of coloured blocks can also be used. These are widely available in toy shops.
- Blocks can be made from cardboard boxes. Stuff boxes with crumpled newspaper and seal with masking tape. Paint, wrap, colour, decorate and finish off with a layer of polyurethane. Homemade blocks can be made from lengths of untreated timber, cut the required length and carefully sanded.
- Extras: large and small vehicles, people, animals, buildings, road signs, cardboard, etc.

### Children may play in any of the following recognised stages of block building

- Making rows (vertical or horizontal), repetition
- Two blocks with a space between, connected by a third block (bridging)
- Blocks placed so they enclose a space (enclosures)
- Decorative patterns and symmetry appear
- Naming of structures connected with dramatic play
- Reproduction of actual structures

### Adults can help

- Talk with children about what they are doing
- Use interesting words
- Ensure children respect others' work (by not knocking it down)
- Support children's developing skills and ideas by discussing their plans and making suggestions
- Keep the area tidy and safe
- Help children join in with others.





# Dramatic play

Children begin very early to dramatise in their play. They pretend to be other people and act out their feelings and events.

In self-directed dramatic play, children have an opportunity to re-enact their own life experiences. In doing so they help make sense of what is happening in the world around them.

## Dramatic play enhances children's development

Children who have a wide variety of life experiences can take on many roles and play in many themes.

In dramatic play, children can share their combined knowledge. It is this exchange of knowledge and understandings that contributes to their intellectual growth.

## Dramatic play helps children:

- Develop their understanding about new experiences
- Develop and practise language
- Express fears and feelings
- Develop social skills, such as learning to cooperate, share and take turns
- Practise problem solving

## Setting up the dramatic play area

Dramatic play is best situated near the dough and block play areas.

## Adults can help

- Provide a selection of materials and equipment
- Stimulate ideas by reading stories, taking children on outings etc
- Support children to put their own ideas into practice, without taking over
- Help children sort out problems constructively
- Encourage children to help tidy up after the session.
- Equipment for dramatic play
  - A selection of dress-up clothes, with accessories for role playing both men and women. Include clothes representing more than one culture
  - Male and female dolls representing different cultures
  - Dolls' clothing, beds and bedding
  - A table, chairs, kitchen utensils, and furniture
  - A clothes line with pegs
  - A selection of boxes and lengths of material
  - Mirror at child height
  - Props as necessary for other types of dramatic play, e.g. shops or medical play.



## Ideas for literacy and numeracy

- Talk with the children using the language that goes with the play
- Provide writing materials for children to use in their play, e.g. making menus for a restaurant, money for a shop, signs for a road, invitations to a party, etc.
- Talk about the mathematical elements of their play, e.g. with money, number, shapes



## Manipulative play

When children participate in manipulative play they are developing control of their bodies, especially the smaller muscles of hand, finger, arm, and eye.

They practise making decisions, choosing their own materials, and setting and solving their own problems. Newly learnt skills are reinforced and perfected, and as they take responsibility for their own learning they gain in confidence and self esteem.

Experience with manipulative resources provides children with opportunities to develop pre-mathematical skills.

### **Some ways for adults to support children's learning**

Set aside a special area with a wide range of resources for manipulative play, including natural resources

Support children to try things and solve problems for themselves as much as possible

Encourage children to use trial and error, as well as previous experience to solve problems

Support children by talking to them about what they are doing and using language which will extend children's thinking and understanding.

Manipulative play refers to activities where children move, order, turn, or screw items to make them fit. It allows children to take control of their world by mastering the objects provided. It is often solitary but when sufficient resources are provided can also be an important cooperative activity.

Remember that for the safety of children under three, all pieces should be too big to fit in a film canister.

### **Manipulative play helps children to:**

Learn about concepts of size, shape, weight, length, and height

Gain knowledge about sequence, conservation, comparison, order, patterning, identifying, colour, and texture

Develop coordination and control of eye, arm, hand, and finger muscles

### **Setting up the manipulative play area**

Manipulative play is easy to set up and can happen indoors or out. The floor or verandah, or a protected spot outdoors, is ideal. A carpet square will give warmth and comfort. Provide a range of equipment and resources in clearly labelled storage containers. Encourage children to bring items from home, e.g. cotton reels or buttons, and use group excursions to gather shells, stones, etc.

### **Manipulative play resource equipment**

Threading materials – beads, cotton reels, natural materials

Screwing materials – nuts, bolts, small plastic jars with lids

A range of items for sorting, matching and classifying for colour, shape, size, etc.

Nesting and stacking toys

Posting boxes

Interlocking sets such as Mega Blocks and Duplo.

### **Children may enjoy sorting and matching:**

Buttons, pegs, shells, leaves, seeds, bottle tops, feathers, nuts, bolts, screws, stones, driftwood, flowers, etc. All natural materials should be non-poisonous.

### **Adults can help**

Provide a range of manipulative equipment and resources

Talk to children about what they are doing, and encourage discussion

Keep the area and the resources tidy and orderly.





## Messy play

Messy play gives children the opportunity to experience a wide range of sensory experiences. Prepared solutions such as fingerpaint, slime and gloop give children a wonderful opportunity to experiment with different textures and materials.

It is important to provide messy play at playgroup, as it may not be provided elsewhere for the child. Aprons and handwashing water nearby can minimise the mess, and having a number of adults around makes it quick to tidy away.

### **Messy play helps children:**

Relax - it can be a soothing activity that helps release tension and frustration

Express their feelings in a creative way

Experiment with the properties of materials, e.g. does it hold its shape or pour or run?

Learn about colour mixing, patterns, design, texture and rhythm

Develop hand-eye coordination and practise the skills of pouring, measuring, mixing, scooping, and beating.

### **Children may:**

Hesitate in accepting messiness

Explore the material tentatively

Become more involved and experiment fully with the material.

### **Adults can help**

Providing messy play often gives children the opportunity to develop their skills and confidence with the medium.

Try not to worry about children getting messy – dress them in old clothes and aprons and be excited that they are learning from their messy experiences

Join in - model that it's OK to get your hands dirty

Keep the area orderly, provide aprons and water for washing hands

Provide equipment and fresh supplies of materials when needed

Encourage discussion, singing and experimentation

Supervise younger children to avoid getting materials in eyes.

### **Literacy and numeracy**

Talk with the children about what they are experiencing - use words like slimy, runny, soft, warm, cold, lumpy, wet

Introduce chants, rhymes, songs, or music, if appropriate.





## Physically active play

When children participate in physically active play they are developing their large and small muscles and gaining increasing control over their bodies. As they play indoors and outdoors, children develop increasing agility, coordination and balance. They will develop abilities and interests in a wide range of domains including spatial, visual, logical, and mathematical. A realistic perception of what they can do and what they cannot yet do contributes to their growing self-confidence.

### Some ways for adults to support children's learning

- Ensure the play environment is safe, supportive of children's development and able to provide challenges for infants, toddlers and younger children
- Provide play equipment that is versatile and able to be used in a range of ways
- Join in or initiate activities with children where appropriate
- Give children many opportunities to practise existing skills and try new ones.

### Physically active play helps children to:

- Develop large muscles, strength and balance
- Develop agility and coordination throughout the body, including hand-eye coordination
- Develop skills such as throwing, catching, hopping, jumping, skipping, climbing, and balancing
- Develop spatial awareness (awareness of where their body parts are in space) and avert clumsiness
- Release tension
- Gain confidence in and control of their bodies, enhancing their self-esteem
- Learn to cooperate and share with others
- Understand that physical activity is fun. Enjoyment and participation at this age can lead to a lifetime of fitness and participation in sporting activities.



### Providing for physically active play

Children need equipment and activities that give them opportunities to practise and extend their skills in running, balancing, swinging, crawling, stepping, climbing, catching, throwing, pushing and pulling, hopping, skipping, jumping, rolling, and crouching.

### Children may participate in physically active play by

- Observing other children
- Trying out simple activities, e.g. crawling through a tunnel when encouraged by a parent
- Pushing and pulling
- Exploring equipment with increasing dexterity, e.g. climbing ladders, using the slide
- Incorporating physical activities and equipment into dramatic play.



### Adults can help

- Provide space and suitable equipment
- Ensure the play area is safe, well-maintained and positioned safely
- Allow children to explore equipment at their own pace and ability level
- Be ready to join in and, if appropriate, assist with skills development, e.g. demonstrate the best ways to land, roll, throw, etc.
- Encourage turn-taking
- On wet days, ensure some physically active play is provided for inside.



## Water play

Water play is an enjoyable and soothing activity where children can play and learn alone or alongside others. Children can participate at any level with no expected end result or product.

### Water play helps children to:

- Develop hand-eye coordination and the manipulative skills of lifting, pouring, controlling
- Explore the early mathematical and scientific concepts of heavy/light, float/sink, full/empty, shallow/deep, and learn about measuring, estimating, and conservation of volume
- Develop concentration and problem solving skills as they become absorbed in their experimentation
- Develop social skills as they play alongside and communicate with others.

### Setting up the water play area

Water play works well outside or on a sheltered deck or verandah. Placing it near the sandpit can lead to interesting extensions of play.

Bowls or plastic containers may be used although a raised trough is better as it allows several children to play together at the same time and prevents children from climbing in.

On wet days, water can be used inside with a plastic sheet under the water trough. Fine, dry sand or untreated sawdust could be used occasionally instead of water.

### Useful equipment for water play

Use plastic, wood or metal items that will not break or rust, e.g. jugs, sieves, toy boats, mugs, colanders, spoons, bottles, beaters, items for floating and sinking, funnels, watering cans, water wheels, sponges, lengths of hose.

Natural materials are also good, e.g. shells, cones, stones, driftwood, seaweed.

### Children may play with water in the following ways:

- Patting, drinking and splashing the water
- Scooping, pouring, tipping
- Experimenting with containers, such as sieves, sponges, funnels, and water wheels.

### Adults can help

- Good supervision is essential for safety
- Ensure children are protected from the sun with hats and/or sunscreen
- Add warm water on cold days
- Add colour or soap flakes for extra interest.



### Ideas to help with literacy and numeracy

- Talk with children about what is happening. Use words like: full/empty/half full; sink/float; heavy/light; wet/dry
- Encourage the children to ask questions, explore, and predict what will happen.