

Routines of Play

Early Years Team

Routines of play are a purposeful way of playing and interacting with a child that follows a simple sequence. It involves predictability, repetition, as well as the fun of playing! It also allows for turn-taking and language learning opportunities. Young children like knowing what to expect because it gives them a sense of comfort, security, and control. Repetition allows for practise and multiple opportunities to acquire a new skill. When a child can anticipate what comes next, they are more likely to socially interact and communicate.

A play routine is *similar* to a play activity because they are fun and interactive and allow for bonding, creativity, stimulation, and problem solving. However, a play routine is *different* to a play activity. Play activities do not have to intentionally follow a predictable order. They are not necessarily designed to trigger something to happen. A play routine, unlike a play activity, has been constructed to embed the learning through its actual structure.

Example of a Play Routine:

Beginning:

Present a box filled with about 5 building blocks to the child. Handle the blocks and encourage them to do the same. Follow the child's lead and do the same thing that they are doing.

Middle:

Take two of the blocks and put one on top of the other and while doing so, talk about what you are doing ... "I'm/Sam is building a tower. Next, give a block to the child and say each turn taking by saying, Now it's your turn," or "Now it's Jack's turn." (Support the child to be successful if necessary). Then say, "My turn" or "Sam's turn". Once all the blocks have been used, start counting down to push the tower over, with waiting time so the child has time to make eye contact. Build up the excitement in your voice "5..4..3..2..1...CRASH" Knock the tower down using your own or child's hand (as appropriate). Repeat the routine if the child is engaged, if not, finish the play before the child loses interest.

End:

End the routine once all the bricks have been used and knocked down, by saying "Build a tower, finished!" and accompany with a clear gesture. Place the blocks

back in the box. Encourage the child to do the same. Move on to a different activity.

During the activity:

Self-talk and parallel talk: Periodically, narrate your actions and the child's actions: "I'm building a tower," or "You're holding a block." Improvise the type and the length of the utterance based on the child's current language skills.

Pause in anticipation: Pause three to five seconds after making a comment. Give the toddler some time to process the comment and respond. For example, you can say, "I can't see a brick". Then count to five and wait expectantly for the toddler to say or do something. Accept any response. If there is no response, just keep playing.

Choices: You can ask the toddler which brick he would like to use. Take out two bricks and offer to the child to choose from.

What next?

Put out the equipment/resources used in the play routine as a free play activity to allow the child to use the rehearsed skills and ideas independently. Build up a range of different play routines to introduce different skills.