

Teaching and Learning

Child initiated play



“Play is essential for children’s development, building their confidence as they learn to explore, relate to others, set their own goals, and solve problems. Children learn by leading their own play.

Children immerse themselves in what most interests them, and in the process find out about themselves, other people, and the world around them. When play is open-ended and flexible, children can explore and experiment with confidence, take risks and challenge themselves at the limits of their capabilities, without fear of failure.”

Birth to 5 Matters 2021

What is child-initiated play?

Child initiated play is led and controlled by the child, rather than being controlled by the adult. By following a child’s lead in play you are supporting them to think of their own ideas and allowing them to be in control of their own learning.

TASK 1

Within your team think about how you promote child-initiated play, discuss, and reflect on the following questions:

- Is your environment well-resourced to promote child-initiated play? Does it cover all areas of learning both indoors and outdoors? Consider the different areas the children have access to such as role play, construction, messy play etc.
- Do you provide opportunities for all types of play? For example: sensory play, exploratory play with objects, pretend play, fantasy and superhero play, physical play, rough and tumble play, risky play or digital play. If so, share examples.
- Does your timetable allow flexibility to meet the needs of children during play both indoors and outdoors allowing them to fully immerse themselves in their child-initiated play?
- How do you empower children during their play?
- Are you mindful of not inadvertently redirecting children's play?

“Because play is spontaneous, flexible, and unique to each child, settings can find it challenging to support play and advocate for play. It is essential for practitioners to gain insights from play's unique ability to show children's dispositions to learn. Settings must also know and understand each family's individual, cultural approaches to play in order to support meaningful experiences which are inclusive of all”.

TASK 2

Read the snapshot of Billy below:

Billy was exploring outside with the sand; he used a spade to make a large heap which he spent at least 10 minutes doing.

Adult: What are you making?

Billy: It's a big volcano.

Billy selected some dinosaurs and pebbles from the baskets to add to his volcano

Billy: My dinosaurs live at my volcano and these (pebbles) are the stepping stones.

Adult: Oh and what happens if a dinosaur falls off a stepping stone?

Billy: It will fall into 'lava' and that will be dangerous.

Adult: Why would that be dangerous?

Billy: Cos the lava it very hot, oh I need lava now!

Adult: "Yes, I think you do, what could you use for this Billy?"

Billy: "I know, I can use some water and I can pretend that it is the lava!"

Adult "I think that's a very good idea, where will you get the water from and how will you transfer it safely to the sand?"

Billy looked around, thinking. He then confidently walked over to the outdoor tap and selected a jug to fill it with water. Billy transferred his jug of water safely to the sand and poured it into the hole at the top of his volcano.

- How do you think the environment supported Billy's child-initiated play?
- How did the adult support Billy and allow him to lead his own play? Why was this effective?
- How can the adult extend Billy's learning further? What would be his next steps?
- Thinking about your own environment – do children have opportunities to think of their own ideas and put them into practice?
- How often do you review play opportunities to extend children's learning?