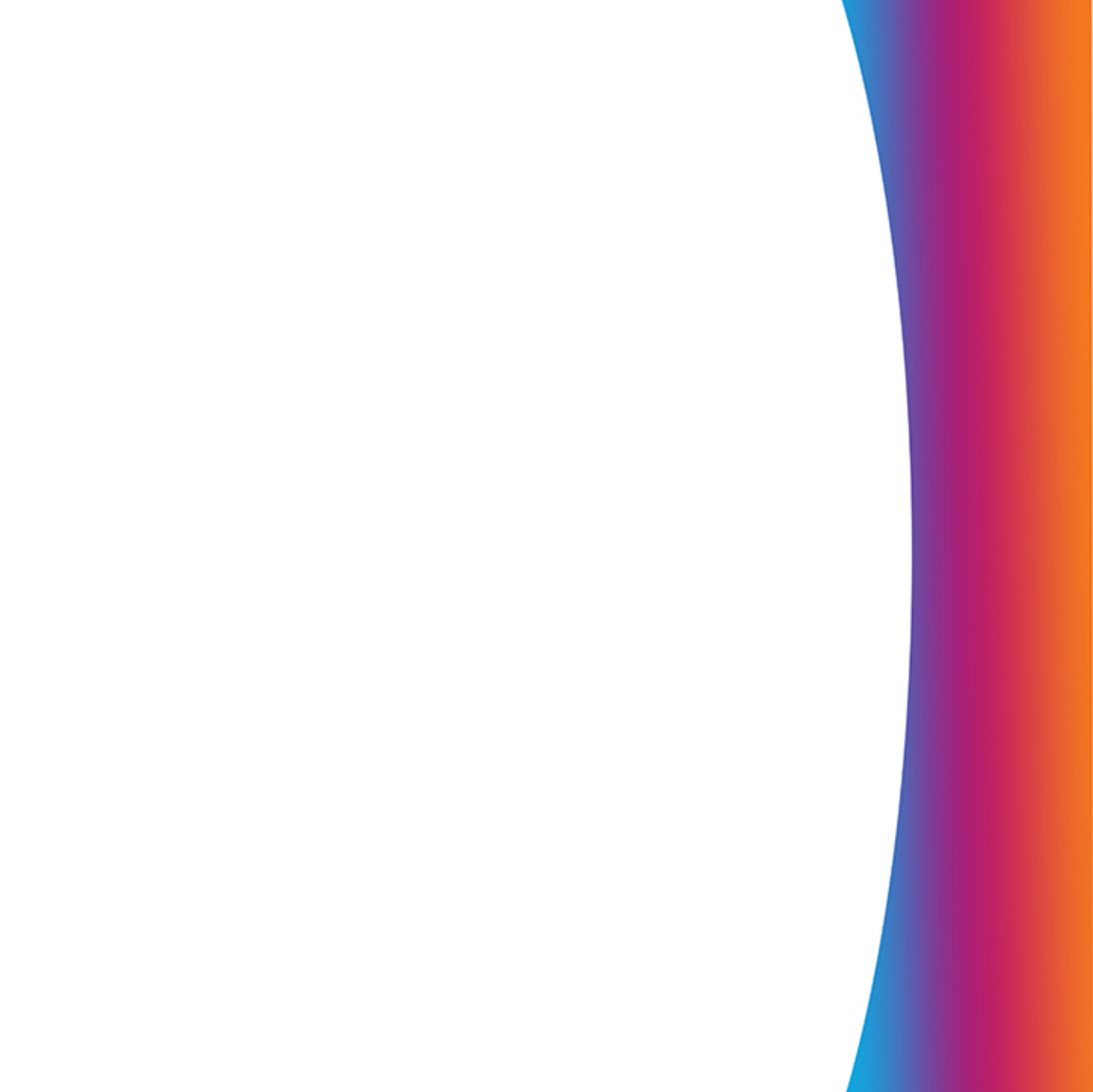


Let the Children Play

Play Activities for Young Children





Let the Children Play

Play Activities for Young Children

The National Childhood Network would like to acknowledge and thank Early Years - the organisation for young children, for the inspiration and information they have provided for this resource from their publication 'I Want to Play'. We would also like to thank the parents and children for permission to use images of children during play, especially the parents of little Eoin O'Neill, from Co Monaghan who lost his life tragically in 2014. Eoin is featured playing with gloop on page 23. His happy face shows how much he loved playing with gloop and how it absorbed his full attention as it trickled through his fingers. We hope in capturing this happy picture of Eoin parents will see how beneficial materials like this are to young children.





National Childhood Network
2015

Let the Children Play

Play Activities for Young Children

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Introduction

Play Activities for Young Children

In producing this resource we aim to provide practical ideas for play activities that may be carried out by young children in the home or in an early childhood setting. We hope engagement in the range of activities suggested will encourage children to be active and have fun. Young children develop and learn through their experiences with materials, adults and other children in their environment. Providing opportunities for children to play with a variety of materials and through simple games from birth is important. Play is central to their health, well-being, learning and development. Parents are a child's first play partners. Children and parents who play together in early childhood develop strong relationships and bonds that carry both children and adults through life, especially in difficult times.

The play activities experienced in early childhood settings enhance those experienced in the home *"When children and adults treat play as seriously as it deserves, we feel a joy that stays with us. It's the things we play with and the people who help us to play that makes a difference to our lives. Childhood play is crucial for social, emotional, physical and mental development. While all forms of play are important for development, imaginative, creative and spontaneous play is the most essential type. Children must play in order to develop and the more they play the more they develop."* Play Therapist, Dr Steward Browne

Early childhood is an important time for developing children's habits, behaviours and healthy lifestyles. Developing the habit of playing as part of child's healthy lifestyle is one that will enhance children's sense of joy and well-being, develop their physical skills, and build confidence, concentration and control as well as the development of their imagination, creativity, speech and language.

Parents, families and early childhood educators play a key role in introducing children to valuable play experiences. Providing for interesting play experiences according to the child's age and stage of development is a real pleasure for children. Having the resources and materials ready to provide for play can be time consuming. Having the time to play can also be a problem given our busy lives today. However taking the time to provide for and engage children in a variety of play activities is a worthwhile experience and one that will have lasting benefits for children and families.

What is Play?

‘Let your children play’!

Plato
427-347 BC

Play is often called the ‘work’ of children

Research tells us that there is a powerful association between achievement in later life and parental involvement in children's early years. This begins as soon as the child is born, through positive interactions and play. Children learn so much from play; it teaches them social skills such as sharing, taking turns, self-regulation and tolerance of others. Through play children learn and develop as individuals; play is the most powerful medium through which children learn.



When a child engages in play, whether it's rolling a ball back and forth with a parent or dressing up and imagining they are a doctor, they are developing important social skills like learning to take turns, how to co-operate and get along with others, as well as developing their creativity and imagination.



Why is play so important for children?

Play is considered so important to a child's development that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) has established it as every child's right. It is the child's way of making sense of the world – a learning tool that engages, motivates, challenges and pleases.

Play prepares children for life

Children are born with an innate drive to learn – they want to be seen as smart, intelligent and capable people who can do things, who know things and who are well connected with family and friends.

Play gives them an opportunity to demonstrate all that they have observed and learned about the real world and at the same time the opportunity to experiment with how they can make that learning useful in their own world.

The Benefits of Play

'Play is central to the well-being, development and learning of the young child'

Siolta

A love of learning

A sense of wonder

Speech and language

Creativity and imagination

Concentration and perseverance

Physical skills and co-ordination

A sense of joy and well-being

Spontaneity

Confidence and self esteem

Resilience and coping skills

Healing

Empathy and compassion

Increased brain development

Sense of touch and non verbal socialisation skills

Positive feelings towards others

Learning about the world



Types of Play

Play helps children to develop a broader range of skills and understandings

Pretend play

Pretend play or dramatic and fantasy play provides opportunities for children to imagine, create and experience a sense of wonder. Children explore familiar experiences as they take on the roles of other people in their family or community. They explore possibilities, go on make believe adventures, create imaginary characters and use objects to represent their ideas (e.g. a box to represent a house or a paper roll to represent a microphone).

Games with rules

In the beginning children often play by their own rather flexible rules! In time they also partake in more conventional games with 'external' rules. Language is an important part of games with rules as children explain, question and negotiate the rules. Rules are often an important part of pretend play where children negotiate rules about what can and can't be done.

Even babies and toddlers can partake in these, as peek-a-boo and turn-taking games have rules.

Creative play

Creative play involves children exploring and using their bodies and materials to make and do things and to share their feelings, ideas and thoughts. They enjoy being creative by dancing, painting, playing with junk and recycled materials, working with play-dough and clay, and using their imaginations.



Information from:

Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework

ncca.ie/aisteartoolkit

Language play

Language play involves children playing with sounds and words. It includes unrehearsed and spontaneous manipulation of these, often with rhythmic and repetitive elements. Children like playing with language – enjoying patterns, sounds and nonsense words. They also love jokes and funny stories.



Types of Play

Physical play

Physical play involves children developing and refining bodily movements and control. It includes whole body and limb movements, co-ordination and balance. These activities involve physical movements for their own sake and enjoyment. Children gain control over their gross motor skills first before refining their fine motor skills.

Exploratory play involves children using physical skills and their senses to find out what things feel like and what can be done with them. Children explore their own bodies and then they explore the things in their environment.

Manipulative play involves practising and refining motor skills. This type of play enhances physical dexterity and hand-eye co-ordination. Over time children need to experience a range of different levels of manipulation if they are to refine their motor skills. This type of play includes manipulating objects and materials.

Constructive play involves building something using natural and manufactured materials. As children develop, this type of play can become more complex and intricate.

Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework shows how important play is and gives lots of practical ideas for playing with babies, toddlers and young children.

Downloadable tips sheets are available providing activity ideas for each of the play types.

ncca.ie/aisteartoolkit

For more information on Aistear, visit ncca.ie/earlylearning

The Parent's Role in Play

As a parent, your ability to play is just as important to a child's development as your ability to care for and protect your child

A young child thrives on positive adult attention

Jiggling your baby on your knee is play. Baby enjoys this activity not just because of the movement, but because you are smiling, cooing and there is eye contact. You are both involved in the activity.

Children learn through repetition

Parents can provide lots of opportunities for children to practice repetition. Repeating facial expressions, songs, rhymes, finger plays, games involving body movements are all ways that can help your baby or young child play. Babies and young children need repetition to help them remember information and build memory. Repeating actions will allow your child to practice again and again until the skill is mastered. Repetition is a toddler's way of learning and building trust.

To a young child any activity can be a play activity

Regardless of the activity, most activities can have a playful aspect to them. Whether it is having a nappy changed, getting ready to eat or ready for bed, tidying up or having a bath, it helps if adults adopt a playful approach to achieving the task on hand. Children respond well when communicated with in a playful manner. Engaging with children playfully can increase the sense of enjoyment in the activity and can promote higher levels of engagement and motivation. Without even knowing it children learn through their play.

One of the greatest attributes of play is that it provides many planned and unplanned opportunities for learning and development. Involve children in your chores. Talk to them about the colour, shape, smell and feel of vegetables as you prepare them. Let them help sort washing, colours and pairing socks.

As you wash up, put bubbles on a surface beside you for your child to experience and play with by making patterns, discovering the characteristics and properties. Talk with your child about what is happening to the bubbles as they touch and move them about. How do they feel? What happens when they burst? Simple spontaneous play activities can have considerable opportunities for learning.

Let the Children Play

Play Activities for Young Children

Activities with Babies



Growing up with Play?

Newborn to around 3 Months

Observing facial expressions are great fun for babies and very stimulating. Concentrating on mobiles that are bright and shiny and move are great practice for focusing their vision. Eventually the baby will reach out and grasp at things. It takes a baby a lot of practice to get hands and eyes to work together.

From about 3 Months

Small, safe things to swipe at and grasp are still important, also objects to hold and investigate. Remember, everything will go into the mouth! Tummy time exercises encourage head control but your lap is ideal for encouraging baby to stand. Rhymes for counting toes and fingers give babies experience of different parts of their bodies. Babies adore all this sensory experience and social engagement.

From about 6 Months

As well as the things your baby already plays with he/she will like items that they can manipulate. Provide a saucepan to bang with a spoon, or use the tube from a kitchen roll with items that can disappear into the tube and then re-appear. Encourage him/her to crawl by getting down on the floor and rolling things for them to chase. Provide things that roll when they are pushed, like a ball, and things that don't, like a block.

From about 1 Year

Toys for this age group are elaborate and can be expensive. When buying, make sure toys are age appropriate and check for the European safety symbol **CE**. They should be hardwearing and reliable. Toys to push, pull, ride on, stack, fit together and hammer will get lots of use. Let your child play with a friend's toys or play with some at the Parent and Toddler group to see what he/she likes best before making a purchase.

The box the toy comes in can be as exciting as the toy at first! Don't forget household items can provide just as much play value as expensive purchases. See the information on the 'Treasure Basket'.



Play Activities for Babies



Jelly Fun

Make a couple of packets of jelly, when set chop up and put into a container. Encourage baby to explore the jelly, then extend their play by adding objects to fill and empty or hide



Put on a CD and help the baby clap hands, clap feet, bicycle their legs. Show the baby how you clap hands, wriggle fingers, twirl, and bob up and down



Copy Games

Make an exaggerated smacking kiss, pop your finger out of the side of your mouth, or make a b-b-b noise by blowing air out of your mouth while wiggling your finger on your lips. Wait to see if the baby tries to make a similar type of sound back to you. Be patient and keep repeating



Stimulating Touch

Using a large paddling pool or container for baby to sit in add paper from your paper shredder or scrunch-up small balls of clean paper for baby to explore in their own space

Aeroplanes

Let the baby follow things with their eyes - move your face, a rattle, or a coloured toy in front of them. Play aeroplanes with your hands - fly through the air and land on the baby's tummy!

Bells on your Toes
Securely sew bells on to a pair of socks, so they make noise when the baby kicks their legs

Play Activities for Babies

Copy the Coos

Follow the babies cue, listen, and when baby makes coo-ing noises such as a coo, a raspberry, or a tongue-click, then imitate it back. You might also try making a series of rhythmic tongue clicks, and see if the baby responds to the different beats

Copy Games

Hold the baby close, babies focus best at around 20-35 cm, make eye contact then slowly poke your tongue out. Do this every 20 seconds or so. It may take a minute or so but after a while, you will notice the baby copying you. Make other facial expressions, such as a big smile or wide open mouth



Tummy Time

Using a large clean cardboard box, encourage baby to investigate. Have patience and let the baby explore at their own pace. You could tempt baby to the box by placing a favourite toy just inside



Large cushions and tents make interesting places to crawl and investigate



Early Paint Experience

Use large sheets of paper on a protected surface. Let baby experience the medium of paint with hands and feet

Play Activities for Babies

Fabric Basket



Into a basket gather a collection of different types of fabric - satin, wool, hessian, silk, voile, flannel, lace, velvet, etc... Introduce one at a time and allow your baby to hold and feel. Emphasise texture verbally - holding to face and saying 'oh, this is lovely and soft' etc... Get baby to hold to their face also and see the response to different textures



Crawling Sensation

Use a thick piece of cardboard about the size of the baby, or a small changing mat, preferably on a carpeted surface. Place the baby on top of it, tummy down, with arms out in front or to the sides. Gently slide the cardboard forward and back, to give the sensation of crawling forward



Water Play

Babies love playing with water, clear, coloured or with bubbles. Using bubbles, babies can play 'hide and seek' with objects



Looking Fun

Take the baby outside and hold them where they can see things moving - streamers, trees, washing on the line, clouds, other children playing

Play Activities for Babies

Hang noise-making toys, rattles or small bottles containing pasta or rice where the baby can kick them



Looking in the Mirror

Hold the baby, or place securely in front of a mirror so they can explore what they look like



Support baby with your legs, make noises or sing to encourage baby to copy you. Do gentle exercises with babies legs in time to the rhythm



Mobiles

Hang colourful, and black and white things that move over the baby's cot



Play Activities for Babies

Scent Session

What you'll need: jars of cinnamon, nutmeg or vanilla; perfumes or sachets; a ripe banana; a slice of orange or lemon.

Sit down with the baby in your lap (use a baby blanket to snuggle) and jars of the various fragrant ingredients on a table or stool in front of you. Pass each item under their nose, watching the baby's face to see the expression. Try this activity every few weeks as the baby gets older and see how reactions change.

Scented Playdough

Make one large ball of play-dough and divide into four or five small balls. To each ball add a different essential oil or essence. As older babies are supported in exploring the texture of the dough bring their attention to the different smells.

Colour can also be added to enhance identification of smell with colour ie: yellow colour with lemon oil, red colour with strawberry essence, pink colour with rose oil, purple colour with lavender oil, etc...



Tickle Songs

'This little piggy' or 'Round and round the garden' with the babies feet or hands. Hold the baby close on your knee and gently uncurl their toes or fingers as you sing. Repeat the song a couple of times until the baby starts to giggle in excited anticipation of the tickle at the end



Ball Bath

Babies and toddlers filling and emptying and climbing in and out

Play Activities for Babies



Place collections of interesting objects on a settee or low table to entice baby to crawl to and pull themselves up to explore



Wet Textures

Water, jelly, wet pasta, mashed potato, cornflour, etc... Provide tray, scoops, cups and colanders and encourage exploration of texture. This game can be enhanced by hiding small-play people in the messy play substance and asking child to look for them

Whole Body Sensorial Experience

Lay your baby on their side at the edge of soft blanket on the floor. Kneel beside them and gently and slowly fold and roll the baby into the blanket, initially rolling them away from you as you sing 'Roll roll roll you up like a sausage roll', using gentle pressing motions from behind then, as you roll and unfold them back to you, sing 'Roll roll roll you back like a sausage roll', sung to the air of 'Row row row the boat'. This is very calming activity or it can be done a little faster and more robustly with an older child



Peek a Boo and Exercise

Get babies attention and eye contact by playing peek a boo games with babies feet. Use exaggerated facial expressions and 'boo' noises, or sing to make the game fun



Play Activities for Babies

Finger Puppets

Lay the baby on its back. Using a set of finger puppets put a finger puppet on the pointer finger of each hand. Bring your fingers slowly into the baby's line of sight and wait until the baby focuses on the faces. Then, speaking slowly, introduce each puppet. Something simple like "Hello, I'm Dino the dog". As each puppet speaks, bend your finger forward so the puppet bows to the baby. Wait a moment, as if the baby is answering, then continue conducting a one-sided conversation between the baby and each puppet. Finally, have the puppets form a parade, bobbing up and down.



The outdoors is full of rich stimulus and sources of learning for very young babies and even the very youngest will respond to the difference in the outdoor environment. The sights of outdoors will interest and intrigue them. As their head and body control develops they will turn towards what they see and reach out to whatever catches their attention. Being placed safely outside for sleep or rest periods gives babies and young children fresh air and an environment filled with new things to look at when they are awake.

Outdoor learning provides a different perspective on the indoor world and extends their interests to its distinctive features such as leaves, trees, butterflies, birds and natural objects such as stones, rocks and logs.

Toddlers and Older Children

Many of the activities in this section can be used for toddlers; even older children enjoy playing with some of these materials, if they are adapted to suit their age and stage.



Babies love the sensory experience of playing with water



Treasure Baskets

Look around your home to make up these simple, but valuable treasure baskets for babies and toddlers. Limit the items to between five and fifteen at a time, and rotate them every couple of weeks to keep baby interested. Some items may not hold your baby's interest one week but may do when introduced at a later time.

Observe as your baby explores the items, merely watching and supporting.

Most babies are interested in discovery baskets from around the time they are sitting unsupported until around 18 months, but toddlers will often be engaged with items for much longer.

SAFETY

Objects must be large enough not to be swallowed and free from sharp edges or anything else that might be harmful when they are touched and quite possibly mouthed by a young child



Contrast Treasure Basket
Use natural objects and household items for baby to explore and investigate



Treasure Baskets

Some suggested objects for the treasure basket

Baby brushes	Old fashioned clothes pegs
Tooth brushes	Sticks
Scrubbing brushes	Slotted spoons
Nail brushes	Balls of wool
Bottle brushes	Nesting dolls
Pastry brushes	Spice jars
Over-sized makeup brushes	Balls
Shaving brushes	Fallen leaves
Thick paintbrushes	Calculators
Pine cones	Garlic presses
Measuring spoons	River rocks
Wooden spoons	Coin purses
Jar lids	Bracelets
Whisks	Powder puffs
Wooden blocks	Hair rollers
Scarves	Scrunchie hair bands
Knitted items	Mini bean bags
Fabric swatches	Small rolling pins
Felted wool balls	Handheld mirrors
Pompoms	Baby toys
Small toy animals	Drums
Cloth napkins	Wooden massagers
Coloured ribbons	Rubber ducks
Bandanas	Small board books
Baby socks and hats	Fabric books
Mittens	Puppets
Sea sponges	Coasters
Kitchen sponges	Doilies
Pan scrubbers	Rattles
Whole fruits and vegetables	Silicone muffin cups
Tea strainers	Funnels
Large shells	Bark
Hand bells	Curtain rings
Maracas	Potato mashers
Nesting Tupperware	Egg cartons
Lids from pots and pans	Small metal pans
Driftwood	Cookie cutters
Pumice	Leather wallets
Empty tins	Silk ties
Feathers	Empty salt and pepper shakers
Old CDs	Walnuts
Small wooden toys	Paper towel rolls

Gourds and mini pumpkins
Sachets with fragrant herbs inside
Baby food jars securely closed with beads inside
An empty tissue box stuffed with fabric squares
Miniature photo albums with pictures of babies or family inside
Sachets with fragrant herbs inside
Discovery bottles (plastic bottles filled with materials like coloured rice and tiny objects to spot, with the lid glued on)
Small woven baskets
Wooden trains and train tracks
Soft Christmas ornaments
Honey dippers
Cinnamon sticks
Gift bows
Silicone ice cube trays
Spools

*Use natural objects
and household
items for babies and
toddlers to explore
and investigate*



Let the Children Play

Play Activities for Young Children

Activities with Toddlers



Growing up with Play

From about 2 Years

Once language begins to develop anything and everything is interesting. Remember that most toddlers can understand much more than they can say, so chatting to them and explaining things is very worthwhile. Favourite toys, situations and stories will emerge. The same story over and over again does not seem to bore this age group! Concentration will be developing and once you have helped to set up a play situation there may be a few minutes of complete silence! Watch out for toys that are too difficult and with which the child becomes frustrated. Put them away until your child is older. Imagination is developing so 'pretend' games and dressing up become fun. Carefully select some television programmes to suit your child's age and watch with them so that you can chat about the programme afterwards.



Play Activities for Toddlers



Row the Boat

As the babies get a little older, encourage them to play and exercise together. Sing or play songs that have actions to go with them, like "Michael Row Your Boat Ashore" or "Row, Row, Row Your Boat."

Look, Smell and Taste Session

Cut out large pictures of fruits. Introduce the picture first, say what it is and demonstrate smelling it i.e.: 'Mm, lovely orange' Then introduce matching real fruit (also have small pieces chopped) and again, graphically demonstrate smelling, also identifying the smells as you demonstrate i.e.: 'oh, nice and sweet, or 'very bitter' etc... Toddlers can taste the fruit pieces (they can be pureed for babies)



Gloop

Gloop is easy to create and wonderful fun, particularly outdoors.

Use 2 cups of cornflour and 1 cup of cold water

Pour the cornflour into a bowl, add the cold water slowly, stirring constantly and stop when the water is barely absorbed by the cornflour.

- Is it solid or is it liquid?
- Pour it on to a table top.
- Can you pile it up to make a castle?
- Can you write your name in it before the writing disappears?
- Divide the gloop in half and add different food colouring to each half.
- Watch what happens when the two mixtures meet!



Play Activities for Toddlers



Dry Textures

Fill a tray with dried foods such as lentils, peas, rice, oats, sugar, pasta, salt, etc... Provide forks, spoons, scoops, and holding containers (plastic cups or bowls). Encourage your toddler to explore, fill, pour and sort all of the textures with their hands.



Activities to Encourage the Development of the Sense of Smell

Taking small samples of ordinary household foods and offering to smell i.e.: peanut butter, bolognese sauce, chocolate sauce, flavoured and unflavoured yogurts, etc. Little plates and spoons from play tea-sets can be used. Demonstrate how to smell, and make appropriate faces to emphasise 'sweet' 'sour' etc.



Dance Practice!

Play a variety of different kinds of music: fast, slow, loud, soft; classical, jazz, pop, etc... as well as nursery rhymes. Let them find the rhythm and move to the music

Guess the Smell?

Line up some plastic sealable containers or small jars. Into each one place a cotton wool ball to which scent has been added i.e.: drop of vanilla extract, drop of lemon oil or juice, drop of vinegar, chocolate essence, etc.... Take out cotton balls, hold up to baby's nose and let them smell. Identify the scent verbally, as this not only helps with distinguishing smell, but also supports language development. For older babies you can double up on the scents (have two jars with similar smells) and play a matching game, exploring which scents are the same



Play Activities for Toddlers

Smelling Nature Walk

Just taking your toddler around the garden and encouraging him / her to smell the grass, the peat, petals off flowers, leaves from trees, smoke from a chimney or BBQ, the smell of damp from wet clay, etc...



Nurture Games

Toddlers enjoy copying. If they see you feeding baby, they may like to do it too. If they see you changing baby's nappy, then they may like to do it. Encourage this by providing them with all of the props they need.



Babies and toddlers love the sound of the human voice, either talking directly to them or singing

Play Activities for Toddlers

Music / Sound box.

Gather a range of items and instruments - drum, saucepan lids, spoons, drum sticks, wooden spoon, xylophone, tin whistle, etc... and introduce to baby (particularly good from about ten months upwards). Demonstrate tapping, banging and blowing. Watch for baby's reaction as he /she reaches out to imitate



More Jelly Fun

Mix different colours of jellies so toddlers can explore the mixing and changing of colours. Shaving foam, with added colour, could be used in place of jelly



Look for items and objects around the home to encourage different musical experiences for your baby

A 'Touchy - Feely' Walk

Start at the house, encourage your toddler to feel the pebble dashing / texture on the walls outside house. Move on to the path - pebbles, concrete and tarmac. Then walk in the grass (barefoot if on warm sunny day) or dip into a puddle, feel the bark of a tree, feel difference in textures of leaves and branches, stems of plants, etc. This will help them to distinguish different textures

Let the Children Play

Play Activities for Young Children

Activities with Pre-school Children



Growing up with Play

From about 3 Years

Around this age, one of your child's greatest needs can be for the companionship of other children. The need to play alongside other children is significant. Children's friendships need to be encouraged and nurtured. As children move through early childhood their world begins to open up. They become more independent and begin to focus on other significant adults' and other children outside of their immediate family. Children want to investigate, explore and ask about the things around them even more. Interactions with family and those around them help to shape their personality and their own ways of thinking and developing.

Outside of the home a range of early childhood services can provide opportunities for children to play. When choosing a service for your child, consider the range of play experiences on offer within the setting both indoors and outdoors. The greater the range of play experiences available to children, the greater the opportunity for children to learn and develop.

Siolta, The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education states that "Play is one of the key contexts for children's early learning and development" www.siolta.ie

siolta
The National Quality Framework
for Early Childhood Education

Aistear, The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework provides clear information on how to promote children's learning through play. www.ncca.ie

Aistear
Curriculum Framework for Early Childhood Education
The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework

Here are some tips from Aistear that will guide you further in promoting your children's development.

1. Give your child time to play every day.
2. Provide things for your child to play with. Recycled materials like boxes, household items and old clothes are often more fun than bought toys and equipment, and they cost less.
3. Join in the play. Take on a role, make jokes and be playful.
4. Make space for play. As your child gets older he/she will probably spend more time playing with a particular thing or in a particular role, so having a place where your child can leave items and continue playing with them the next day is important.
5. When chatting, ask what your child was playing that day. Show that you value play whether it's at home, with the childminder, in pre-school, in playgroup or in primary school.
6. Tell your childminder or the staff in the pre-school, playgroup or primary school about the games, activities, nursery rhymes, and books your young child enjoys.

Further tip sheets are available by visiting www.ncca.ie

Play Activities for Pre-schoolers

Learning Through Play

This section outlines various play activities that you and your child can share at home. Most of these activities require little financial outlay and provide opportunities to develop your child's skills and self-confidence. No matter what type of play is taking place it will be the close contact and conversation between you and your child which will form a sound basis for 'learning through play'. Use your imagination in presenting and suggesting play activities, as it is one of the best ways of encouraging your child to use theirs.

When children play, the quality of their play can be greatly influenced by the adults around them. Adults can provide materials and encouragement and open the door to new activities and learning.

All of the activities below will provide opportunities for you and your child to interact, for your child to play alone, or with other children; all of which will enhance the opportunity for "learning through play"

This section includes:

Paint
Play Dough
Clay Play
Music
Toy Play
Water Play
Dance
Puppetry
Drama
Sand Play
Songs and Rhymes
Junk Play
Imaginative Play
Gloop Play
Outdoor Play
Storytelling
Block Play
Doing Things Together

Play Activities for Pre-schoolers

Paint



Why Paint?

It's fun

It is creative and expressive and an activity over which your child has total control

It encourages hand-eye co-ordination and is therefore a pre-writing skill

It gives practice in the various stages of gripping

It helps to develop many early childhood concepts such as:- colour, texture, size, light, dark, big, small

What Do You Do?

Stay close by and observe your child. Encourage him/her to tell you about the work, about the colour, shape and so on. Avoid saying "What is it?"

Offer painting sessions regularly and maintain appeal of materials and equipment by keeping them clean and 'gunge' free

Occasionally introduce different techniques e.g. finger painting, bubbles, printing

Don't expect recognisable pictures for a long time. First stage paintings consist of blobs, streaks and odd shapes

Allow your child to experiment: the mess can be easily cleared up; encourage him/her to help you do this

Paint Ideas

Printing

USE:

Large sheets of paper, dishes of various coloured paint, various shaped print makers e.g. cutters, moulds, jam jar lids of various sizes, cotton reels

Blob & Fold / Butterfly Painting

USE:

Large sheets of folded paper, tubs of paint

Vegetable Printing

USE:

Large sheets of paper, large trays of various coloured paint, onions, cabbage leaves, potatoes, broccoli, cauliflower, paper plates

String Painting

USE:

Large sheets of paper, dishes of various coloured paint, lengths of string / wool of various thicknesses

Blow / Fireworks Painting

USE:

Large sheets of paper, 2 parts paint: 1part pva glue, few drops of water, individual containers, paint brushes, glue sticks, glitter, tissue, flour, cotton wool, straws

Splatter Painting

USE:

Long sheet of paper (old roll of wallpaper), doilies, old toothbrushes, paint, paint trays

Bubble Painting Prints

USE:

Paper, tubs of paint with washing-up liquid added, straws

Easel Painting

indoor and outdoor

USE:

Easels, large sheets of paper, pots of various coloured paint, brush in each pot

Texture Painting

USE:

Large sheets of paper, tubs of coloured paint. Choose from: salt, sugar, rice, ground coffee, oatmeal, sand, glitter, wax crayon shavings, shaving cream, soap flakes, baking powder, flour

Paint Ideas

Finger Painting

USE:

Add cold water to a packet of cornflour to make a smooth, thick paste. Stir in boiling water until mixture is thick and nearly clear. Put mixture into paint tubs and add colours of liquid paint

Hand Prints / Foot Prints

USE:

Bare feet or with shoes / boots
Large rolls of paper, trays of paint, clean water and towels
Footprints are best done outside

Microwave Puff Paint

USE:

Add water to equal amounts of self-raising flour and salt, add a few drops of food colouring mix to a smooth paste. Paint on a thick sheet of card. Microwave the design on high for 10 - 30 seconds until the paint puffs are dry

Painting Large Cardboard Boxes

USE:

Various coloured paints, large brushes, various sizes of large boxes

Squeezy Bottle Painting - Outdoor Activity

USE:

Extra-large sheets of paper, squeezy bottles, 2 parts paint; 1 part water

Invisible Paint

USE:

Dissolve baking soda in water. Paint using cotton buds, then brush over the picture with purple grape juice

Sand Painting

USE:

Add sand to 1 part paint and 1 part glue to paint with or apply glue with paint brush and shake on sand Sand, paint, glue, paper, glue sticks paint brushes, and small containers for holding paint

Wax Rubbings Painting

USE:

Sheets of paper, wax crayons, leaves, sand paper, bubble wrap, thin paint, jars, brushes

INSTEAD OF BRUSHES - TRY PAINTING WITH THESE:

Eyedroppers
Fly swatters
Spray bottles
Spoons and forks
Cooked spaghetti
Shoe polish applicators
Plastic animals (feet)
Jar lids
Balloons
Wool
Bark
Combs
Sponges
Ice
Pipe cleaners
Bubble wrap
Bottle caps
Cotton balls
Cotton buds
Brushes
Feathers
Toy cars (roll the wheels through paint)
Hands, fingers, arms, toes, feet
Roll-on deodorant bottles
Bingo dabbers/markers
Marbles, ping pong balls, golf balls
Foods (fruit and vegetables)
Soap-free scouring pads



MIXING PAINT COLOURS

Red + White = Pink
Red + Blue = Purple
Purple + White = Lilac
Red + Yellow = Orange
Orange + White = Peach
Black + White = Grey
Green + White = Mint Green

Blue + White = Sky Blue
Yellow + White = Pale Yellow
Blue + Green = Turquoise
Red + Green + Blue = Brown
Orange + Red = Red-Orange
Purple + Red = Fuchsia
Brown + Black = Dark Brown

FINGER PAINT RECIPE

1 cup of flour
1 tbsp. of salt
1½ cups of cold water
1 cup of hot water
¼ cup of liquid food dye

Mix salt and flour. Pour in cold water and beat until smooth. Add hot water and bring to the boil, stirring continuously. Beat until smooth. When cool, mix in food dye.

Playdough

Why Play with Playdough?

Children love playing with it. It can be very soothing!

It is very versatile, cheap and easily made at home

Touch is a sense young children use more than adults to experience and learn about their world. Through dough play your child will begin to understand ideas of size, weight and volume while using fingers, hands and wrists

It aids language development: big, little, long, short, flat, lumpy, more, less, shapes and eventually shades, colours and textures



What Do You Do?

Allow your child to assist you with mixing up the dough

Have the dough and other implements ready for your child

Encourage your child and admire their efforts

Be on hand to introduce new words and give ideas to extend the play if required

Change the dough regularly to ensure it is hygienic

Playdough Ideas

In the Beginning

Stretchy dough without the use of colour, additional texture, scent, or implements

USE:

Stretchy dough, table top, flour shaker.

This dough is good for twisting, poking, pulling, squeezing, and stretching. Additional equipment is not required

Exploring Stretchy Dough with Colour and Scent

USE:

Match scent with colour e.g. add orange paint with orange essence or mix colours and smells, e.g. orange colour with mint essence. Use oils, spices and herbs. Ask your child to identify colours and smells

Explore Stretchy Dough with Colour and Texture

Exploring Stretchy Dough with Colour

USE:

Stretchy dough, table top, flour shaker. Add paint or food colouring when making playdough. When you start use one colour per week to encourage colour recognition

Exploring Stretchy Dough with Texture

USE:

Stretchy dough, table top, flour shaker, rice, glitter, rolled oats, ground coffee, sawdust, lentils, pasta, seeds, etc...

Exploring Basic Playdough

USE:

Basic playdough, table top, flour shaker. Let your child explore the properties of this dough with their hands and fingers

Comparisons of Mass, Weight, Height and Length

USE:

Basic coloured playdough, rulers, tape measures, scales (encourage prediction)

Shape Recognition

USE:

Basic playdough, theme colour as required, table top, flour shaker, pastry cutters of various shapes and sizes

Playdough Ideas

Baking

USE:

Basic playdough, theme colour as required, table top, flour shaker, pastry cutters, rolling pins, bun cases, cake, bun and loaf tins

Birthday Cakes

USE:

Basic playdough, table top, flour shaker, cutters, rolling pins, baking trays, used matchsticks, buttons, sprinkles

Modelling Playdough with no Colour

USE:

Modelling Playdough. Model or use shape cutters, leave to dry overnight. When dry paint or add glue and glitter

Modelling Playdough with Colour

USE:

Modelling Playdough. Model or use pastry cutters of various shapes and sizes, use a narrow pencil to make a hole through, leave to dry overnight, thread with ribbon and hang

Pattern Making

USE:

Sparkling Snow Dough, patterned rolling pins, cutters, hammers, shells, buttons, pasta, stones / pebbles, lollypop sticks, etc...

Make a Model of 'My Family' with Playdough & Other Materials

USE:

Photographs of your own and other families. Discuss family structures, identities and differences

Basic Recipes

Modelling Playdough

1 cup salt
½ cup cornflour
½ cup water, added slowly
Food colouring or paint if required
Method: Mix well together in a pan, cook over a low heat, stirring constantly until mixture thickens. Remove from heat immediately. Leave to cool

Stretchy Dough

2 cups self raising flour
Add water and mix to a firm dough

Basic Playdough

3 cups plain flour
½ cup salt
1 tablespoon oil or washing-up liquid or baby shampoo.
Food colour or paint, if required.
Water to mix, added slowly

Sparkling Snow Dough

2 cups water
2 cups flour
1 cup salt
4 tsp. cream of tartar
4 tsp. oil
Iridescent glitter if required
Combine ingredients in a heavy saucepan. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly with wooden spoon until mixture thickens and pulls away from sides of pan. Make into a ball, place on board and leave to cool

Play Activities for Pre-schoolers

Why Play with Water?

It is very versatile and children love it

It will help your child to learn how to pour and avoid spills, therefore learning the consequences of cause and effect

It will help him/her learn about volume and weight

He/she will learn how to use new words – sink, float, heavy, light, full, empty, more and less

It is great fun and very therapeutic

He/she can practice washing toys, clothes, dolls, dishes, cars and him/herself



Water

What Do You Do?

Ensure your child is always supervised. A child can drown in two inches of water

Provide lots of props and materials, ask your child what else could be used

Talk about what is happening and why

Water is very versatile and children love it. Allow your child to investigate the endless possibilities for having fun

Provide trips to the local pool to help give your child confidence for learning to swim

Remember puddles, paddling pools and the bath are all 'venues' for water play

Water Ideas

Appreciating Exploring, Feeling and Discovering Water

USE:

Water container with no equipment



Outdoor Water Play

USE:

Buckets, paint brushes, rollers, hosepipes, troughs and guttering, washing up liquid. Use fence, wall or cement path for painting on

Floating or Sinking

Use different objects in the water tray to demonstrate the properties. Record the behaviour of each object on a chart pictorially

USE:

Corks, bottle tops, leaves, boats, ducks, pebbles, sponges, shells, spoons, golf balls, ping pong balls

Filling and Pouring

USE:

Water container, jugs, plastic bottles – wide and narrow necks, graded containers, funnels, tubing

Weighing and Measuring Exploring Volume and Density

USE:

Water mill, spoons, scoops, colanders, plastic bottles – 4 small, 1 large, 2 measuring jugs, cups and containers of various sizes

Exploring Colour Changes

USE:

Paint, food colouring, clear plastic cups, spoons, crêpe paper

Exploring / Splashing Discuss why Water is so Good

USE:

Bath toys, small world people and animals, sea shells

Exploring Water in Relation to Frost and Ice

Add ice to warm water, sprinkle salt on the ice

USE:

Water tray, warm water, ice cubes, moulded ice shapes, salt

Water Ideas

Absorbency Inside

Pour water in bowls; investigate how various materials react in the water

USE:

Sponges, cotton wool, tissues, cloth, newspaper strips, pebbles, spoons, etc...

Washing Dolls

USE:

Baby baths / basins, dolls, flannel, sponge, towels, shampoo, soap, bath toys, ducks, boats

Ice Cube Hurling

Place an ice cube in the middle of table, each person tries to hit it with their own ice cube using a lollipop stick

USE:

Water proof surface, ice cubes, coloured ice cubes, lollipop sticks, towels

Washing and Hanging Clothes

Indoor / outdoor.

Wash clothes in water container, hang to dry

USE:

Dolls clothes, paint aprons, shorts, tee-shirts, socks, soap flakes, clothes pegs

Blowing Bubbles

USE:

Washing up liquid / baby shampoo, mixer, straws

Absorbency Outside

Use small jugs of water on various surfaces

Record the behaviour of each object on a chart pictorially

USE:

Water being absorbed into clay / water on cement / sand / mopping up water

Observing the Impact of Temperature Changes

USE:

Warm water, ice cubes, coloured ice cubes / moulds

Water Ideas

Shape Discovery

USE:

Plastic shapes, various shaped containers, balls - golf, plastic, bouncy, ping pong

Talk about Jobs that Involve Water

Fishermen, Sailors, Farmers, Plumbers, Firemen

USE:

Books, poster, pictures, dress-up clothes, relevant props

Sensory Activity

USE:

Warm and cold water, various colours of glitter, various food colourings, various sized and shaped containers, pine-cones, shells, leaves, sponges

Pattern Making

USE:

Using fingers, spoons, spatulas, sticks, pebbles rippling when dropped

Boats

USE:

Orange peel, paper, bun cases, nut shells, tin-foil and plastic cartons



Sand

Why Play with Sand?

Sand is like many different toys in one. You can pour, fill, shake and sieve it when it is dry. Add a little water and you can also mould, shape, pat, bash, rake and build with the damp sand

Children use sand to process, communicate, and create. Sand offers a therapeutic experience to children who need to express their feelings

Your child will learn basic mathematical and scientific concepts from it e.g. weight, volume, cause and effect

Sand play is safe and absorbing



What Do You Do?

Prepare a place to play with the sand. An old sheet could be used to cover the floor

Encourage your child in the clearing up operation

Explain how dangerous it is to throw sand and how painful it feels in your eyes - explain the rules around playing with sand

Ensure the sand stays clean by sieving it to remove dirt or by replacing the sand on a regular basis

Join in by asking and answering questions, posing problems and encouraging your child to solve them

Sand Ideas

Appreciating, Exploring, Feeling and Discovering Dry Sand

USE:

Sand tray – dry sand (no equipment)

Weighing, Measuring and Capacity

Exploring Volume and Density

USE:

Dry sand - sand mill, spoons, scoops, colanders, different size plastic bottles, 2 measuring jugs, different size containers that hold the same amount, sugar bags, cups and containers of various sizes

Exploring Cause and Effect

USE:

Sand container, dry sand, funnels, various sized containers, sand timer, sieves (various sizes), pebbles, stones

Pattern Making

USE:

Sand container, dry sand, rakes, cutters, patterned rollers, sieve, pencils, car / truck tyres, combs, use fingers, spoons, spatulas, sticks, pebbles, feathers

Filling and Pouring

USE:

Sand container – dry sand, jugs, plastic bottles – wide and narrow necks, graded containers, funnels, tubing, sand wheels

Exploring Colour Changes

Add powder paint to sand

USE:

Dry sand, powder paint, clear plastic cups and spoons

Sand Ideas

Appreciating, Exploring, Feeling and Discovering Wet Sand

USE:

Sand container – wet sand (no equipment)

Moulding Wet Sand

USE:

Sand tray, wet sand, shapes, moulds, spoons, plastic tubs.

Pattern Making

USE:

Sand container, wet sand, rakes, cutters, patterned rollers, pencils, car / truck tyres, combs, fingers, spoons, spatulas, sticks, pebbles, feathers

The Farm

Add farm animals to sand tray - put small containers of water in the sand

USE:

Sand tray, sand, small containers, water, farm animals, tractors

Outdoor Sand Play

USE:

Large sand container, buckets, spades, rakes, diggers

Impression of Body Parts

USE:

Sand trays, wet sand

Print Making

Writing Numbers / Letters in the Sand

USE:

Sand tray, use fingers, number / letter shapes – number / letter posters

Sand Ideas

Exploring Sand in Relation to the Local Environment

Building site, recreating the shore or a garden in the sand tray

USE:

Sand tray, damp sand, water, pebbles, diggers, tractors, wooden blocks, Lego, hard hats, boats, shells, coloured cellophane, tin foil, bubble wrap, ferns, grass, twigs, stones, sticks, leaves, plastic ducks / fish / frogs

Creating Physical Features

Mould hills, tunnels, roads, fields, etc...

USE:

Sand tray, damp sand, use hands and add appropriate props



Sand Painting

Add sand to 1 part paint and 1 part glue or apply glue with paint brush and shake on sand

USE:

Sand, paint, glue, paper, glue sticks, paint brushes, and small containers for holding paint

Creating Sand Mousse

Add water to make it very sloshy, add washing-up liquid or bubble bath and whisk. (When left to dry, this makes the sand powdery)

USE:

Sand container, fine sand, water, mechanical whisk, washing-up liquid or bubble bath



Sand Ideas

Talk about Sand

Deserts, sand animals & plants
e.g. camels, sand flies, cactus,
the uses of sand e.g. building

USE:

Sand container, sand, books,
poster, pictures, dress-up clothes,
relevant props

Discovering Shape

USE:

Sand container, sand,
plastic shapes / various
shaped cutters /
containers, balls – golf,
plastic, bouncy, ping
pong, blocks, relevant
posters & books

Sensory Activity

USE:

Sand container, sand, various colours of
glitter, various powder paint colours,
various sized and shaped containers,
pine cones, shells, leaves, pasta, etc...

Discovering the Various Properties and Behaviour of Sand

Feel with hands and feet. Wiggle toes in sand
discuss how it feels

USE:

Containers of wet sand, damp sand, dry sand,
fine sand, coarse sand

Why Play with Junk?

It provides endless opportunities for your child to use scissors and brushes: these will help hand/eye co-ordination

It will help develop your child's concentration and imagination

Your child will be making design decisions related to his/her overall plan

Junk art is a great way to occupy your child and use up some of the enormous amount of junk we accumulate on a daily basis

Your child is able to control the end product

It will help your child develop spacial awareness

What Do You Do?

Provide a range of junk play materials suitable for the age/stage of your child

Sort materials into containers e.g. litre size ice-cream tubs

Encourage your child to explore the materials

Use as many natural materials as possible

Offer support if you see your child needs it, for example, in learning how to hold scissors

Don't expect recognisable structures. Accept your child's creations



Sticking Ready Cut Shapes

USE:

Glue, glue sticks, shapes of coloured paper, large sheets of paper

Random Cutting

USE:

Scissors, scraps of quality paper, magazine pages, junk mail, newspapers, gift wrap paper, old greetings cards, etc.

Cutting and Sticking

USE:

Scissors, glue, glue sticks, large sheets of paper, scraps of quality paper, magazine pages, junk mail, newspapers, gift wrap paper, old greetings cards, etc.

Sticking 3-D Objects

USE:

Coloured paper & card, glue, glue sticks, paper plates, pasta shapes, lentils, straws, lollypop sticks, cotton wool, fabric pieces, string, natural materials

Junk Ideas

Tearing and Sticking

USE:

Glue, glue sticks, shapes of coloured paper, large sheets of paper

Cutting Around Shapes and Pictures

USE:

Scissors, magazine pages, old greeting cards, etc...



Junk Ideas

Mask / Hat Making

USE:

Some pre-cut face / eye masks and hat shapes, paint, glue, materials for decorating, mount masks on sticks or use elastic

Model Making

USE:

Various sized boxes to use as base, let children have use of a range of materials and joiners

Collage Creating 2-D Patterns and Pictures

USE:

Scissors, glue, glue sticks, large sheets of paper, scraps of good quality paper, coloured paper & card, magazine pages, junk mail, newspapers, gift wrap paper, old greeting cards, etc...

Snowflakes Decorations

USE:

Thin paper, scissors
Fold paper several times
and cut out small shapes

Paper Maché

USE:

Bowls of water, strips of newspaper, bases e.g. containers, balloons, etc...

Bottle Shakers Bottle Rollers

USE:

Various sized plastic bottles, fillings
e.g. rice, pasta, etc...

Large clear plastic bottles, coloured
cellophane, tin foil, sweet wrappers,
water, tape to secure bottle top



Junk Ideas

Painting Boxes

Creating Slides, Trains, Tunnels,
Robots, etc...

USE:

Boxes of various sizes, various colours
of paint, large paint brushes, tinfoil,
buttons, joining materials

Jewellery Making

USE:

String / wool, large blunt
needle, popcorn, pasta
(painted)

Tubes & Cups Sculptures

USE:

Different sized paper
cups, kitchen paper tubes
- cut into different sizes,
cereal boxes, PVA glue,
glue sticks, masking tape,
sellotape, paper clips

3D Collage

USE:

Paper, card, boxes, tubes, paper plates, pasta
shapes, lentils, straws, lollypop sticks, cotton
wool, fabric pieces, string, natural materials
tissue paper balls, rice, sand, PVA glue, glue
sticks, masking tape, sellotape, paper clips

Junk Equipment

General Equipment

Storage area for children's unfinished projects

Scissors, pencils, paints, brushes, felt pens, rulers, glue spreaders

Joining Materials

PVA glue, paper paste, sellotape, masking tape, paper clips, clothes pegs, paper fasteners of different sizes, string, wool, elastic bands, stapler, hole punch

Materials

Rigid materials for gluing on e.g. thick card, thin hard board off-cuts, plastic trays, containers, boxes, paper bags, packaging, take away containers, cake boxes, cereal boxes, shoe boxes, large bottle tops

Flexible materials for gluing on e.g. fabric, paper, thin card, newspaper, tissues, shiny sweet wrappers

Rods and tubes e.g. straws, cardboard tubes, dowelling, stems, lollipop sticks

Threads e.g. string, ribbons, rope, wool, elastic

Fabrics of varying textures

Household materials e.g. yoghurt pots, kitchen rolls, boxes of various sizes, egg cartons, cotton wool, tinfoil dishes / plates, cellophane, plastic bottles, pasta shapes, rice, lentils

Buttons, straws, sequins, glitter, pipe cleaners, paint

Natural Materials

pinecones
twigs
leaves
seeds
bark
wood-off-cuts
wood shavings
sawdust
feathers
shells
small pebbles
small stones
gravel
sand

Gloop

Why Play with Gloop?

Gloop is a curious, but fascinating substance for children as it's neither a solid nor a liquid

Gloop is a fun and extremely easy open ended material to make

The ingredients are reasonably priced and they can be purchased in everyday shops - you may even have them in your cupboard already!

Gloop is a fantastic sensory experience for both children and adults

What Do You Do?

Involve your child in the preparation process

Create discussions about the texture, smell and colour of the gloop and their thoughts and experiences

Create opportunities which will encourage the child to talk in an imaginary context

When your child is used to gloop and its properties, provide different materials and resources which will further enhance their learning



Gloop Fun

Basic Gloop

2 cups of corn flour
1 cup of water



Tapioca Gloop

Tapioca
Hot Water
Food colouring
Boil the tapioca in water for 30 minutes along with the food colouring. Allow the child to play with it while it is still warm

Gloop Prints

2 cups of corn flour
1 cup of water
Marble inks

This activity may be carried out indoors or outdoors with protective sheeting on the floor. The gloop can be made up in a basin or even on a table surface. Prepare the gloop and allow the child to mix all the ingredients together. When this is carried out, give the child a blank sheet of paper and press to make gloop prints

Glitter Gloop

2 cups of corn flour
1 cup of water
Food colouring
Glitter
Make the 'Basic Gloop', add the food colouring and glitter to the mixture and mix well. Allow the child to put as much food colouring and glitter in as they please

Gloop Fun

Ice Gloop

Ice cube tray
Poster paints
2 cups of corn flour
Water

To make this fun sensory activity, have pre-made ice cube paints. Add some paint and water to an ice cube tray and freeze for two hours. When the ice paints are ready prepare 'Basic Gloop'. Add the ice cubes to the gloop and watch them melt. The child will have the opportunity to explore the cold melting effects of the ice along with the curious properties of the gloop. Watch as it creates a fun colourful exploratory journey for your child

Quick Sand Gloop

1 box of corn flour
3 cups of sand
Water

The best place to make the quick sand is in a shallow tray on the ground (the child can assist in making it). The corn flour and sand can be mixed together first and then add the water slowly until the right consistency is achieved. This is a wonderful sensory activity for the child and encourages exploration of two different open ended materials - gloop and sand!

Spray Gloop

½ box of corn flour
An empty spray bottle
Powder paint or water colours
Water

Add the corn flour to an empty tray or basin. In an empty spray bottle, add water and the paint and shake well. Have a range of different spray bottles with various colours to offer choice. Allow the child to spray the mixture on the corn flour and mix well. It may take a while but it is a creative fun activity which increases both fine motor skills and hand eye co-ordination



Play Activities for Pre-schoolers

Why Play with Blocks?

Children learn best through hands-on experiences, and block play is a valuable part of cognitive development in toddlers and young children. Using blocks, children can piece together shapes to create a bigger picture, whether it is a representation of something they have seen or from their imagination. Exploring with blocks also nurtures an understanding for maths, science, language and dramatic play. Whether the shapes are wooden, coloured, snap-together or boxes, blocks will enhance your child's learning activities



Blocks



What Do You Do?

Prior to play the blocks can be positioned in an appealing manner as this might suggest ideas and motivate play

Comment on your child's actions, it will initiate conversation

Provide your child with a variety of wooden blocks and allow them to use their imagination in whatever they want to build and let their creativity flow

Provide other resources to enhance play, such as: fabric, card, toys cars and animals

Play Activities for Pre-schoolers

Clay Play

Children proceed through different stages when they are playing with clay. To start off with, they explore and experiment with the material, they repeat their experiments and practise handling the clay until it leads to controlled use and creativity. Clay along with gloop and play dough is necessary for messy play in young children. Modelling clay can be purchased in any good art suppliers and if it is maintained and stored properly it can last a long time



Provide your child with a range of different materials and resources when playing with clay e.g.: a small bowl with water, cutters, rolling pins, forks and wooden mallets.

Natural materials can also be provided to create prints such as shells, pine cones, pebbles, and water with different types of sponges



Concentrate on the process of playing with clay rather than the product

Imaginative Play

Why Play Pretend?

Most children enjoy dressing up

A child needs to be able to try out what it feels like to be a mother, a father, a baby, a patient or a shop keeper

It helps a child to relive happy experiences or try to come to terms with an unhappy one. By playing in this way they are learning about the world around them

Opportunities for language use and development are boundless

Dressing up and role playing can give a child who is shy a feeling of confidence and self esteem



What Do You Do?

Don't throw anything out which might be useful for imaginative play e.g. airline boarding passes, bus tickets

Provide and maintain materials

Help set the scene and provide an encouraging atmosphere

Become involved through questions and discussion

Leave them alone when the role play is going well

Add different props/material to cater for your child's interest

Imaginative

Pretend Ideas

shop
house
post office
castle
cave
library
chip shop
fast food
greengrocers
shoe shop
doctor's surgery
hospital
boat
spaceship
the latest TV fad
mum, dad and baby
painting (using water)



Imaginative

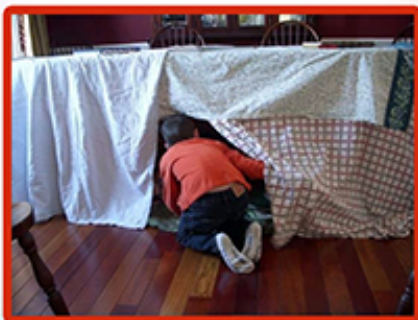
You will need your own and your child's imagination

Playmates – Invite them in



My Den

Build a den, created out of an old blanket or sheet thrown over a table to represent anything from a house to a hospital, a fire station to a shop



Cardboard Boxes

Very large cardboard boxes are wonderful and very popular with children
(Watch out for large metal staples)

Imaginative

Provide Real Objects

cooking utensils
shopping bags
purses
hats
jewellery
empty cartons
packets
tea set
telephone
newspapers
note pads

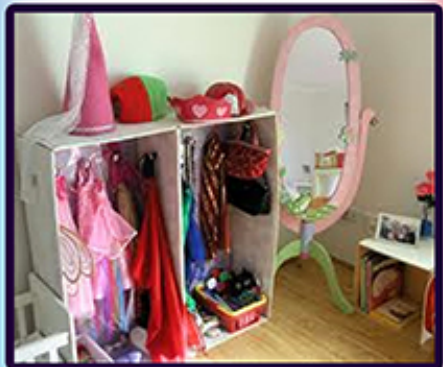


Dressing-up Clothes

Use second hand or
purpose made

elastic waisted skirts
trousers
lace curtains
ribbons
hats

Turn up old clothes so
that they are not a safety
hazard



Provide a large mirror so that children see themselves

Why Music?

Listening and dancing to music has many benefits for children. Music can help nourish the brain while impacting positively on all areas of development

It can help children to listen, express feelings and emotions, develop their physical and mental ability as well as their confidence and social skills

Listening to and enjoying music may also help them develop a liking for an instrument they might like to play in later years

What Do You Do?

Let them listen to the sounds of different instruments, nursery rhymes and simple songs as well as listening to classical, pop, rock, hip hop, jazz, reggae, Irish and music from other countries

Help them develop a sense of rhythm

Provide a range of bought and homemade instruments for them to experiment with



Music Ideas

Drums

USE:

Upside down
saucepan and wooden
spoon



Cardboard box and
paper hand towel tube

Cymbals

USE:

Two saucepan lids with knobs

Scrapers

USE:

Sandpaper rubbed on
a hollow cardboard box



Corrugated cardboard
and a wooden spoon

Shakers

USE:

Rice in plastic bottle



Sand sealed in a
small box



Rice sealed in
yoghurt tubs

Bells

USE:

Glass containers or jam jars of
different sizes filled with water
at varying levels, and use a
pencil or wooden peg as a
striker

(Supervise this activity)

Comb Tunes

USE:

Run finger along the
teeth of a comb



Wrap greaseproof
paper around a comb
leaving both ends
open and blow or
hum in one end

Rattles

USE:

Stones, rice or dried beans in
an empty plastic bottle



Coins in a plastic money box

Tambourines

USE:

Two disposable plastic plates
with uncooked rice between them
and taped together



Two tin foil dishes with small
stones, rice or dried beans
between them and taped together

Play Activities for Pre-schoolers

Story Telling

Listening to stories not only strengthens your child's understanding of language it also stimulates the brain in other areas and is of fundamental importance in child development



Why Story Telling?

Story telling helps children to express and understand themselves as well as others

Involving children in creating and participating in story telling strengthens their sense of well-being and self-confidence and prompts them to express their own opinions

Story telling helps to broaden their imagination and understanding of the world

What Do You Do?

Tell stories in an interactive way to help enhance children's imagination and creativity

Make it an enjoyable, relaxing and fun experience

Story telling can take place indoors and outdoors so that children can enjoy books at all times of the day

Introduce story telling from a very early age. Bright pictures and lively story telling can hold a child's attention and interest

Tell stories without books, for example, recall what you did on a recent outing or shopping trip, or tell them what you did when you were a child



Why Puppets?

Puppetry is a natural and a fun way to extend pretend play for children

Puppetry can support children through many important learning experiences

The creation of puppets is also a learning experience for children, as they can create and imagine what and who they want to make using their decision making skills to influence the character and look of the puppet

What Do You Do?

Provide various types of puppets to represent different cultures and ethnic groups to broaden a child's understanding of the different individuals in the world around them

Inspire children to create stories and to share them with other children and adults

Link puppetry and storytelling to improve on the children's experience of stories and use of their imagination

Puppets Created from Homemade Materials

Simple puppets from socks with just adding googly eyes or pieces of string can help create an imaginary character for children

Kitchen roll holders or paper plates are ideal for making puppets, using a lollipop sticks for the children to hold it up to their faces

The child can be creative in what they want their character to look like using markers, crayons, paint, etc...

Play Activities for Pre-schoolers

Dance



Why Dance?

Dance is a way for children to express themselves through different movements

Dance also helps to develop a sense of rhythm through moving to the different beats

Children can enjoy many different types of dance that will engage their thoughts and feelings

Dancing to various types of dance music such as jazz, hip hop, rock, salsa, Irish as well as dances from different cultures, will help children to broaden their understanding and knowledge of the world

Dancing will help children to develop spatial awareness and a sense of timing

What Do You Do?

Provide a wide variety of dance music for your child so they can experience music and rhythms from other cultures

Listen, watch, try and experience:

Ballet

Contemporary

Irish/Spanish dancing

Zumba

Tap dancing



Play Activities for Pre-schoolers

Songs and Rhymes



Why Songs and Rhymes?

Children of all ages enjoy songs and rhymes

They help children to develop listening skills

They encourage and extend children's use of language and knowledge of the world

Help to develop memory and imagination

What Do You Do?

Provide as many rhymes and action songs as you can muster – nursery rhymes, TV jingles, lullabies and marches

Using musical instruments e.g. tambourine, drum, xylophone, whistle, small guitar and bells, will make rhymes more fun

Make up songs and rhymes with your child



Remember that a child does not worry about a voice being good or bad. You can sing as loudly as you like; it is confidence, not a good voice that is required

Play Activities for Pre-schoolers

Toy Play



Why Toys?

Toys can help develop concentration and stimulate your child's imagination

Toys can help form a basis for great conversation

Construction toys allow your child to build a prop to suit the plan or story they are thinking about

Floor play with miniature worlds – zoos, farms, car mats, garages and so on give lots of opportunity for imagination to develop and also gives your child the chance to be in control of a 'small world' of his/her own making



What Do You Do?

Choose toys which provide opportunities for building, moving around, fitting together and taking apart

Choose toys which suit the age/stage of your child

Toys do not need to be bought, but can be everyday objects such as pans, lids, brushes etc...

Join your child in play

Support your child so he/she can develop mastery of the toy



Some Ideas for Toys



floating bath toys
tool kit
toys which make a sound
household containers
nesting toys
binoculars
picture books
shells
telephone
football
drum
skittles
personal stereo
push and pull toys
flash light
magnifying glass
puppets
construction toys

wooden bricks
stacking toys
roller skates
dolls house
cash register
take apart toys
magnetic letters and numbers
threading toys
walkie talkies
jigsaws
board games
hammer pegs
turning and screwing toys
snap cards
musical instruments
pots and pans
brushes
crayons and paper





Outdoor Play

Why Outdoors?

Children engage in more active play when they are outside, as opposed to inside

Active children are healthy children, and outdoor activities are especially healthy for them

It helps children learn to interact with and understand the natural world

It helps to develop their powers of observation and their assessment of risk

Play outdoors offers more opportunities for creativity and free play

Gives children a chance to burn off energy

Can also be calming and allow children to "recharge" their energy levels

It will help your child to build a strong link between physical health and outdoor play, at a young age

Outdoor Play

A Natural Experience

Almost all children (and adults) have a "natural attraction" to the outdoors, playing outside, and learning about nature.

Being outside and playing outside is vital to a child's growth, and their physical and mental development; it's important to allow and encourage your child to spend lots of time in the natural world.

They can "connect" with the outdoors and nature by climbing trees, wading in streams, lying in tall grass, inventing games, or just digging in the sand or mud!



Curiosity and Creativity

Interacting with nature, and with other children outside helps to stimulate curiosity, creativity and also boosts children's confidence as they learn new things



Outdoor Play



DVD

A DVD showing children's play activities outdoors is available from the National Childhood Network, containing lots of ideas for outdoor play
CONTACT: ncn.ie

Doing Things Together

Why Together?

It builds a close relationship between you and your child

It is fun – children love to do what adults do

It builds self-confidence and independence

Your child will learn new skills

Your child will learn about real work



What Do You Do?

Provide supervision

Break jobs down into child sized tasks

Give clear instructions

Look for effort rather than perfect results

Say 'thank you' and give encouragement

Answer questions as they arise

Doing Things Together

What Opportunities Can You Provide?

COOKING

This can be fun

Your child will learn new words like the names of ingredients, utensils and consistencies. They will discover new tastes, smells and textures

There will be scientific experiences (effects of heat, changes in texture) and mathematical experiences (counting, dividing and adding) as well as the link with reading (labels, recipe cards etc.)

Ideas

Make buns e.g. rice crispy buns, chocolate marshmallows, iced biscuits. Chop fruit and vegetables for salads. Look at how food changes shape e.g. apple: stewed apple. Make sandwiches, wraps and paninis

CLEANING

Your children may enjoy helping with all sorts of cleaning jobs, especially dusting

Ideas

Wash the car. Encourage your child to dust his/her room. Wash toys



Doing Things Together in the Home

WASHING

Your child can help with sorting washing and therefore learn about colours, pairs etc...

Your child will enjoy washing dishes. If this is done in the evening it won't matter too much if the clothes get wet

Ideas

Wash cutlery and sort it into the cutlery drawer. Give your child the opportunity to wash dolls clothes by hand



SHOPPING

This is a vital part of family work

Involving your child will prove worthwhile as he/she begins to help rather than hinder

Shopping provides opportunities for your child to make choices and to develop pre-reading, maths, and language skills

Ideas

Make a visual shopping list so your child can 'read' it, i.e. use labels cut from packaging or magazines to do this. Let them help with choosing in the shop. Involve them in putting shopping away when you get home

Doing Things Together

GARDENING

This is an opportunity to talk about the environment

It involves physical skills, scientific understanding and language

A child learns that the result can be beautiful flowers or vegetables we can eat

It provides an opportunity to learn about the weather and the changing seasons

Ideas

Plant bulbs, sprout beans, sow seeds, e.g. sunflower seeds. Provide your child with their own vegetable plot. 'Adopt' a tree in the local park and watch it throughout the year



The IMPORTANCE of Play

The importance of play and the benefits that this brings to your child cannot be over emphasised. We hope you have found this book useful and that it has encouraged you to spend time with and have fun with your child.

Research also shows us that playtime with parents is important. Children crave time with parents. It makes them feel special!

Follow the links below for useful information and more activity ideas:



helpmykidlearn.ie

An interactive resource for parents and guardians, with practical ideas for activities that support speaking, reading, writing and maths skills.

NALA



ncca.ie/aisteartoolkit

Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework

síolta

The National Quality Framework
for Early Childhood Education

www.siolta.ie

Síolta: The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education. Síolta is designed to define, assess and support the improvement of quality across all aspects of practice in early childhood care and education (ECCE) settings where children aged birth to six years are present.

Let the Children Play

Play Activities for Young Children



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