

Schemas: Learning through play

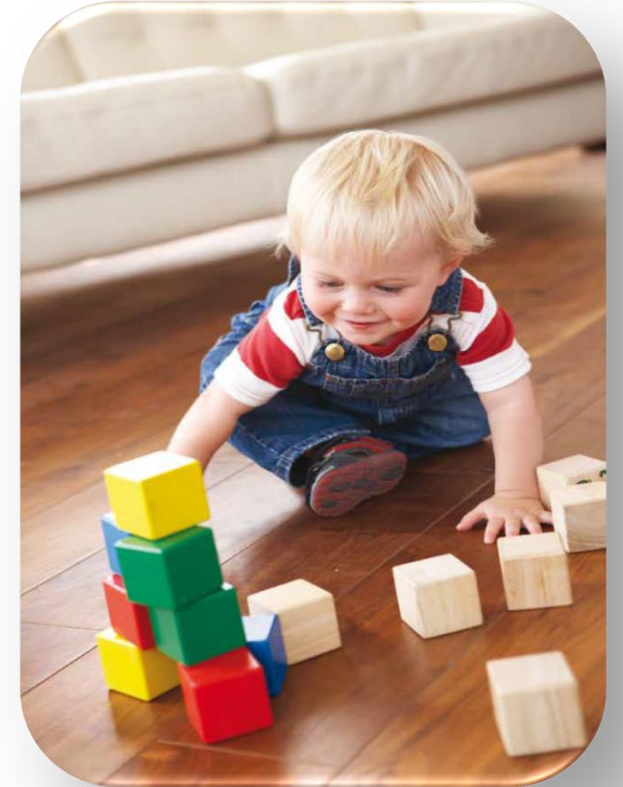


Schemas: learning through play

Have you ever watched your child at play and wondered why they are continually repeating certain actions?

You can maybe recall watching your child continually drop toys from their pram or highchair, or fill up bags and boxes and move things around different parts of your home.

If so, it is possible that your child is engaging in schematic play. So let's find out more about what this means.



Schematic Play

Schematic play happens when babies, toddlers and young children are involved in repeated actions or certain behaviours as they explore the world around them and try to find out how things work.

We call these specific actions or behaviours ‘Schemas’. They can vary from child to child and some children may never display schematic play or behaviours.

Very young children benefit from opportunities to repeat and practise different actions. This helps their brain development and learning as they grow and develop. For example, actions of up and down, going from side to side, and rotating will support children when they begin to make marks, draw and eventually write.



Types of Schema

There are many types of schemas that children often display. Some will have a predominant schema such as showing an interest in things that move up and down and round-about.

Others will show more than one at a time. For example, they may hide objects or themselves, wrap things up, and enjoy connecting and disconnecting toys.

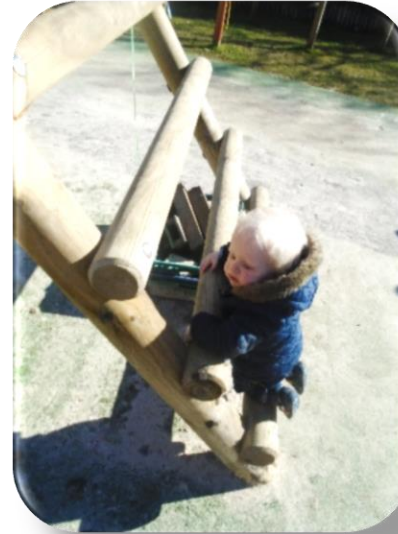


Lets take a look at some of the more common schemas that you might see your child display in their play.

Trajectory Schema

The trajectory schema is one of the earliest schemas observed in babies. They are fascinated with how they, and objects move.

Children will often throw objects or food from their pram or highchair. They climb and jump in puddles and enjoy exploring running water.



Chase and catch bubbles.

On a windy day play with scarves and ribbons.

Water play with different containers including funnels.

Throw balls or sponges at a target.

Play on swings and trees.

Transporting Schema

Children enjoy repeatedly moving resources around, from one place to another. They will carry many items at a time using their hands, pockets, containers, baskets or transporters.

Ideas for playing and learning alongside your child.



While in the garden or out and about in your community, gather twigs, fir cones, sticks and leaves. Children will enjoy exploring, sorting and transporting using buckets, boxes, bags, baskets and wheeled toys such as prams or trolleys.

Enclosing Schema

Children show an interest in enclosed spaces. They construct fences and barricades to enclose toy animals or themselves. They may build a train track and put toy animals in the centre.



Ideas for playing and learning alongside your child.

Play with tents, tunnels and cardboard boxes.

Play hide and seek.

Make dens with blankets or bits of material. Outside you can use fallen branches with leaves, logs, sticks, willow and string.

Rotational Schema

Children showing a rotational schema may display a preference for turning taps on and off, winding and unwinding string, and playing with hoops.

They may also be fascinated with the physical experience of twirling and twisting their body, spinning around on the spot, or rolling themselves down a hill.

They have an interest in things that turn, such as wheels and windmills. They enjoy rolling tyres around, turning lids and watching the washing machine on a spin cycle.



Ideas for playing and learning alongside your child.

Explore toys with wheels and cogs.

Use different sized balls for throwing, catching and kicking.

Play with rattles, windmills, roundabouts and spinning toys.

Enveloping Schema

Children with an enveloping schema are interested in covering and hiding items, including themselves. They will enjoy dressing up, and filling and emptying bags and containers with different objects. This is often the time when you will lose items!

Ideas for playing
and learning
alongside your
child.

Wrap presents.



Swaddle dolls and teddies with blankets.

Use everyday objects such as pegs, curtain rings, keys and fir cones to wrap, hide and fill containers and bags with.

Dress up with scarves, hats and bits of material.

Connecting Schema

Children displaying the connecting schema want to join items together. They find resources like string to tie things. They connect and disconnect toys such as rail tracks.

They enjoy construction toys, and doing arts and crafts where they can glue and stick pieces together.



Make jewellery by threading pasta onto string.

Create models using junk materials.

Peg up cards, photographs or washing.

Orientation Schema

Children like to turn objects and themselves around and upside down, to get a view from under the table or from the branch of a tree. They may bend over and look at the world backwards through their legs. They enjoy seeing things from a different view when exploring using cardboard tubes, binoculars or a magnifying glass.



Lots of energetic play to climb, roll and tumble.

Visits to local parks to use climbing frames and explore trees.



I spy games and mini beast hunts in the garden or park using binoculars bought or homemade out of cardboard tubes.

References

The content of this resource was adapted from the work of Dr Stella Louis who is a freelance early years consultant, trainer and author. We hope you have enjoyed finding out a bit more about Schemas. If you want to know some more:

Louis S. Featherstone S. Macgraw L. Hayes L. Beswick C. (2013). *Understanding Schemas in Young Children: Again! Again! London: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC.*

[Schemas | Dorset Nexus](#)



Education Scotland

Denholm House

Almondvale Business Park

Almondvale Way

Livingston EH54 6GA

T +44 (0)131 244 5000

E enquiries@educationscotland.gsi.gov.uk

For Scotland's children, with Scotland's parents