

LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

CREATIVE PLAY

"If Picasso Painted a Snowman"

Expressive arts, such as painting, music, dance and creative movement, play a significant role in supporting children with SEND. These activities provide inclusive, flexible ways for children to communicate, regulate emotions and develop motor skills.

By ensuring activities are process focused (not product focused), children are able to express themselves freely, engaging in a variety of ways. By providing multiple art resources, paintbrushes, twigs and other materials children, have a choice as to whether they would like their hands to get messy or if they'd prefer to use tools to achieve their goals. Providing activities in this way helps to develop children's self-confidence and self-esteem as there is no "right answer" they are able to interact freely, and all their creations are celebrated.

Creative play is essential in early years as it supports holistic development, including communication, emotional wellbeing, social skills and physical growth. It creates a positive and inclusive environment where all children, including those with SEND, can explore, learn and express themselves.



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SUSTAINABLE PLAY "Somebody Swallowed Stanley!"

Sustainable play in early years involves using environmentally friendly resources and practices that promote respect for the environment. We encourage children to reuse, recycle and explore natural materials, whilst learning about sustainability.

A favourite story to do this with is "Somebody Swallowed Stanley" – we use recycled materials, fabrics and natural resources alongside sound buttons, language aided boards and sensory lights, to create an underworld adventure.

We learn about the impacts of plastic waste in the ocean and the impact this has on both the natural world and sea life.

Sustainable play helps to promote environmental awareness, learning about multi-use materials and developing respect for nature. Encourage creativity with open ended, recycled materials which inspires children to think creatively.

It encourages responsibility for our natural world whilst providing inclusive, low-cost and engaging learning opportunities.

By introducing sustainable play, educators help children to develop lifelong respect for the environment at an early age.



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SENSORY STORIES

Sensory stories are interactive story telling experiences that use sounds, textures, smells, visuals and movement to bring a story to life. Instead of only listening, children actively explore the story through their senses.

How sensory stories support inclusive play:

They promote engagement and attention - using multi-sensory input to help children feel engaged in ways that are meaningful for individuals. One child may like to sit with an educator and point out the letters in the book, another may choose to walk barefoot along the sensory trail and a third may use the characters or coconut shells to make “trip trap” sounds as the educator reads the story.

Sensory stories help children connect words with real experiences and this supports their communication and language development. Objects and actions help to reinforce the meanings, and repetition supports vocabulary development.

This approach to story telling actively considers children’s sensory processing and communication needs. Children are able to explore textures, sounds and smells at their own pace and according to their own preferences, with activities adapted to avoid sensory overload. They provide a variety of ways to communicate included within the play activity, including using sound buttons to press and symbols to point to.

Utilising sensory stories can help to develop social interaction and shared play experiences, providing opportunities for collaboration with peers and turn taking with objects. They are an inclusive and engaging approach to play that supports all children, including children with SEND. They enhance communication, engagement, social interaction and emotional development whilst making storytelling accessible for all!



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NATURE INSPIRED PLAY

Nature based play supports children to interact with the natural world around them. Through activities such as exploring parks, playing with natural materials, gardening or outdoor play. It is often child-led and encourages exploration, curiosity and discovery.

Nature play can support children's physical development through incorporating activities which require both gross and fine motor skills.



Here, following a walk within the local community where spring flowers were observed, children were supported to engage with daffodil playdough. This provocation included playdough, cut daffodils, pot grown daffodils, bulbs and pattern indented stones to provide a variety of sensory experiences.

Nature play is known to enhance children's emotional well-being. Being in nature has a calming effect and can help reduce anxiety. Extending this, by reflecting on time spent outdoors and introducing concepts into every day play can help develop children's memory, recall and love for the natural world.

Nature stimulates curiosity and encourages exploration, at children's individual paces and in different ways that are meaningful for each of them. They may observe the world around them, ask questions, explore through trial and error and link real-life experiences to learning.

Nature based play is a highly effective way to support children's physical, emotional, social and cognitive development. For children with SEND, it offers inclusive opportunities to explore, learn and thrive in a calm and engaging environment.

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TYPES OF PLAY

Parallel Play

Parallel play is when children play alongside each other but not directly with each other. They may use similar toys or engage in the same activity, but there is little interaction between them.

This type of play is important for children as they are learning about others. They can observe their peers, building awareness of others around them, begin to understand turn-taking opportunities. This type of play provides the foundation for cooperative play later on.

Parallel play supports children to feel both safe and independent, there is no pressure to communicate or share, children can explore at their own pace, and this helps to reduce anxiety in social situations. It also supports imitation and learning as children naturally watch one another and copy each other's actions. Parallel play is a vital step in stages of play for children.

Educators can support this type of play by:

- Providing similar resources to encourage shared interest
- Creating calm, safe environments
- Modelling simple social language “You’re both building towers!”
- Not forcing different types of play

Parallel play is important in early years development. It helps children build confidence, independence and early social skills, providing the foundations for cooperative and group play.

For children with SEND, it's a valuable and inclusive way to engage with others at their own pace.

