



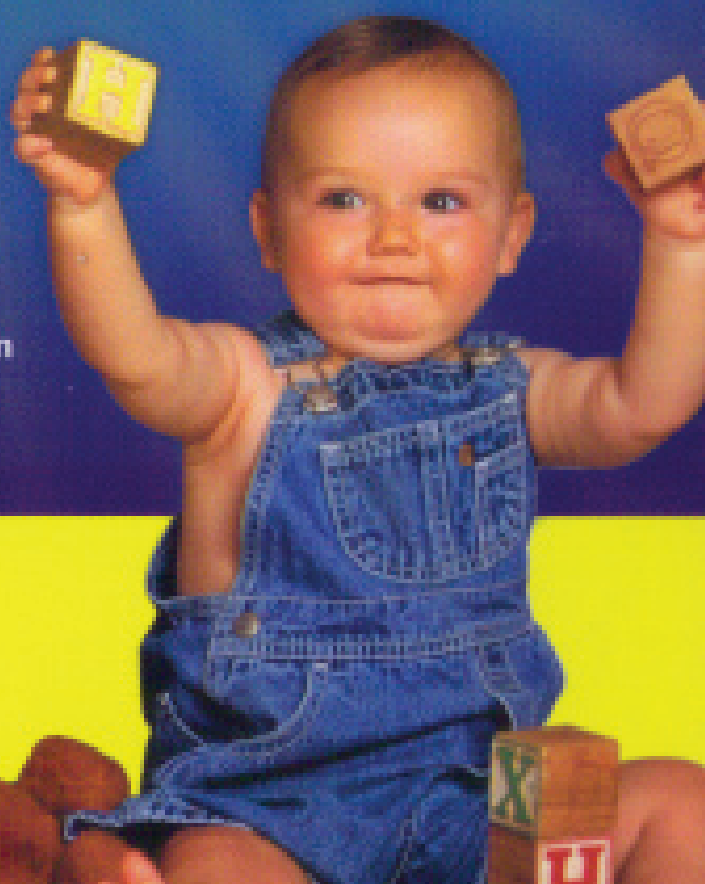
Learning Through Play

For the under threes in parent and toddler groups

10 STEPS

to a Successful Toddler Group

- 1** Use SPPA's Running a Toddler Group - a Code of Practice, as a guide
- 2** Encourage all adults to bring their skills and experience to the group
- 3** Elect a committee and adopt a constitution
- 4** Take out insurance cover
- 5** Provide a safe, welcoming, stimulating environment, free from prejudice and discrimination, where everyone feels comfortable and secure
- 6** Make health and safety arrangements which ensure that all safety checks, emergency drill and precautions are taken
- 7** Keep each session manageable, plan that no more than twenty children and their carers attend
- 8** Provide a wide range of challenging activities and equipment and make sure that the children are free to choose
- 9** Encourage adults and children to make friends
- 10** Consider employing a playworker



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Learning Through Play!

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this booklet is to focus on positive adult/ child relationships, to promote the value of play for young children and to show how parents can support the learning and development of their children.

The importance of relationships

“Relationships begin before a baby is born. They begin with the care and attention that babies receive while they are in the womb. Because of this, babies are born already strongly connected to other people. The important process of attachment and forming relationships has begun even before they are born.” (Birth to Three LTS 2005). So the importance of the role adults play in the care of children is a vital one.

Active learners

Children are active learners from birth. How they are cared for and what experiences they have in the first years of their lives, have a major impact on their development. In their book “Play and Learning for the Under 3’s” Jennie Lindon, Kevin Kelman and Alice Sharp state the importance of this. “Babies and Toddlers are primed to learn and recent research into the development of the human brain has shown the importance of this early potential. The babies’ efforts within their early, all round development, stimulate the possible neural networks within their immature brains. These networks then develop into actual physical connections that support further learning. Within the first two or three years of life, more connections in total can be made than are created at any other time of our life. This research confirms what involved practitioners and parents have always said; that the early years are a time of great potential. However, such possibilities can be lost if parents and other carers relate poorly to babies and toddlers, or if we channel the play and learning experience of babies and toddlers in a very narrow way, inappropriate to their development.” (1 * Appendix A.)

Parents and carers

Parents are the prime educators of their children and this too, has to be recognised. As the Child Psychologist Jennie Lindon says, “Caring adults count more than equipment”. Having a secure relationship with their parent/carer is essential for a child’s all round development. Children need a caring, warm, physically close relationship. When they feel emotionally secure they can enjoy their play and be receptive to all the experiences that are offered to them. The parents’/carers’ role is to provide this security and to understand the level of support their children require and the impact that their support has on child development and well-being.

Being a parent/carer is a path of learning and discovery. The foundations are laid by their own experience of being parented as children. If parents/carers have a clear understanding of children’s needs and a basic understanding of child development, then they are more likely to be aware of recognising needs and to be aware of their role in promoting and supporting children’s learning and well-being. All children are individuals with needs, interests and concerns of their own. Parents/carers need to tune in to these if they are to support them. Parents/carers grow in their understanding that children have already achieved many developmental steps, and appreciate that, with the opportunity and given the time to explore and experience stimulating play, children seek learning and make progress with the skills that they need for life.

The value of toddler groups

Parent and toddler groups can offer parents/carers opportunities to assist their children's development and achieve greater satisfaction in their roles as parents through playing together and exploring how children develop. Groups can provide a stimulating environment in which young children, through play, have opportunities for physical development, social interaction, personal development and the growth of skills in communication and language. This stimulating environment improves children's ability to learn. Groups can promote self-esteem and personal confidence, as well as communication and decision making skills in both children and their parents/carers. They can help to strengthen families and communities and also provide opportunities to acquire skills, which lay the basis for future training and/or subsequent employment.





THE PARENT AND TODDLER GROUP SETTING

The environment, the people they are with and the experiences they have, all affect how children view themselves and how they develop attitudes and inclination to living and learning.

The parent and toddler group offers opportunities for parents/carers and children to meet in a setting which encourages them to play together, explore new experiences and be sociable. Parents/carers have the opportunity to observe their children at play and playing with others. The group setting provides opportunities for parents/carers to make friends and to share and discuss experiences with other parents/carers and find the reassurance that they are doing a good enough job. They are able to watch their children relating to others and making friends. Activities and ideas from the group can also be tried out and enjoyed in the home. (2 * Appendix A.)

The parent and toddler group experience that exposes children to their peers is a crucial element of promoting child development because they learn, not only on their own, but also from observing and interacting with each other. Although babies cannot be as physically active as older children, it's important to recognise that they interact from birth. Children's opportunities to interact with each other helps them to make progress across development areas. The quality of play provision affects the degree of progress that is achieved. For example, if the choice of quality of activities is limited and does not meet overall developmental needs, then the children will be denied opportunities to progress.

FAMILY AND FRIENDS NETWORK

Parents/carers learn about their children and measure their progress in a variety of ways. They have the opportunity to mix with others with young children in this setting to discuss, compare, observe and make judgements about their parenting role.

Children are learning all the time in the home setting. The home provides the first and most important environment for learning. The interactions which take place in the family setting between a child, its brothers and sisters and caring parents/carers provide opportunities to share jointly every day experiences, that form the foundation of the child's learning. There needs to be a recognition of the value of these experiences for children and parents/carers and they can be built on. Part of understanding the crucial elements of parents/carers and their children sharing experiences, relates to acknowledging there will be positive and negative experiences. Promoting positive attitudes, good communication, encouragement and praise and realistic expectations for their children, helps parents/carers to develop their role and relationship with them. Children need to feel secure enough to be able to make mistakes.

The reassurance and participation, praise and encouragement of familiar parents/carers is essential as it helps to develop children's confidence and self esteem and as their confidence grows their play will become more independent. The role of parents/carers is varied, but the components could be described as:

- being responsible
- offering support
- interacting
- evaluating
- observing
- offering security, love and affection
- listening
- supervising
- participating in play

Observation is vital to:

- see what is happening in the group
- learn more about the children
- ensure children's needs are being met
- decide if they need help or if they can work things out for themselves
- see if the equipment needs replenishing or changing

Parents/carers provide:

- a lap for sitting on
- arms for cuddling and comforting
- faces for looking at
- voices for listening to
- a hand to hold when a child is learning to walk
- encouragement and support for when things go wrong
- praise and adulation for when things go right

- someone who is aware of their physical needs and when they are too tired to go on
- someone who is a playmate
- someone who can retrieve lost toys

Children are inquisitive and unaware of risk so careful supervision of all play activities by parents/carers is vital to safeguard their safety. To make the most of the parent and toddler groups setting parents/carers need to ask themselves the following questions regularly, about the children:

- What are they experiencing?
- Is what is being provided for them in their best interests?
- Are all their needs being catered for?
- Do they all have an equal chance to develop their skills?
- Are they being provided with enough opportunities for learning?

Children need parents/carers who will:

- support them in their play
- praise and encourage them
- enable learning to progress at their own pace
- enable them to choose what they want to do for as long as it suits them
- enable them to practice and develop skills and take risks without fear of failure
- look after their interests and needs
- understand that the process of “doing” is what is important
- not expect an end result from their work
- give them opportunities to learn through their senses and physical exploration
- give them opportunities for repetition and to apply their ideas
- understand their interests and current abilities



THE ENVIRONMENT

It is important to involve parents/carers in the children's play. They need to have a supportive role and give assistance. Parents/carers should be able to re-create positive play experiences in the home too, adapting the play opportunities which are created in a group, for the home. The key to a successful toddler group is to create a welcoming, well organised, attractive environment that is beneficial to the parents/carers and promotes quality experiences for the children. An environment that enables babies and toddlers to communicate, be physically active, look at and handle things, offers the best way to support early brain development.

A well planned room with sufficient, age appropriate activities which takes account of the needs and interests of the children, which offers choice, is important. Too many activities can be overwhelming and would provide too much choice. The recipe for success is to start simple, ensuring the activities are of interest. The activities should include activities for babies, floor toys, table top activities and sit and ride toys and interest areas (for example a home corner and book area).

Having decided on the layout of activities, children should be allowed to choose what activity they like and to continue with it for as long as they wish. (These are the elements of free play, which should not be confused with allowing children to act entirely as they wish in an uncontrolled situation.) When children can exercise choice, it leads to an understanding and development of self discipline.

Room arrangement

Careful room arrangement and organisation of resources and activities can stimulate children's play, adult involvement and social interaction. All premises will be different, however here are some ideas and suggested layouts to help. (Please see Appendix C.)

How the chairs are arranged can influence what happens. If the adult chairs are all in one place and the children's chairs are in another, it is not as easy for adults to be close to the children and to support their play. They can be mixed to give parents the opportunity to chat to each other too, as they interact with the children. Chairs can be arranged in clusters around an activity and a babies' corner can be created. Chairs can be used to screen off areas to protect the very young and also to prevent the crawling babies from disrupting the older children's play. An area can be set aside for the children to sleep in if they need to.

Craft activities, books and jigsaws, benefit from being in a warm, light position. Heavy equipment could be situated near where it is stored and messy play could be situated near the water supply, if possible.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY

Play and learning experiences should be centred on the children's needs and interests and on their lives. They need to focus on helping children develop positive attitudes to themselves, towards others and towards learning. Children who develop these positive attitudes "become confident, sociable and competent learners. This is of vital importance and will have positive effects on young children here and now and throughout their lives." (3 * Appendix A.)

Through play children:

- begin to make sense of a complicated world
- acquire knowledge
- discover, develop and practice vital skills required for later life
- find reassurance
- come to terms with adult concepts and skills

These are the key aspects of children's development and learning

Emotional, personal and social development: Learning about feelings and how to cope with them; growing secure and confident; having self-esteem. Learning how to relate to and form positive relationships with children and adults; becoming increasingly independent; playing co-operatively, taking turns and sharing resources.

Communication and language: Learning how to communicate thoughts, feelings and ideas and to listen to others. Express needs, thoughts and feelings with increasing confidence in speech and non-verbal language. Using language for a variety of purposes, for example to describe, explain, predict, ask questions and develop ideas.

Knowledge and understanding of the world: Making sense of the world around them, use of senses, understanding and investigating their environment which encourages the development of thinking, reasoning, imagination and curiosity.

Expressive and aesthetic: Learning to express ideas, thoughts and feelings and use imagination. Listening and responding to sounds, rhythms, songs and a variety of music. Using verbal and non-verbal language in role play.

Physical development and movement: Exploring different ways in which they can use their bodies in physical activity; developing an awareness of space; large and fine motor skills eg crawling, walking, running, jumping, holding a paintbrush, pencils or handling large and small objects.

WHAT TO PROVIDE

Activities which offer experiences that help children to develop and learn

Play for babies

Babies need somewhere warm, comfortable and safe in which they can lie or sit; and discover the world around them. They need people and things to look at, listen to, touch and grasp. It is vital to ensure that there are no small items near the babies, as at this stage everything goes into the mouth.

Babies need objects:

- To look at - mobiles, pictures, unbreakable mirrors, shapes, colours, patterns, balls, balloons, shiny/dull objects, things that move, faces
- To listen to - bells, music, rattles, talking, singing
- To touch - different textures - soft/hard, smooth/rough, warm/cold, teething rings
- To grasp - soft ball/toys stretched across the pram/seat or hung above the mattress, toys which roll when touched. It is important to remember the babies in prams and buggies, as they will also need play things within their reach and range of vision.

Play for crawling babies

Babies need to explore their environment with a selection of toys and equipment to explore and investigate. Crawling babies need a safe warm, clean environment in which to explore. They could be provided with:

- activity centres, hammer pegs, posting boxes
- containers to fill and empty
- building blocks to build up and knock down
- toys and containers that roll
- a floor level mirror
- toys that make sounds
- dolls, teddies, toy animals, books
- treasure baskets

Play for learner walkers

Toddlers need a safe environment in which to practise this unsteady and difficult newly acquired skill with sturdy push along toys, steady furniture to grasp and hands to hold. They need:

- push along toys that cannot tip over (sit-in baby walkers should be avoided as they can be very dangerous, especially in a busy group)
- furniture around which they can “cruise” and pull themselves up
- a pair of adult hands to hold

Paint, junk, woodplay, collage, clay and dough

- Provide a rich source of a stimulus and excitement to children’s imagination

- Encourage spontaneous creative activity and experimentation
- Foster self esteem, confidence and self expression
- Develop manipulative skills and early mathematical understanding
- Contribute to the development of language
- Develop hand eye co-ordination and develop an awareness of what makes up their environment

Paint

Children respond to painting in different ways. Some will spend time exploring it with their fingers, others will make a few tentative marks and leave it quickly but, may return often. Others will spend a considerable time covering every inch of paper either with one colour or with several. Some children will take a long time to feel comfortable with paint. Whatever their response, allow them plenty of time to explore the possibilities.

It might be necessary to have more than one area for painting. Start by providing one or two colours of paint and gradually build up the range of colours to include black and white. Non-spill pots, which can be made from washing up liquid bottles with the tops cut off and inverted into the bottom, plastic tray, chunky brushes and paper in different sizes, colours and textures can be offered. Adding washing up liquid to powder paint helps to thicken it and helps to wash it off skin and out of clothes more easily.

Provide different painting surfaces. Painting at an easel will produce different results from painting at a table or on a floor. Commercial easels can often be too tall for the children and the legs may need to be shortened.

As they become more familiar with paint, they may like to try painting on other materials - card, wood, stones. A range of implements can be provided with which they can apply the paint for example a toothbrush, decorator's small brush, paint roller, feathers, leaves, sponges, cotton wool or scrunched up paper, all give different results. The children can use water and large paint brushes for "painting" the walls outside. The texture of the paint can be changed by adding sand or sawdust. Finger paints can be made or bought. Some children do not like getting paint on their hands at first. It can help if they are offered something else to apply the finger paint with, until they feel more comfortable. Pencils, crayons and washable felt tips can be used also.

Junk and collage

Learning the properties of glue takes time and practice - how it drips, spreads and runs, how it sticks one thing to another. Children will also discover different types of glue, solid sticks, runny clear or white glue, and also that some glue sticks better than others. In addition, the children can try other ways of fixing things together, such as sellotape, paper clips or staples if appropriate. There are endless materials that can be offered:

- Paper and card of all types, including magazines, tissue and crepe paper, wallpaper, wrapping paper, cereal packets, foil and used birthday and Christmas cards
- Scraps of fabric, wool, ribbon, cotton wool and buttons
- Food stuffs such as pasta and pulses
- Sand, feathers, dried flowers and grasses, pot pourri, woodshavings.

PLEASE NOTE: Polystyrene or medicine containers and packaging should never be used.

Dough

Working with dough can be a very soothing occupation. It also provides an outlet for children's frustrations, in addition to helping to strengthen hand and finger muscles.

Different types of dough can be presented to provide children with different experiences. Experiment with stretchy as well as long lasting dough. It's good to provide plenty of dough. Children need to have time to squeeze, pinch, punch and knead dough on its own until they have explored its possibilities. When appropriate, children can be provided with the basic ingredients so that they can make the dough themselves. Offer different colours by adding poster paint or food dye. Children might like to help with this too, so that they can become aware of the changes that take place. The texture can be changed by adding sand or glitter. The smell can be varied by adding different food essences for example lemon, almond, peppermint.

Once children have fully explored the dough, add in:

- Tools for rolling: large and small tubes both textured and plain, small wallpaper rollers, smooth/ rough round stones as well as rolling pins.
- Plastic implements (the salt in the dough rusts metal ones). For cutting: scone and biscuit cutters, garlic presses, knives and scissors (both left and right handed) as well as moulds
- Objects for making impressions: keys, padlocks, cotton reels, corrugated card, corduroy and so on.

Don't expect an end result! The satisfaction and the learning for children comes from exploring possibilities. (Please see Appendix D for dough recipes.)

Cornflour

Mix with water to a thick paste and tip onto a tray. It can be runny or nearly solid, poured or moulded for an instant. Food dyes can be added to vary the colour. If it's allowed to dry out, it can be reconstituted with water. It can also be cooked and baked when used as a modelling dough, (see "Magic Model Mix" Appendix D).

Clay

Use clay modelling tools, rollers, wooden cutters and a range of objects for texturing and modelling. If the clay proves too hard for little fingers, mix it with water in a large container and play "clay pies".

Woodwork

Careful supervision is necessary. Real, child sized tools can be used with soft wood, nails, screws, sand-paper and a small sized workbench. Whatever the children make, can be varnished / painted.

Sand and water

- Encourage social and personal development
- Stimulate interest in the natural world and develop early mathematical understanding
- Develop manipulative skills
- Give scope to the children's creativity and ingenuity.

Sand

Sand can stimulate the children's senses and spark their imagination. It also enables them to experience weight, volume, quantity and how to estimate - all essential to the later understanding of mathematics. Since very young children may prefer to play alone or alongside another, it may be more appropriate to provide sand in a few individual basins/bowls as well as or instead of a larger sand tray or baby bath. Several of the basins/bowls could then be placed close together or offered individually. In addition provide:

- Containers of different shapes and sizes for filling and emptying, including margarine tubs, yoghurt pots and pails along with spades and scoops.
- Equipment for pouring, funnels in a range of sizes, plastic tubing of different widths and lengths, plain and coloured plastic bottles, sieves, strainers, containers with holes in the bottom and/or sides including small flower pots.



Check catalogues for toys that are suitable for use with dry sand for example a sand wheel.

Children will enjoy finding interesting “treasures” buried in the sand such as unusual stones, shells or unusual pieces of wood. Encourage them to talk about their finds.

Avoid making children feel naughty when the sand is spilt. Instead, try to encourage them to keep within limits and let them help with clearing it up. Have a dustpan and brush readily available for this purpose.

Add water to sand. As wet sand is good for making impressions, patterns or drawing, try a potato masher, sole of a shoe or wellington boot. Damp sand holds its shape well if the children want to mould or build creatively. Have moulds of all types, plastic or wooden (wet sand rusts metal) vehicles, play people, buildings and animals available. Add natural materials including pebbles, shells and twigs if appropriate.

Water

Water is familiar soothing and relaxing. Like sand, it gives children an opportunity to learn how natural materials behave and allows them to experience concepts of quantity and volume. Playing with the water allows children to practice their pouring skills. Depending on the needs of the children it may be more appropriate to provide water in individual basins/bowls as well as or instead of in a baby bath or water tray. These could be offered separately or next to each other.

Initially the children may be happy just to explore and test the water using their hands. Later offer equipment similar to that used in sand play and add in objects which:

- Float and/or sink-corks, ping pong balls, stones, shells
- Absorb and/or resist water-sponges, pieces of material including plastic and oil cloth, leaves.
- Let the children see how water can be changed by adding food colouring, bubbles, ice cubes.

Make sure that sleeves are rolled up and aprons are on. Provide cloths and or mops for the inevitable spillages and encourage the children to help to keep the area tidy and mopped up.

Never leave children unattended near water.

Home corner, dressing up, imaginative play

- Encourage physical, intellectual, linguistic and emotional development
- Promote creative, aesthetic, social and personal development
- Foster self esteem, confidence and self expression
- Lets children pretend to be someone else and enables insight into and understanding of different situations
- Helps children to make sense of their environment and stimulates interest in the wider world

Dressing up

Keep dressing up clothes simple, clean and hanging or displayed neatly so that the children can see easily what is available. A variety of dressing up clothes should be offered, connected with both males and females which include accessories such as shopping bags, handbags, baskets, briefcases, hats, belts and jewellery. Include work outfits as well as multicultural costumes and lengths of material which can become anything the children wish.

Imaginative play

Provide a pretend corner and start with situations that young children are likely to be familiar with. This will probably include activities like:

- Dressing, feeding dolls and taking them for walks or shopping, reading them stories and putting them to bed

- Cooking, eating, washing up
- Washing and ironing clothes, making phone calls and so on

Develop this as appropriate and extend the children's role play to include all cultures and areas of work, for example a shop, hospital, office, whatever children's interests or needs dictate. Where possible provide child sized furniture. Cushions or soft mats can double as beds. Strong cardboard boxes with any sharp staples removed, can be prepared and painted to make all sorts of home or workplace equipment for example a cooker, washing machine, shop counter, cupboard, TV, photocopier and computer. Pots, cutlery, bowls, blankets, prams, iron and board, phone, mirror, dolls of different nationalities of both sexes can be added in. Children will devise their own imaginative play without props, take the cue from them.

Floor Toys-Bricks , Construction Toys, Cardboard Boxes, Table Top Toys-Puzzles, Games, Small World etc.

- Encourage emotional, creative, social and personal development
- Stimulate curiosity, language and imagination
- Extend knowledge and understanding of the world
- Encourage sharing and an understanding of rules

Floor toys

Building blocks offer lots of scope for play and come in different sizes. The simplest can be made from cardboard boxes and tubes which have been stuffed with paper and securely taped and painted. Offer construction toys, large jigsaws and a range of small world imaginative play such as garage, farm, village, harbour, trains and airport. It is important that these reflect the children's own backgrounds and cultures as well as those of other people. Large cardboard boxes which can become whatever children want them to be, provide endless fun.

Table toys

These help children to understand rules and encourage them to help and share with each other. These can be commercial or home-made. They can include simple jigsaws made from birthday, Christmas and postcards and sorting games using colours, simple shapes or textures. Picture dominoes, snap, lotto and construction sets can be added. The chance to practice threading skills can be provided by offering large colourful buttons, large wooden beads of different shapes and varieties of straight pasta.

Adventure play-slide, hide away cubes, ride-on toys etc.

- Stimulate body awareness and co-ordination of movement
- Enable children to take risks and challenge themselves
- Support healthy growth and a sense of well being
- Gives rise to role play and imaginative game playing and make believe
- Build confidence

Check over all the equipment regularly and provide mats/mattresses in and around the climbing frame, slide, trampoline, hideaway cubes, see-saw, rocking boats and anywhere

else it is felt to be necessary for safety. Older children enjoy having a place to hide away - a table with a sheet over it provides an ideal place, as do tunnels and large cardboard boxes. Ride - on toys can cause a lot of disruption unless there is enough space for them to be used. A few outdoors can work well and if there is enough space inside, an obstacle track can be laid out within a well defined area.

Books and stories

- Contribute to the development of language and pre-reading skills
- Provide a rich source of stimulus and excitement to children's imagination
- Encourage self expression, confidence and self esteem
- Broaden insight and understanding
- Offer comfort as they help to address and express feelings

Children love stories from a very early age whether they are read or told. They learn to handle and respect books by watching how adults use them. Include books of all types, board books, cloth and plastic books, pop-up books, story, nursery rhyme, information and reference books among others. All these need to be checked regularly to make sure that they are clean, in good repair and are not scribbled on. If they do become damaged, the children could be allowed to help to repair them whenever possible.

A cosy quiet area set aside, where children can browse through the books and also listen to an adult reading a story, is important. Remember that the demand and need for stories can happen any time and anywhere in the playroom. Libraries not only lend books, but provide story reading sessions and toy lending.

Sounds, music, songs and rhymes

- Encourage creative, emotional and aesthetic development
- Promote physical and personal development
- Encourage enjoyment of rhythm and movement
- Encourage language development
- Give opportunities for practising memory, concentration and listening skills

Make as many opportunities as possible to develop listening skills through exploring sounds of all sorts including everyday ones. Make up tapes which have different sounds for the children to listen to and identify. Let them listen to voices-their own as well as other people whom they know, and see if they can identify who is speaking. Have a sounds table and let the children listen to the sounds made by different musical instruments including those which are home made.

Explore how these sounds are made; blowing, banging, strumming, tapping are some of the ways you can try.

Play all sorts of music and if there is anyone with musical talents, invite them along to play.

Songs and rhymes are often used to bring everyone together at home time, but it is also an activity which can be enjoyed spontaneously at any time. Introduce a range of songs and rhymes that children and adults can become familiar with including action songs and nursery rhymes. Words can be made up to fit the actions of a particular task which can

prove to be very helpful for getting the tidying up or the other chores done.

As well as traditional songs and rhymes three excellent song books are:

- “Bobby Shaftoe Clap Your Hands” has new words and actions for well known tunes. Published by A & C Black Ltd. Available from www.amazon.co.uk.
- “Game Songs with Prof Dogg’s Troupe” which comes with a CD. Published by A & C Black Ltd. Available from www.amazon.co.uk.
- “Singing Games and Rhymes for Tiny Tots” which comes with a CD. Published by National Youth Choir of Scotland (Tel: 0141 287 2856 or e-mail: admin@nycos.co.uk - website: www.nycos.uk).

These books are full of songs that really work with young children.

Heuristic Play

Heuristic comes from the Greek “eurisko” which means “serves to discover” or “gain understanding of”. Heuristic Play is self motivated learning through exploration and discovery using all the senses. It is play with everyday objects and natural materials rather than with toys.

Children have played this way quite naturally for centuries. This type of play is particularly suited to under threes since it meets their need for stimulation, exploration, discovery and experimentation. Treasure Baskets provide this kind of play experience.

Treasure baskets

- Provide a rich source of stimulus and excitement
- Stimulate curiosity, language and imagination
- Extend knowledge and understanding of the world
- Stimulate body awareness and co-ordination of movement
- Encourage social and personal development

This resource is intended for babies once they can sit comfortably with support and remains a valuable source of exploration for young toddlers. The idea is to gather a range of materials that vary in feel and texture and keep them in a low, open basket. The aim is to avoid any commercially made toys and plastic, since this material is so dominant in bought play materials.

Ordinary objects can be collected that are safe for babies to handle, including putting them in their mouth. These may include small containers, large cotton reels, fir cones, woolly balls, a firm fruit like a lemon, a wooden spoon or spatula, large wooden curtain rings, a bath sponge, a small scoop or pastry cutters or the larger type of wooden clothes peg.

There are no firm rules for the contents of a treasure basket except that the material can be wiped clean and nothing is so small that babies or toddlers could swallow it. (If the treasure basket resource is used with older children with learning disabilities, watch out for size since they will get larger objects into their mouth.) The collection should vary in look, texture, shape and smell so that babies can explore the materials in whatever way they like.

There is no need to comment on what the babies are doing, nor to intervene unless there is a genuine safety issue. Just sit close and enjoy watching. (4 * Appendix A.)

Other activities

Visitors

Children can learn a lot from visitors. It can be difficult to provide a quiet area in which someone can talk to them, but even seeing them is useful. Fear of uniforms (for both children and adults!) can be overcome if everyone sees PC Selby on his knees playing in the babies corner or Fire-fighter Penny Morris working at the junk table.

Outings

Taking the children on local visits provides a wealth of experiences. Places to visit may include the park, fire station, library, playgroup, nursery, school, farm, health centre, beach, swimming pool, wildlife park and shops.

Cookery

A cooker is not always necessary. The children can make things such as sandwiches, sweets, salads etc. This would involve cutting/grating cheese, fruit and vegetables, icing/decorating biscuits and cakes and mixing playdough. It is productive to involve the children in all aspects of preparation, weighing, measuring etc and clearing up. Remember to give due regard to safety and hygiene.



ACTIVITIES WHICH OFFER CHILDREN EXPERIENCES TO DEVELOP AND LEARN IN RENFREWSHIRE

To illustrate the value of activities, here are some descriptions of children enjoying the Activity Workshops, which were delivered by Scottish Pre-school Play Association staff.

Dough

“It was Jane’s first experience of playing with dough in the Toddler Group. She spent time prodding it with her fingers then experimenting with it with a spoon and fork. Her mother showed her how to roll it and use a teddy bear shaped cutter. She prodded and patted the different colours of dough. She put a blob of dough onto the teddy shape and said “eyes”. She experimented with a stick, adding more layers of dough to the teddy.

By the end of the session she was exhibiting a lot more confidence with the materials and was moving around and sharing with the other children.

Other children mixed the coloured dough, stuffed it into pots, rolled it out and cut out shapes, recognising the shapes of butterflies, cars and teddy bears. They placed containers of dough in the toy oven and on top of the cooker, exchanging conversation with other children. Some selected knives, forks and spoons to attack the dough with and this demonstrated that they had clear ideas about what they wanted to achieve. It was suggested to them that the dough felt cold, as it had been in the fridge. Later that morning a number of them observed that the dough was now warm. This was great observation and demonstrated the use of the senses and understanding of the concepts of cold and warm. The children were exploring, experimenting and increasing their understanding of the materials. They were using language connected with the activity and engaging in elementary science experiments, when adding the flour.”

This is what some of their parents/carers said:

“I enjoyed playing with the playdough with my son and watching his reaction to some of the shapes he made. He enjoyed the textures and putting the colours together”

“It was fun for both myself and my daughter and we’ll be making our own playdough at home.”

“He liked the feel of the dough and playing with the different shaped cutters”.

“I enjoyed playing and watching her interact with the other children”

“I thought it was good as children and parents all mixed. The children seemed to play well together. It brought them all together as a group.”

Treasure baskets

“Three baby boys aged approximately six months old, sat on the mat next to the two treasure baskets. Their curiosity was immediately aroused by the baskets and their senses stimulated. Each baby took great delight in taking the items out of the basket and exploring them using their hands and mouths, shaking and touching them, enjoying their textures and the sounds they made . On three occasions, one baby gave some of the items from his basket, to another baby. All three babies were vocal whilst they were playing. After twenty minutes the babies were quite tired and had explored most of the objects in the baskets. The baskets had provided the babies with plenty of sensory stimulation and opportunities to explore, discover, experiment, vocalise and interact.”

The parents/carers were delighted with the way their babies had enjoyed discovering and exploring the items in the baskets.

Water play

“Two children came to see what was on offer before we had even put any water in. One girl was there from start to finish and only left when we had drained all the water. Her mother said that she puts water in the bowl in her play kitchen at home and spends hours there. The children were totally absorbed in playing with the water. (Even one of the babies, in his walker, came to have a look and wanted to join in, a ball from the water was given to him to play with on his tray!)

Using funnels, a water wheel, duck, floating letters, a watering can, small containers, boats etc they were exploring the water, pouring, sprinkling, bailing, conversing, discovering, experimenting, interacting, observing and engaging in pretend play. They also poured water on their feet and the floor to see what would happen. A minimum of 4 children were at the water trough at all times except for their snack time. At one stage there were 7 children and no space for any more. However there was a good turn around and 12 children in all, experimented with the water. The set of buckets with various hole patterns was particularly popular.

It also stimulated a lot of interaction and conversation between the children themselves and adults observing. Because of the height of the trough and the numbers of children participating it wasn't possible for the adults to physically participate, however the verbal interaction was good. Some parents had come prepared with a change of clothing, so there was no reluctance to allow the children to participate. There was quite a lot of grabbing of tools from each other and a reluctance to share, which required parental intervention, however this was forthcoming. The whole experience allowed the children to experiment with basic science and properties and conservation of liquids as well as being a lot of fun.”

This is what some of their parents/carers said:

The children loved it and they were amazed at their child's concentration and absorption in the activity.

They enjoyed watching their children. One girl was there from start to finish and only left when we had drained all the water. Her mother said that she puts water in the bowl in her play kitchen at home and spends hours there, but the water trough was so much bigger and better.

They hadn't realised how fascinated with water their children were.

A few parents commented that although it was obvious that their children were enjoying the activity they wouldn't try it at home as it was too messy. It was pointed out that they could incorporate it into bath time for example, where the water could be contained, or in outdoor play or they could use a smaller amount of water in a washing up bowl.

Paint

“Parental participation was very high and the majority of the children came to the table accompanied by an adult. Interaction/conversation between the adults and children was particularly prominent with a lot of verbal communication taking place around discussions of what the children were producing and the production process. The adults expressed pleasure and praise to the children in their endeavours. Most of the children made their first picture on the white paper that was provided. When they asked for more paper they were given a selection to choose from with almost all opting for the coloured paper. Sharing of the paint trays was also observed.

Many of the children produced large swirling type patterns, others made patterns of dots/ blobs of paint. One child, Lisa, kept approaching the table, but when offered an overall said that she wasn't painting. However she did paint her name on a sheet of paper. Another girl (around 20 months) although showing an interest in the activity was deterred when asked to wear an overall. However, her Grandmother opted to let her participate without an overall and she enjoyed exploring the media on offer. The children produced at least 3 or 4 pictures each, with some leaving to go onto other activities after that, others remained at the table for the whole session. The parents took many of the pictures home. Our youngest participant was Mary (8 months) whose face lit up as she experimented with the paintbrush and when she succeeded in aiming it at the paper. This was of particular note as her mother had, on previous occasions, noted she had been reluctant to participate. Her older child was also involved and seemed to enjoy aiming the brush at his mother's trousers almost as much as at the paper.

Some children worked on the same painting for a lengthy period of time, layering the paint thickly. Others produced many paintings in quick succession. Some children made patterns of colour mixes or individual colours. Others went into detailed descriptions of what their picture represented. The children also enjoyed mixing the different colours of paint in the paint trays. Some children selected many different colours for their paintings, whilst others selected to use just one or two colours. Two of the younger children painted the newspaper put down to protect the tables when their pictures were taken away to dry, until fresh paper was put in front of them. After the break we had put out the toothbrushes and about 5 of the children experimented with them, exploring the different markings/textures they could produce.”

This is what some of their parents/carers said:

“The kids now paint more at home and are more creative”

“The kids are learning to share the paints”

“She enjoys painting”

“She likes getting messy very much”

“Very exciting”

Craft

The craft activity had a Christmas theme. Christmas tree shapes were provided with glue sticks, card, glitter shakers, snowflakes and plastic aprons. The children anticipated that something interesting was happening at the end of the hall. They sat down and the adults joined them or they worked alone with support from Scottish Pre-school Play Association staff and each other. Some parents/carers took their child’s hand and led them to the table. It was very easy for the children to spread the glue using the chunky stick all over the paper. The children selected a tree and anything else they wished to add to their card or picture. Most of the children made at least one picture and one girl made four. The children demonstrated great skill picking up the tiny stars and snowflakes and placing them on a chosen spot on the picture. Scottish Pre-school Play Association staff discussed with parents/carers the fine motor skills that the children were practising, the definite choices they were making and the appreciation of something beautiful that each child had created. The parents/carers gave praise freely and parents/carers told the staff how much the children and how much they, had enjoyed the activity.

This is what some of their parents/carers said:

“It helps children’s creative skills.”

“I enjoyed helping the children create their own patterns and shapes.”



CONCLUSION

*“The well-being and broad skills of parents are fundamental to children’s progress” (5 * Appendix A.)*

Bringing up children can be a rewarding task but it can also be a tiring, worrying and isolating one. Parents and carers require a friendly, supportive group that meets their needs and those of their children. The group lies at the heart of the local community and can foster adult confidence, provide friendship, social opportunities and mutual support for parents and carers. To flourish, both parents/carers and children need to feel safe and emotionally secure. The group can enable this to take place.

Having a secure relationship with their parent/carer provides the foundation for children’s all round development. From this foundation, children can enjoy their play and be receptive to all the experiences that are offered to them. Children require an environment that provides them with play experiences which extend their learning, that gives them an opportunity to communicate, use language, and develop physical and social skills. It should be an environment that also gives them opportunities to explore, investigate and practice what they have learned, one which fosters self esteem, independence and builds confidence. The parent and toddler group setting, can help to provide such opportunities, it can support families and enhance the quality of relationships.

The work undertaken in parent and toddler groups by the Scottish Pre-school Play Association, confirms these conclusions.



APPENDICES

Appendix A

References

1* Play and Learning for the Under 3's Jennie Lindon, Kevin Kelman, Alice Sharp (Nursery World)

2* SPPA has used a simple survey form to seek opinions from parents/carers about why they come to a toddler group. Many indicated that they had come to the group for themselves for a variety of reasons, but most said that their child benefited from the group. One parent for example said, "I feel I can talk to the other parents and it makes me feel good watching my child interact with other children"

3* Sylva, 1994; Carr, 1995; Katz, 1997; Early Childhood Education Forum, 1998

4* This information on treasure baskets comes from Jennie Lindon's book, "Helping babies and toddlers learn- a guide to good practice with under threes" (Published by National Early Years Network ISBN 1870985 57 5). SPPA is grateful to her for her kind permission to reproduce it.

5* Sure Start Scotland

Appendix B

Figure 1: Age group characteristics at 0-3 months

Physical development - growing and developing

- grows fast and sleeps a good deal
- becomes alert while awake
- changes from being rather floppy to holding up head when carried
- starts to wave arms about
- starts to kick
- learns to roll from side to back
- holds a suitably shaped rattle in either hand
- reaches out to hit things
- starts to lift head and tries to pull up when hands are held
- from seeing best at a distance of 10 inches, starts to watch intently things which are further away
- responds to touch, grasps adult's fingers, wiggles toes when his feet are held

Intellectual development - learning, remembering, using information

- soon learns to know his mother and if distressed will not respond easily to anyone else
- learns familiar voices and stops crying when he hears them
- becomes aware of other sounds and turns towards them
- becomes aware of different smells
- puts everything to his mouth
- notices and looks intently at things that move
- may respond to some colours, particularly bright ones, more than others
- starts to make noises other than crying

He needs

- love, attention, security, stimulation, opportunity to play and exercise
- something to watch, hear, touch

Social Development - adjusting to others, getting on with people

- cries because he is hungry, cross, uncomfortable, frightened but then develops different cries which mother can distinguish
- will stop crying to listen
- starts to make cooing noises
- responds to a smile from someone else then starts to smile first. At 3 months, smiles at everyone happily
- responds to strange adults unless very distressed
- starts to enjoy being handled and relaxes at bath times
- enjoys music and being sung to

Emotional development - feeling and expressing feelings

- can be very frightened, very cross and can also glow with happiness. This is a time of extreme reaction which can change quickly
- becomes very attached to his mother

He needs

- someone to smile back at him and respond to his noise
- warmth and a safe place to kick with no clothes on

Figure 2: Age group characteristics at 3 - 9 months

Physical development - growing and developing

- progresses through sitting firmly when held to gradually supporting his own back and sitting up
- learns to pull himself up to sitting
- progresses through turning from side to back to rolling over easily and crawling
- goes from kicking vigorously to taking some weight on his feet to standing with support
- learns to hold things more efficiently then masters picking things up with thumb and forefinger. Hands grow larger as well as stronger and more skilful
- learns to 'let go' and drop things deliberately
- uses both hands separately and together for holding
- copies first automatically then deliberately what others do - particularly facial expressions
- puts things in containers then takes them out

Intellectual development - learning, remembering, using information

- starts to know people as individuals and recognises family names but can't say them
- is interested in everything but has some favourite playthings and books
- enjoys looking at books and pictures and will point with finger
- remembers what familiar 'action' toys do and laughs before they pop up or make a noise
- responds to peep-bo games and may start the games himself
- looks for things which are dropped or have been hidden
- watches carefully when taken out for a walk
- starts to learn about near and far, hard and soft when he becomes mobile
- deliberately splashes with hands in the bath

He needs

- times from adults to play, talk, sing, laugh with him
- lots of slow walks with time to watch
- many simple playthings - bricks, containers, noise makers, books

Social development - adjusting to others, getting on with people

- begins to respond and play with all members of the family but may become wary of strangers towards the end of this period
- has 'conversations' by making a noise, waiting for a response then making a noise again
- 'calls' people by making a noise
- tries to copy sounds
- starts to really rock with laughter which makes other people laugh
- copies simple actions like clapping or waving
- knows his own name when it is said
- understands simple words and will look towards where the object is

Emotional development - feeling and expressing feelings

- shows rage and disapproval by stiffening his body and trying to throw himself backwards
- pushes away anything he doesn't want or doesn't like
- frowns while he is deciding whether or not to cry or object to something or someone
- gets cross if something is taken from him but can be distracted
- shows tremendous pleasure while playing or being played with
- can be frightened by sudden loud noises or nasty surprises
- may become distressed if other people are cross or speak sharply - not necessarily to him

He needs

- somewhere safe to learn to pull himself up to standing and crawling
- lots of time to play in the bath
- straps or harness, safety gates and guards for the other people in the home to get used to using them

Figure 3: Age group characteristics at 9-18 months

Physical development - growing and developing

- learns to crawl or get around the floor if he has not already done so
- learns to walk and uses furniture or something to hold on to or push
- may start to go upstairs on his front but will have difficulty coming down
- tries to climb up on furniture
- gets up from a lying position to standing without adult help but may flop down on his bottom
- puts things in containers and then takes them out
- spends a long time fingering things and looking closely at them
- still puts things in his mouth
- has a good try at feeding himself and holding a cup
- places one brick on top of another - maybe more - to make a tower
- scribbles with a crayon and dabbles in food
- watches for a ball rolled to him and tries to push it back. Crawls after a ball

Intellectual development - learning, remembering, using information

- once moving about learns more at first hand by touching and bumping into things, having a closer look
- watches and imitates and tries to do what the adult does
- does not understand about too large, too small when fitting objects in containers - uses trial and error methods
- starts to have preferences
- notices tiny little details
- learns that 'things' have group names
- has little idea about cause and effect - why things happen and how to make them happen
- does not concentrate for long
- forgets
- has no idea of danger
- learns to say a few words but understands many more
- may slow down talking while learning to walk but still quietly absorbs what is said to him. When he does start to talk he will start using all these 'absorbed' words

He needs

- a safe environment; a playpen is useful, safety gates essential
- more words, more conversation from adults, even if he does not give back yet
- encouragement and praise
- more books and songs

Social development - adjusting to others, getting on with people

- may understand simple instructions: 'Give it to Mummy', 'Put your foot out'
- may use some words. This varies a good deal. Average words will be about ten
- plays with people by throwing things down to be picked up
- offers things to people and expects a simple 'thank you' in return - also expects to get back what he gave
- may seem aggressive with other children but does not mean to be
- has no idea of mine and yours and takes other people's things
- can wait a little while for attention but expects to get it before other children
- may find adults and other children are stopping him doing things, speaking firmly and saying "No" and this is a new experience
- in a strange situation looks to his mother for reassurance and does not go far away from her even when mobile

Emotional development

- can get into a great rage if adults stop him doing something he wants to do
- can be cooperative about being dressed if he wants to be - and very uncooperative if he does not
- can have quite a little tantrum if he is not given what he wants or something is taken from him - but soon forgets
- may show fear and distress in some situations - sudden loud noises, large noisy animals, noisy places

- can be surprised and distressed when people say 'No' - and is puzzled because he doesn't know why
- looks towards his mother when he needs reassurance or information
- is surprised and distressed if something he does makes another child cry

He needs

- long leisurely outings
- opportunity to see other children
- more adult-type toys - telephone, dustpan and brush

Figure 4: Age group characteristics at 18 months - 2 years

Physical Development - growing and developing

- can walk well and tries to trot - most children are flat-footed and walk fast rather than run - has difficulty in stopping
- bends down well to pick things up
- comes downstairs on his tummy with help and supervision
- becomes efficient at using push and pull toys
- learns to push a pedal - less tricycle or trundle toy with his feet
- throws a ball but does not aim very well. Has difficulty catching a ball
- makes heavier scribbles
- tries to take off screw lids and uses screw toys
- works very hard at his play and uses more energy than is strictly necessary
- builds a small tower of bricks
- is learning to be 'clean' but may have more difficulty in keeping dry

Intellectual development - learning, remembering, using information

- language is becoming an important tool. Starts to ask 'what dat?'
- repeats words adults say
- uses a good many words and short sentences
- understands a great deal of what is said to him
- picks out objects which adult names
- recognises objects from pictures and books
- may match colours but does not name them
- may learn to do or help with simple jigsaws
- looks for something which he knows is hidden
- starts to match holes and shapes
- curious about everything but does not concentrate for long
- starts to make choices and show preferences

He needs

- a good deal of companionship and attention
- lots of words, conversation and being listened to patiently

Social development - adjusting to others, getting on with people

- starts using more words to get information and attention. By two years has perhaps as many as 200 words
- chatters to himself while he plays
- plays in the company of other children rather than with them and needs careful supervision
- enjoys the company of his family
- enjoys 'rough' games with a competent, trusted adult
- listens carefully to what is going on around him and observes how others behave
- uses language to attract attention but if this does not work will grab at the person he wants attention from
- may interfere with older children's games and their attitude to him may change
- fetches things for other people when asked
- follows very simple instructions: "Fetch your shoes", "Sit in your chair for a drink"
- favourite activity becomes 'helping' adults

Emotional development - feeling and expressing feelings

- wants to do things for himself and gets very cross if not allowed to do so
- may get cross but can be loving and affectionate
- may be independent one day and dependent the next
- may show some fears and cry, hide his face or hide behind an object or person
- takes great pleasure in 'doing' and is not too concerned about failure
- can be very distressed if other children hurt him
- can be very distressed when other children cry because he has hurt them
- may 'explore' in an unfamiliar situation, but returns to his mother frequently then goes off again

He needs

- household work and routines to be slowed up so that he can help
- encouragement to do things for himself - which usually means allowing time for this

Figure 5: Age group characteristics at 2 -3 years

Physical development - growing and developing

- is more reliable at using a potty and staying dry
- starts to climb well
- kicks a ball, tries to jump, stand on one leg and walk along low balancing board
- may learn to somersault
- learns to come downstairs upright one step at a time
- learns to pedal a tricycle with feet on the pedals
- tries to manage dressing but needs help, more successful at undressing
- uses both hands for a long time yet but preference for one may start to show
- learns to use suitable tools, hammer, smaller screw toys, spanner, tries to use scissors
- builds well with bricks and learns to make a span bridge
- more positive with crayons and paintbrush

Intellectual development - learning, remembering, using information

- knows about and can point to own facial features and other people's. Knows names of head, feet, toes, arm
- copies what adults do and gets it wrong because he doesn't know enough
- interested in doing rather than making but interested in the result of his efforts
- still asks 'What's that?' and uses language to get more information
- experiments with colour and texture, learns more about shapes and colours. Sorts and matches but may not know names
- has an idea of large and small, fat and thin
- some simple pretend play
- plays for longer and asks for help. May go back to a game
- has some idea of time - before and after, when and tomorrow
- remembers songs, stories, rhymes
- can carry very simple messages
- very single-minded and can forget everything except what he is doing

He needs

- patience, tolerance and understanding
- plus a good deal of ingenuity in providing space, materials, opportunity for play
- opportunity to play alongside other children
- tact and care with a new-baby situation

Social development - adjusting to others, getting on with people

- wants to do things himself
- may say 'No' and be defiant
- very keen to have approval and asks for it
- plays well within the family but can be disruptive in a group
- enjoys being with other children and may play alongside rather than with
- not ready to share and may take things from other children
- learns more about protecting himself and his possessions
- may involve mother in pretend games - other children are usually not able enough to cooperate
- may have baby brother or sister about now - or older child goes to school so his experience may change
- when approaching 3 the parent and toddler group may not be able to offer enough sessions or the necessary activities
- he is not ready to stay alone in a new group but accepts somewhere new if mother goes too
- there are big differences between children which become apparent when they are in a group

Emotional development - feeling and expressing feelings

- may go through a period of tantrums
- there are tensions as he tries to become independent but still needs love and approval
- begins to understand other people have needs and rights but still sees his own needs as more important than anyone else's

- likes to laugh and enjoys silly songs and games
- can get very cross and frustrated when he can't do things and equally cross with inanimate objects
- may use play situations to 'play out' bad feelings so can appear to be wilfully destructive
- may become quiet, shy and wary with strangers
- may become jealous of the new baby, lonely when an older child goes to school
- stays close by his mother in a new situation. May leave her for a little while but looks back to her and becomes distressed if she has moved or gone

He needs

- more safety precautions to take account of increasing mobility, ability and strength
- more books, songs, stories
- consistency - if the answer is NO today it ought to be NO tomorrow too
- an appreciation by parents that he may be 'different', 'forward', or 'backward' - but so are other children

Figure 6: Age group characteristics at 3-4 years

Physical development - growing and developing

- usually reliable at being clean and dry
- can run and stop
- very good at using a tricycle, climbing, jumping. Uses a swing
- throws a ball further and harder but the aim may not be too accurate
- catches a ball with his whole body
- learns to cut with scissors and use tools
- learns to handle raw materials, tear paper
- gradually learns to use just the right amount of energy with hands, feet and body to achieve what he wants to do

Intellectual development - learning, remembering, using information

- may have as many as 900 words
- persistent in asking questions, asks for help
- 'chatters' to people he knows well in a way that demands an answer - 'We like cakes, don't we?'
- remembers a sequence of actions
- follows instructions provided not too many given at once
- gives very simple accounts of what he has done
- learns a good deal of information through practical play which helps develop concepts, basic skills and knowledge of materials
- experiments deliberately
- starts to use construction kits so has some idea of 'parts of things' and fitting together
- learns names of colours - still has difficulty with shapes - matches pictures
- knows about large, medium, small
- learns how to play with other children
- learns to modify what he does, and his language, to conform to a group

- learns to accept and add to other children's ideas
- has strong opinions on what he wants to eat, wear and do

He needs

- other children to play with
- encouragement to do things for himself, work things out for himself
- time with other members of the family
- time for activities like dressing, putting toys away
- more books, stories
- materials to make things with, tools

Social development - adjusting to others, getting on with people

- tries hard to dress himself and manage in the lavatory
- may be helpful with a new baby
- may deliberately be naughty
- wants to please. Responds well to praise and acknowledgment
- watches and copies other children
- may have difficulty in a group if he is at a different level of language development
- may be confused if a group has different 'rules' than the ones he is used to
- learns to play with age mates
- learns how to be accepted by older children - but will go and play on his own when he gets tired of this
- learns to stay without his mother in a nursery group
- may be quiet and watchful at first. May get into difficulties when he 'branches out'
- looks to adults for help if he has problems with other children
- in a group plays for short periods with many activities. Spends a lot of time watching

Emotional development - feeling and expressing feelings

- finds it easier to accept a change of position in the family as he becomes more competent and confident
- may still show some jealousy of a new baby
- may be very upset if not allowed to do what older brothers and sisters do
- may see mother's insistence that he does things for himself as rejection but will try to do them quite happily in a group where other children do
- becomes ready to stay without his mother in a group but there may be a 'set-back' when he starts really joining in
- may get cross with other children
- may appeal to adults for help: 'He won't let me have....'
- quarrels tend to be forgotten and ignored quite quickly
- may be apprehensive of bigger children and boisterous play and watches from a safe distance or near an adult

He needs

- more opportunity to develop body skills
- more adults to get to know

- to be taught 'good' behaviour and rewarded for 'good' behaviour - not sweets, but praise and acknowledgement
- to be given small responsibilities and acceptance of the standard he can reach with these

Figure 7: Age group characteristics at 4-5 years

Physical development - growing and developing

- becomes competent in attending to his own needs (but can't manage shoelaces and complicated fastenings on clothes)
- very competent physically; climbs, runs, jumps, balances
- better at ball games but not yet able to use a bat well
- tries to hop and skip but has difficulty
- hand skills improve, can use smaller tools and get better at making things and handling materials
- may enjoy outings to a swimming bath
- may learn to ride a bicycle

Intellectual development - learning, remembering, using information

- may use about 1,500 words
- asks what, how, when, who, and also why
- can concentrate for longer
- learns more about spatial relationships (three-dimensional thinking) which allows for more complicated building and construction
- thinks first about what to do then does it - then elaborates
- will go back to an unfinished game
- shows interest in more complicated books. Can follow a story and thinks about it
- usually good at suitable jigsaws
- knows colours and can pick out a coloured object when asked, sort into colours and give names of primary colours and some others
- recognises and matches shapes but may have difficulty in naming them, has difficulty copying them
- becomes able at 'pre-learning' skills - some children interested in reading
- may develop a special interest
- interested in what adults do and watches carefully, asks questions and wants to help

He needs

- help with rivalry which goes too far
- acknowledgement of effort as well as achievement
- tactful help for a non or slow achiever

Social development - adjusting to others, getting on with people

- starts to use language to negotiate, manipulate and lead
- watches what other children do, comments on it, tries to do the same - or better
- confident, may boast, brag, and 'boss' others

- pretend play can become elaborate and sustained for longer with a larger group
- may have special friends
- learns to take turns and becomes fierce about other children observing rules
- may tattle-tale, blame other children for his own misdemeanours
- may copy swearing and other undesirable behaviour
- can cooperate in groups which form and re-form
- may suffer rejection temporarily, reject others in the same way
- may be deliberately disobedient
- can be expected to observe reasonable social rules when with adults
- non-English-speaking children usually make good progress in an English speaking group
- in a group plays for longer periods. Spend less time watching than 3-year-olds

Emotional Development - Feeling and expressing feelings

- can be selfish but will respond to the distress of others
- may become an attention seeker if he does not get attention naturally
- may become aggressive in words or deeds - or both
- doesn't forget quarrels so easily
- reacts badly to 'You can't play' but does it to other children
- may get cross if younger children spoil his game
- pretend and fantasy play may reflect direct experience or something which has worried him or which he has not understood
- imaginary playmate may become evident
- gets better at deferring immediate wishes in order to have something better later
- can lose confidence if he 'fails' too often

He needs

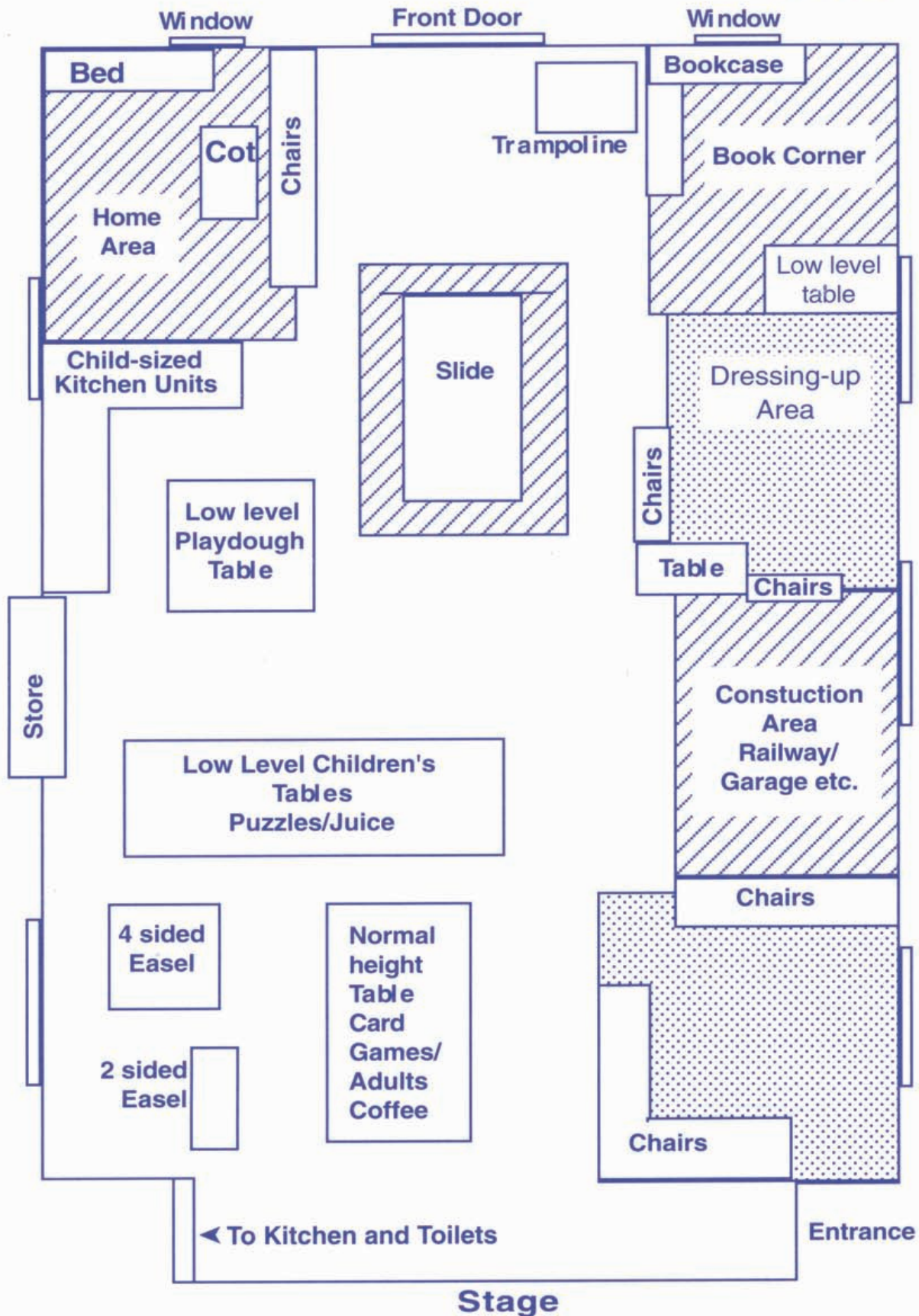
- more complicated play activities and space and freedom from interruption to pursue them
- part-time attendance at a nursery group. Will make more progress if daily sessions follow each other rather than being spaced out over the week, because he can remember what he was doing yesterday

PLAY WITH A PURPOSE FOR UNDER-7S by Elizabeth Matterson (Penguin, 1965) Copyright © Elizabeth Matterson, 1965, 1973, 1975, 1989.

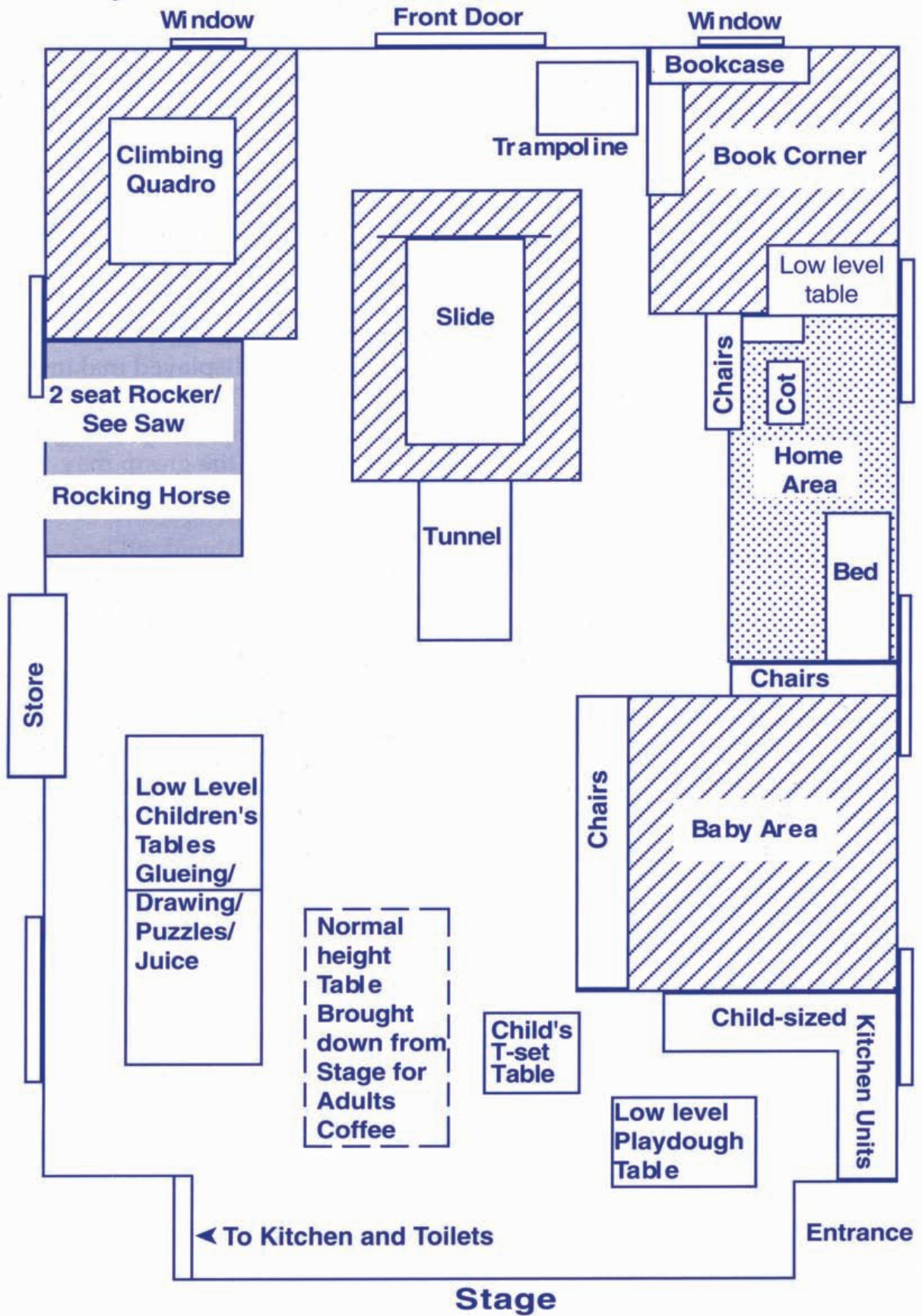


Appendix C

Thursday



Tuesday



Appendix D

Dough recipes

Playdough is one of the basic and most satisfying of materials used in the pre-school group. Variations on the following recipes are limitless.

Though recipes usually work with 1 1/2 kg flour, this quantity may prove difficult to mix. Unless very big lumps are needed for the children to work with, half that amount will be enough for a group of up to six children.

In general, dough is made up of varying proportions of flour to water plus salt, cooking oil and colouring. It can be made with just flour and water. It will be stretchy but will not keep long, as the smell will soon indicate this. The addition of salt puts this right but does tend to make the dough brittle. This, in turn, can be partly prevented by adding cooking oil which gives it a more pliable consistency. Doughs made with salt will stay moist as the salt draws moisture from the atmosphere but, when not in use, it needs to be kept in a polythene bag in an airtight tin. Like this it will keep for half a term. Colouring can be added either by using powder paint (mix it dry with the flour, or make it up with water first and then add as the dough is mixed) or by using food colouring which is much more intense and needs to be added drop by drop.

As the colours of the dough are varied it may be that some are particularly popular or evoke strong reactions. Watch the children when presented with a dark brown or black dough. Although they may use it as coal or tarmac, many will find a pale colour more inviting. Sometimes leaving it without any added colouring might give them new ideas.

No cook playdough

Version 1:

1^{1/2} kg self-raising flour
Water (approx. 750 ml)

Makes stretchy dough that will not keep.

Version 2:

1 cup salt
2 cups plain flour
1 cup water (approx)

Children can easily make this. Thinned down with water it makes useful fingerpaint, or paste for sticking.

Version 3:

1¹/₂ kg plain flour
1¹/₂ kg salt
2 tablespoons oil
Water as required

This is a tough dough with a nice gleam, easily cut with pastry cutters. The oil makes it pliable. Knead well for best results.

Version 4:

1¹/₂ kg self-raising flour
1¹/₂ kg salt
Water as required

Not sticky, good for modelling, can be dried hard in the oven and painted.

Cooked playdough

2 cups plain flour
1 cup salt
2 cups water
2 tablespoons oil
2 teaspoons cream of tartar
1 dessertspoon powder paint or a few drops food colouring

Cook mixture in pan over medium heat, stirring all the time to prevent sticking. Remove from heat when mixture comes away from sides of pan. Knead and store in airtight container. Keeps very well.

Microwave playdough

2 cups of plain flour
2 cups of salt
2 cups of water
Few drops of colour
4 teasp cream of tartar
2 teasp cooking oil

Mix together. Cook at High for 1 minute. Stir well. Repeat until mixture pulls away from sides of bowl (approx. 2¹/₂ mins).

Magic model mix

2 cups salt
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup water
1 cup cornflour
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup water

Mix salt and $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of water in a pan. Stir constantly over medium heat for 3-4 min. or until bubbles form. Remove from heat. Immediately mix cornflour and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of cold water with the hot mixture. Stir quickly to a stiff consistency. If it does not thicken stir over heat for 1 minute. Quantity made is approx. 800 gms. Knead the dough until pliable and store in a tightly closed container. If exposed it will harden in 36 hours or it can be baked in an oven at 180°C (Gas No. 4). It can be painted when hard.

Craft clay

1 cup cornflour
2 cups bicarbonate of soda
 $1\frac{1}{4}$ cups water

Combine ingredients and cook over medium heat, stirring constantly until thickened to dough-like consistency. Turn onto a pastry board and knead lightly. Cover with damp cloth until cool, then shape as desired, keeping unused portion covered with aluminium foil. When exposed to the air this clay will dry very hard and is great for making pendants, plaques, etc., which then can be painted and glazed.



Appendix E

Recommended reading

SPPA's Running a Toddler Group - a Code of Practice

SPPA's Publications and Resources Sales List contains further useful information.

Ready Steady Baby (NHS Health Scotland)

Visit <http://www.readysteadybaby.org.uk>

Ready Steady Toddler (NHS Health Scotland)

Visit <http://www.readysteadytoddler.org.uk>

Play@home

The programme provides all families in Scotland with three books covering from birth to 5.

Visit <http://www.maternal-and-early-years.org.uk/topic/0-3-years/playhome>

Pre-Birth to Three: Positive Outcomes for Scotland's Children and Families

© Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2010 ISBN: 978-184399-184-7

Visit <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/earlyyears/prebirthtothree/nationalguidance/index.asp>

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