

PLAY-BASED LEARNING



At Linden Tree Nursery Schools we create an environment which enables children to develop, learn and explore. One of the most effective methods for holistic development in early years is play in its full sense.

Children's learning is best supported when they have opportunities which allow for movement and action, creativity and imagination, independence and collaboration.

We work in line with the Froebelian approach and we put great value on child-led activities. Giving the children freedom to explore, discover and create for themselves and offering guidance when needed.



'Play is the highest expression of human development in childhood for it alone is the free expression of what is in the child's soul'

Fredrich Froebel



CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Before a child goes to school and can be successful in learning they must learn a full scope of skills such as understanding language and being able to communicate successfully, having well-developed fine and gross motor skills, being confident and assertive, be able to make friends, negotiate and manage their feelings. These are fundamental abilities which lay the foundation for further goals without which children struggle to reach their highest potential.

'In play there is no necessity to conform or bow to the pressure of external rules, outcomes, target or adult-led ideas. Rules in play, can be broken, created changed and challenged. This enables children to face life, deal with and face situations, work out alternatives, change how things are done and cope with their future'

Tina Bruce



Child development refers to the sequence of physical, language, intellectual and emotional changes that occur in a child from birth to the beginning of adulthood.



Froebel considered the whole child's, health, physical development, the environment, emotional well-being, mental ability, social relationships and spiritual aspects of development as important.

[The British Association of Early Childhood Education](http://www.british-early-childhood-education.org/)



Cognitive development

This is how children explore the world around them, how they think and how they solve problems. Through the process of cognitive development, they can practice the skills to problem solve and process and interact with their surroundings. Piaget proposed four major stages of cognitive development and called them sensimotor intelligence, preoperational thinking, concrete operational thinking and formal operational thinking.

To learn about cognitive developmental milestones click [here](#)



Physical development

In early years the body's physical development is rapid. Motor development occurs in an orderly sequence as infants move from reflexive reactions (e.g., sucking) to more advanced motor functioning. Physical development includes both growth and the ability to use muscles and body parts for particular skills. Both gross (large muscle movement) and fine (small movements) motor skills contribute to physical development and children often learn a set of skills by a certain age. In the early years children are establishing patterns of activity which will affect their whole future.

Communication and language development

As children grow, they begin to be aware and explore different sounds, symbols and words. Children's skills develop through a series of identifiable stages within three aspects - listening and attention, understanding and speaking. Communication and language lay foundations for learning and development. During the first five years, stimulation of language development is essential as the brain is developing new nerve cells as well as connections between those cells to serve the function of expressive and receptive language. While not all the children will follow the sequence of progress at the same rate, it is important to identify any language delay to be able to support a child appropriately and in timely manner.

For more information click [here](#)

Social and Emotional Development

Early relationships strongly influence how children develop, and having close, secure attachment to their carers is important for children's healthy development. Positive relationships support wellbeing and the gradual development of self-regulation. When adults tune in to children's signals and respond sensitively and consistently to meet their needs, children can feel safe, relaxed, and loved. Regular patterns of activities which create routine and help children to know what to expect next also foster a sense of security and self-confidence.

(www.birthto5matters.org.uk)



Types of play

Children may be pursuing different purposes in sensory play, exploratory play with objects, schematic play, symbolic play, pretend play (alone, in a role play or with small world objects), co-operative role play with others, fantasy and superhero play, physical play, rough and tumble play, risky play, or digital play.

(www.birthto5matters.org.uk)



Outdoor play

Outdoor play is essential as it supports the overall development of a child. Not only does it provide opportunities for free and unrestricted movement, fresh air and natural resources to play with, it also supports physical development, cognitive learning and encourages communication skills. Outdoor play often gives children more freedom and autonomy than indoor play as they can explore and be independent. When it comes to social skills, children can play in larger groups when given more space outdoors. This can help them develop better social skills and learn to manage their emotions in a large groups. For emotional development, any amount of time spent exercising in the fresh air promotes wellbeing and mental health. Given space to run, jump, climb, roll and skip outdoors, children can lower their stress levels, and improve their overall performance in once they're back in the classroom.



You can find a lot of interesting facts about how children develop and benefit from spending time outdoors closely associated with Froebelian practice today in the informational pamphlet '[Outdoor play and exploration](#)' by Helen Tovey.



Each type of play is important

Symbolic play is the ability of children to use objects, actions, or ideas to represent other objects, actions, or ideas. Classroom dramatic play areas and small world setups are the perfect learning experience to foster symbolic play. It is widely considered the most sophisticated play activity during the preschool and kindergarten years. Symbolic play encourages the development of social skills, academic abilities, early literacy concepts, and behavioural self-regulation (Leong & Bodrova 2015).

Symbolic play can be seen in children as young as 18 months of age. Toddlers can be seen engaging in pretend play when they use objects to represent something else like driving a car by moving a pretend steering wheel or using a block of wood as a cell phone. Drinking from an empty cup or pretending to feed a doll are also examples of symbolic play. Children will also be developing their cognitive skills when they use their imagination and take part in symbolic or fantasy. New neural pathways are created whenever a child learns how to think creatively.



Learning through play is at the heart of Froebelian practice. Read more articles [here](#)

PLAY

- Provides opportunities to make sense of their experiences
- Helps them to develop the awareness of themselves and others
- Children can explore, investigate, experiment
- They are actively involved in their own learning
- They test out their theories and draw their conclusion
- They develop their sense of confidence
- They express their feelings, ideas, relationships in diverse range of ways
- They learn to collaborate with others, share resources, develop their relationships with others
- They can initiate their own learning
- They practice newly acquired skills, they consolidate learning
- Play challenges children's new learning

Read and listen to Stella Louis talking about [power of play](#)

Free-flow play allows the child to have control over their own play by exploring their different ideas and feelings, using their imagination, making choices and making mistakes.

Free flow

This type of play is when children have all the control and choose all the materials and decide how they want to use them. Free play differs from guided play in that the adult is not creating activities with specific learning goals. For example, when the children go outside to play, they have autonomy to choose how to spend their time and what resources to use.



Central to Tina Bruce's Play Theory is the belief that play is vital within a child's learning, and places much emphasis on free-flow play. In 1997 she stated:

'When play is at its most fruitful, it is in 'free-flow'.



Role play

Role play is vital to cognitive development. It provides the opportunity for children to explore various roles and social rules that they may not otherwise have the chance to explore in the real world. Dramatic play helps children to move away from their egocentric thinking. Children will learn skills in negotiation, cooperation, listening, sharing, taking turns, and respecting others' feelings, thoughts, ideas, and physical space.



Exploratory and physical play

Children explore the world through play. Through exploratory play they learn about the effect they can have on the environment. Exploratory play stimulates important neural connections within the brain. It also helps the child with cognitive development, such as, problem solving and decision making. By encouraging independent exploratory play, children have the opportunity to develop their self-confidence, self-esteem and also critical thinking skills, it also helps to develop an enquiring mind. Nurturing these skills from an early age is so beneficial in creating a firm foundation to a child's academic success.



Solitary play

Solitary play is an essential part of child development and is common between the ages of 1 and 3. It is one of the 6 stages of play where a child starts to play independently, completely uninterested and unaware of other children around them.

It has also been proven that children who engage in solitary play are more able to focus and have longer attention spans, which makes them better learners as they grow. It is also vital to developing and regulating children's emotional state.



It plays an important role in helping children learn about themselves and the world around them, develops imagination, teaches them how to focus, develops self-confidence, encourages independence, helps develop creativity, and improves problem-solving skill.

Overstimulated toddlers can very easily end up in a state of meltdown. Being able to play independently and alone, allows them have time to regulate their emotions and re-centre themselves. Solitary play is important at any age.

Co-operative play



During co-operative play children are working together towards a shared goal. They will create rules about how to play and assigned roles. There may be a lot of arguing as they learn to share, take turns, and negotiate. It is a great opportunity for the child to develop their social skills through negotiation, resolving conflicts, using and improving their communication skills, learning about themselves and others.

'We don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing'

George Bernard Shaw