



# Free play & activities

## Adaptions for activities

You can adapt free play and activities to make sure they are set-up to be as inclusive as possible for all children with additional needs. We will discuss craft, and sensory play. Also, remember the tips & tricks for setting up an inclusive playgroup environment.

### **Craft Play**

There can be some easy ways to adapt craft activities. Using thick textas and crayons make it easier to grasp for children. There are some designed for young children that are also helpful for all people who have difficulties grasping. Cutting is difficult for many children – consider having adapted scissors, using thin card rather than paper, ripping instead of cutting or having some things pre-cut. If a table is not the right height for a child, you can set up the craft on the wall, an easel or a chalkboard. It is fun for children to work on a vertical surface and good for their arm and hand strength. Here are some other ideas:

- Put something heavy on paper so it doesn't move, if it is hard for a child to steady paper while drawing.
- Have a completed craft activity, or a photo of the completed activity, so children know what they are making .
- Finger painting is often easier for everyone

### **Sensory/Messy Play**

Messy play is play that stimulates children's senses (touch, smell, taste, sound and movement), such as sand, water, bubbles, playdough, mud and fingerprint play.

Some children, who may not be interested in many types of play, are often very fascinated with some types of messy play. In this way, messy play is an important part of an inclusive Playgroup.



Some children do not like touching certain textures, so make sure there are items available so they can still play, but without actually touching with their fingers. For example, provide scoops, popsticks, paintbrushes and other items.

Here are some tips to help setting up messy play when creating an inclusive environment:

- Have a small container of water and a towel near the messy play so children can clean their hands straight away if they want to.
- Have messy play at different levels.
- If the play is on the floor and a child or parent can't get to it easily, can it (or some of it) be placed on a table?

There are some adaptations that we can make to have the activities at Playgroup more inclusive for children with additional needs. Can you think of some adaptations you can make to activities that you set-up for children?

Remember that not all the adaptations we make will work for all children. All children have different abilities, these different abilities will mean the adaptation we make for one activity may not work for another. This is why it is important to think about the individual children attending our Playgroups, and what we can do to make sure they have the opportunity to join in as many activities as possible.

### **Teaching a child a new skill**

When teaching a new skill or behavior keep these five training principles in mind. They help frame successful training:

- Start where the child is at.
- Break it down, build gradually.
- Keep it simple, maximize success.
- Do it together, scaffolding the learning.
- Keep it fun! Mastery is motivating; builds confidence!

When starting it is important to include all the basic principles. Regardless of the teaching strategies you are using, each principle, other than “doing it together” will apply.



## Group Time

Some children enjoy group time, others aren't so interested. Group time can be a flexible time where children may come and go.

- Keep mat time short and fairly predictable – things in the same order more or less each week.
- All children love repetition – repeat favourite well known songs and books.
- Sing simple songs where the actions aren't too fast or complicated.

Do lots of pausing and waiting for participation from the children. This benefits all children's language development.

Some things to consider to help children engage with group time are:

- Some children benefit from a visual and tactile reminder of where to sit on the floor – carpet squares or cushions can be used
- Small toys to hold and fidget with can help some children settle and pay attention
- A visual reminder of the expected behaviour at mat time can help remind older children
- Consider the speed of songs and their actions – if they aren't too fast it means everyone can give them a go
- Songs and books with visual supports and keyword signs can help all children engage and understand

If there are children who have strong interests in particular topics, try and incorporate this topic into group time some weeks. See if that child would like to join in by holding something or sharing their knowledge with the group.