

4.1 **Play and Exploration**

Children's play reflects their wide ranging and varied interests and preoccupations. **In their play children learn at their highest level.** Play with peers is important for children's development.

**Learning through experience**

- Children have to experience play physically and emotionally.
- Children may play alone or with others.
- In their play children use the experiences they have and extend them to build up ideas, concepts and skills.
- While playing children can express fears and re-live anxious experiences. They can try things out, solve problems and be creative and can take risks and use trial and error to find things out.

Adult involvement

- Play comes naturally and spontaneously to most children, though some need adult support.
- Practitioners plan and resource a challenging environment where children's play can be supported and extended.
- Practitioners can extend and develop children's language and communication in their play through sensitive observation and appropriate intervention.
- Practitioners always intervene in play if it is racist, sexist or in any way offensive, unsafe, violent or bullying.

Contexts for learning

- Children need plenty of space and time to play, both outdoors and indoors.
- Children who are allowed to play with resources and equipment before using them to solve a problem are more likely to solve the problem successfully.
- Making dens and dressing-up are an integral part of children's play and they don't require expensive resources.
- Role-play areas allow children to take on and rehearse new and familiar roles.



Effective practice

- Provide flexible resources that can be used in many different ways to facilitate children's play and exploration. These might include lengths of plastic guttering, tubing and watering cans near the sand and water play areas; lengths of fabric and clothes pegs in a box; large paintbrushes and buckets near the outside tap; boxes, clothes horses, old blankets and tablecloths to make dens and shelters.
- Observe children's play and help children to join in if they find it hard to be included, but watch and listen carefully before intervening.
- Find out how children play at home and value different cultural approaches to play.
- Value play which is based on people such as superheroes who may mean a lot to children, even if you do not appreciate them yourself!
- Tell and read stories and encourage children to act them out.



Reflecting on practice

- Imagine that it's a lovely sunny day. You are sitting outside under a tree reading a story to a group of attentive girls when suddenly the peace is shattered by a group of boys running around the tree, shouting loudly and waving sticks. You gather that they are superheroes on a mission and they run off to another tree to do the same thing there. After a few minutes they run back to their den, disappear inside for a few seconds and then come out again to run around shouting.
- How would you react? Why? Does your reaction have anything to do with whether you are male or female?

Challenges and dilemmas

- Valuing the play of all the children, even those who tend to play noisily or often base their play on themes with which you are unfamiliar.
- Knowing when to get involved and when to allow children to carry on playing.



What do I do next?

- **Welfare requirements** are explained in full in the *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage* booklet.
- **Areas of Learning and Development** including effective practice, planning and resourcing at different stages are detailed in the *Practice Guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage* booklet and on the CD-ROM.
- **Early Support** information is available on the CD-ROM under areas of Learning and Development.
- **Research and resources** are available on the CD-ROM.

