



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.

