

Guidelines for Stay and Play Sessions at Children's Centres

This guidance is for Children's Centre practitioners running Stay and Play sessions for families with children 0-5 years of age in light of the revised EYFS.

Stay and Play sessions play a pivotal role in Children's Centre services. The purpose of the sessions is to offer a high quality provision within a safe, informative, and stimulating environment which is welcoming and supportive to all.

Stay and Play Services should offer:

- Provide high quality, well planned, stimulating and challenging activities for all ages and stages within the 0-5 age group, based on child initiated play both indoors and outdoors. Holiday periods and afterschool may include provision for older children (resources allowing).
- Support for parental involvement in their child's learning and development through observation and collaborative discussion about their unique child.
- An environment with core experiences that support positive interactions between adults and children where staff model sensitive and respectful adult interactions which supports children's individual learning and development.
- Ideas, activities and opportunities that can be replicated in the home environment, for example the use of treasure baskets, the making of play dough etc.
- Personal support for parents and carers.
- Information relevant to families who have young children including, employment, training, child care, health and wellbeing.
- The promotion of healthy lifestyles e.g. healthy snacks or meals.

Stay and Play within the Children's Centre Framework

The Stay and Play should:

- Aim to foster opportunities to enable children, parents, carers and staff to be more sensitive to each other's needs.
- Provide the ideal opportunity to consult with parents, carers and children about the services the Children's Centre offers and issues that affect families locally and nationally.

Staff Roles and Responsibilities

There should be:

- Clearly defined roles and responsibilities for staff and volunteers working in sessions.
- Two staff should facilitate a Stay and Play session, generally, (this may include an experienced, trained volunteer).

Staff must:

- Have knowledge of child development and be conversant with policies and procedures in line with the revised EYFS framework.
- Be able to listen to parents' and carer's concerns to be able to support them or be able to signpost them to appropriate agencies for support.

- Sensitively support parents to complete appropriate paperwork e.g. registration forms.

Staff should:

- Be aware that parents, carers and children may come to Stay and Play with different and changing needs.
- Be able to sensitively model adult and child interactions which support and extend a child's learning and development.
- Support parents / carers to engage with their child and enjoy shared play experiences
- Be able to work in a responsive, flexible and respectful way.
- Be skilled in making each session an inclusive experience for parents, carers and children. It may take time and regular communication to build solid relationships, which are founded on mutual trust and respect.
- Recognise when a parent or carer may need to have time to reflect, to have his/her own space, to off-load or to gain the support of fellow parents and carers. As a consequence of the parent's or carer's need their child may need support by a member of staff to access provision in that time.
- Develop a code of conduct for Stay and Play sessions so that they are clear about expectations e.g. of behaviour, mobile phone use, smoking, parental responsibility for their children, food and drink. Also see policies.

Volunteers

Volunteers will need training in the agreed protocol for welcoming newcomers and informing them about the Centre. An induction to all relevant documents and background reading should form part of the induction process. The volunteer and staff need to be aware of the volunteer's role this can be done through the application/ induction process, coaching or training.

Whilst it is good for parents and carers to be encouraged to help in the session (ownership and empowerment), clear parameters should exist, reinforced by the volunteer application process, coaching or training, so that parents and carers who volunteer understand what is required and users and all staff/ volunteer are aware of the volunteer's role.

Professional Development

It is good practice to identify training needs of the team. On-going professional development should be available for staff who should be encouraged and expected to take part in it. This may be through:

- Specific training for working in Stay and Play. e.g. PICL training
- Training which provides support for practitioners in listening to very young children and imaginative ways to consult with young children in addition to observations.
- Sharing good practice across the Centre as well as between Centres should be arranged so that staff can share their expertise.

- Peer observations (the observation by a colleague of a particular session, with confidential feedback on their practice) are a valuable way of promoting reflection and evidence-based practice.

Multiagency Working

Sometimes sessions are used as a context for work with other agencies.

For example:

- Health Visitors may run a baby clinic and/or attend sessions to give advice on a range of health and development issues.
- The Family Information Service may also attend. Expertise from other agencies can also be included in Stay and Play sessions, such as PEEP programmes which can be adapted to take place within sessions.
- Staff from other agencies may attend on an informal basis to give information about their role and allay parent's and carer's anxieties about using services.

Equality of Access

Equality of access should ensure that all users are able to access the environment regardless of their physical needs, culture, economic status etc.

- The diversity of individuals and communities is to be valued and respected.
- All children and families need to feel safe, included and valued.
- Barriers need to be recognised and addressed wherever possible through inclusive working practices, positive action and anti-discriminatory employment and working methods.
- For equality of access, voluntary charges should be locally decided, however fees should not be a barrier to families attending sessions.
- See equal opportunities policy / Act.

Confidentiality

All information parents and carers share with staff should be confidential and not shared with any other agency/individual without parental permission. However, staff have a responsibility to protect the children in their care and in matters of safeguarding, when there is a concern regarding a child's welfare, it may be necessary to consult the Social Work Assessment Team prior to discussing matters with parents. Refer to your Safeguarding and Information Sharing Policies.

Policies

All users should be made aware of relevant policies for instance Equal Opportunity, Confidentiality, Health and Safety and Complaints Procedures.

Other policies expectations may include:

Hot drinks / food.

Mobile phone policy.

No smoking.

Positive behaviour

Users

Stay and Play sessions are a universal service for anyone who wants or needs this service (self-referred or referred by another agency).

- A family may be referred by a Social Worker and may attend the session as part of a care plan.
The role of the staff must be clearly defined and understood by the parent and the referring agency.
Confidentiality and an open and honest dialogue needs to be established with the family, including the sharing of records made.
- Each Stay and Play setting needs to have a protocol agreed with staff and users, for welcoming newcomers and informing them about the Centre.
- Parents or carers are expected to be responsible for their children during the Stay and Play session and are supported by staff in maintaining positive behaviour and a safe environment.

Children's Rights

Children's Rights should be embedded in all practice within a Children's Centre. The *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) contains 54 articles in total, which can be grouped into three main types of rights, often called the 3P's:

- **Provision rights** - rights to goods, services and resources
- **Protection rights** - rights from neglect, abuse, exploitation, discrimination
- **Participation rights** - rights regarding decisions affecting their lives

Information on the CRC can be found on www.unicef.org/crc and some good resources to support planning and evaluations can also be found on the UNICEF UK websites:

- <http://www.unicef.org.uk/Education/Resources-Overview/Resources/>
- http://www.unicef.org.uk/Documents/Education-Documents/UNICEF%20UK_RRSA_catalogue_2012.pdf

For more information, see Appendix A.

Play Activities

- Need to be planned by the staff team in consultation with parents, carers and children to ensure a varied programme is offered that addresses the developmental needs of a diverse group of children and families thus ensuring a voice for children, parents and carers in planning and evaluation. Displaying planning can help to support this.
- Should be planned and evaluated using the EYFS guidelines with particular reference to the Characteristics of Effective Learning.
- Opportunities should be open ended so that they cater for the range of ages and stages accessing the session and also offering challenge for individuals.
- Staff should be involved in a review, reflect and evaluate cycle at the end of each session.
- Time for regular quality monitoring, in depth reflection and evaluation needs to be built in to the programme to ensure good practice.
- Reflective practice is key to all Stay and Play sessions.
- Practitioners should model positive interactions, play and positive behaviour strategies with children to encourage and inform parents e.g. PICL model.

The Environment

A rich and varied environment plays a key role in supporting and extending children's learning and development.

Accessible indoor and outdoor play should be available throughout the year. Free flow play with accessible resources gives the child the confidence to explore and learn while making sense of the world around them in secure and safe, yet stimulating indoor and outdoor spaces.

The environment should provide experiences based on the 7 areas of learning from the EYFS. There should be core experiences such as:

Sand and water play

Baby area

Construction

Small world Play

Fine motor opportunities

Gross motor opportunities

Malleable

Sensory

Music / singing/ rhymes

Messy / creative play.

In addition, adult initiated activities related to planning based on observations helps facilitate provision both indoor and outdoor for individual children, these should be shared with parents which provide opportunities to engage parents in their child's learning and development.

Staff need to maintain a safe and secure environment which is warm, positive and rewarding for everyone based on promoting the well being of families and children.

Risk assessments should be made to ensure that the environment and the resources used are safe.

Additional Resources

The Foundation Years website has regular updates of information and you are able to subscribe to their newsletter:

<http://www.foundationyears.org.uk/early-years-foundation-stage-2012>

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Appendix A

Stay and Play in relation to Children's Rights

Respecting Provision Rights

Starting from the child within their family we work to improve the lives of young children and their families, with a particular focus on the most disadvantaged families, through our provision by valuing each child as a competent learner, by developing positive relationships with parents and carers, and by offering high quality experiences that support and extend children's learning and development.

The most relevant Provision Rights	
Article 3	The wellbeing of every child is of primary importance
Article 5	We have a responsibility to support parents in their duty to help their child to exercise their rights
Article 18	We have a responsibility to support both parents in the upbringing and development of their child
Article 23	Disabled children have a right to equal access
Article 24	Every child has a right to the best possible health and nutrition
Article 28	Every child has a right to developmentally appropriate education and care
Article 29	Every child has a right to learn about respecting human rights, respecting parents, his or her own culture and other cultures, languages, the environment and themselves
Article 30	Children of minority cultures have a right to enjoy their own culture
Article 31	Every child has a right to rest, play and to do things they enjoy

Respecting Protection Rights

Protecting children from any kind of harm is an utmost priority while at the same time encouraging their curiosity to explore, and promoting their independence. Through active listening, eye contact, patience, respect, verbal encouragement and sensitive corrections of misconceptions we can create a climate where it is all right to make mistakes in the hope that children will feel safe to take calculated risks as they grow and develop.

The most relevant Protection Rights	
Article 2	Every child has the right to be protected against all forms of discrimination
Article 19	Every child must be protected from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and mistreatment

Respecting Participation Rights

By direct, age appropriate means such as through play and activities, and by indirect means through consulting with parents about their child, we can give children a voice in what is on offer in the Children's Centre.

The most relevant Participation Rights	
Article 12	Every child has the right to express their views and their views must be taken seriously
Article 13	Every child has the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas

Placing children's rights more explicitly at the heart of policy and practice could be seen as the collective responsibility of practitioners working with children and families, since it is at the core of legislation such as the Children Act 2004.