

PLAYING AND EXPLORING - ENGAGEMENT

Finding out and exploring

Sensory play is an important part of learning for young children as through their senses they make sense of the world around them and begin to explore naturally. A stimulating environment is vital to ensure that this area of learning is maximised to its full potential. Sensory play includes activities that stimulate children's senses such as sight, sound, smell, taste or touch. By providing this type of activity children will learn more about the world around them in a natural way, through their senses.

Playing with what they know

Children need time to repeat actions to practice skills learnt and be allowed to play with things they enjoy. They will enjoy playing with toys that are familiar to them and toys that they see others using, and engaging them in imaginative play. Dressing up and role play and small world areas can be beneficial for this

Being willing to have a go

Activities should be age and stage appropriate to the child's development, yet challenging, therefore building up their confidence to try new things. Children are naturally curious but may be quite shy to try new things. Offer support and encouragement and model how to do things if you can as they may not know what to do. Once children practice new skills they will become better at mastering them once they try things over and over again. Children will vary in their level of involvement in some activities and may prefer some types of play over others; this is down to personal choice, if a child really does not want to do something they should never be forced to.

ACTIVE LEARNING - MOTIVATION

Being involved and concentrating

Children sometimes need help to remain focused on activity, there should be a balance of child initiated and adult led activity and with careful planning these can be incorporated within the daily routines. Young children do not have a great concentration span and may get easily distracted. Always make sure that activities are age appropriate so that children are not being set up to fail at something. It is far better to give them an easily accomplished task that gets progressively harder so that they can gain any new skills required slowly.

Keeping on trying

Adults need to support children to complete tasks that are age and stage appropriate. Some children they may find activities hard to master so perseverance is key. When we observe young children we find out what they like to do and if they enjoy certain aspects of play. This helps us to plan for their interests and makes learning more tailored to the child's needs. Learning new skills can be frustrating for young children so helping them to keep on trying and stick with it will be beneficial to them.

Enjoying achieving what they set out to do

Enjoying achieving what they set out to do – praise and encouragement should be given to each child even in the smallest of tasks to help build self-esteem.

Again, by observing the children in the setting you will find out what it is that they like and what they need to help them to progress towards their next steps. Providing fun activities and experiences will make this happen more easily as they child will be enjoying the experience.

CREATING AND THINKING CRITICALLY - THINKING

Having their own ideas

Children should be given a variety of resources so that they may self-select and use their imaginations. Open-ended craft activities are an excellent way to help children to express themselves and use their imagination. For children, creativity is about the process and not always the end product that counts. Often when we plan for play activities we have a set goal in mind that we wish the children to gain from the activity however, children will often take the activity to another level by adding their own imaginative processes in sometimes ways in which we had not intended. This shows that they are becoming independent and imaginative and should be encouraged where possible.

Making links

Themes can be followed through within all areas of the curriculum to embed the learning objectives – for example – if you are having a 'Growing' theme then why not make a garden centre shop in the home corner. This way children can re-enact experiences they may have had outside of the setting. If they have been to a garden centre they can pretend to play at selling plants and other things they may find in a garden centre.

Choosing ways to do things

Children need to be given choices and opportunities and encouragement to try new things. Usually in a setting there are places and zones for certain activities which are comforting to the children as they know where to go if they want to play with something and will know where they are. However, it is also a good thing to try spontaneous activity and large group work or circle time. Some activities are better done outdoors and some indoors – let the children decide as it can make for a new dimension on what it is that they do in the space.