



## PLAYING WITH YOUNG CHILDREN 2

Play for pre-school children

### THE IDEA

As children grow they need many types of activities to develop their senses and to help their bodies develop well. Older children can help to make everyday activities – going to the market, preparing food – fun and interesting for young children. These are opportunities for imaginative play and for learning about many things such as colours and shapes and how to sort, match, weigh and count things. Excellent playthings can be found in the community and made with materials that cost nothing. Listening to and responding to young children is one of the most important things that adults and older children can do. When we do this well children learn that what they say and do is important. This makes them feel good about themselves and gives them the confidence to try new things.

Priya and her younger brother Suresh are using weights to 'buy' potatoes. Priya and Suresh choose and discard stones to carefully create a balance for a tower of potatoes. Carefully Priya guides Suresh – helping to select stones, helping him to learn about shape, what will stack, and about heavy and heaviest.



### Understanding

Children often need to create their own play, as well as to copy what others do. They need to try out new things and to imagine different situations. Older children can help younger children to develop by being there to play with them, to listen to them and to support them when they try out new activities.

All communities are rich in materials for play activities. Children are very good at finding playthings and thinking of new ways to play with them. Older children can support this by collecting together different ideas and materials that could be used for making toys and playthings. Together they can talk about and share ideas for things to do with their younger brothers and sisters.

### Safety in play

Older children should make sure that play materials for young children are safe. They must avoid:

- Things with sharp edges.
- Small pieces that young children could swallow or put in their noses or ears.
- Plastic bags that can suffocate little children.

When young children play out of doors it is important to check that places where they run and climb are safe and that they do not risk running into a road or falling in water.

#### **When children are sick**

When children are sick, play can make them feel happier and more secure.

**Remember:** When children are sick they may want to play games and use toys that they played with when they were younger. They will probably enjoy hearing stories and having songs sung to them.

#### **Finding out more**

Children can find out many things in their community.

For example, they can:

- Conduct a survey of games that their younger brothers and sisters like to play.
- See what toys are made locally.
- Learn the songs, stories and games that their grandparents knew and played when they were young.

#### *Grandmothers tell good stories*

*In a remote mountainous area grandmothers are renowned storytellers. One grandmother made a little donkey out of straw that carries all the household goods on its back. She uses the donkey to tell stories of how her people move from one place to another, building their homesteads. She describes all the important items they must take with them — cooking pots, rope to tie the animals, poles to build a home and so on. Children love to listen to her and tell other children about her stories.*



- Devise a questionnaire to ask their parents, nursery school teachers, school teachers and other people in the neighbourhood about play activities.
- Check if the places where children play are safe – both inside and outside the home.

### **Planning and doing**

Based on what they found out children can plan activities with their teachers or other responsible adults.

For example:

- They may plan to make a play area for younger children in their school or clinic and collect and make appropriate play materials for this.
- They may plan a campaign on the local radio for better play areas.

- They may decide to write articles for the local paper or magazines on the importance of play.
- They may decide to collect play materials and ideas for toys and games.

Older children can organise play activities with younger children in different settings and collect play materials and ideas from many people and places in the community. This could be as part of school or youth group activities or with their own families and neighbours' children.

Here are some suggestions for **games and play activities**, where to **collect materials** for toys and games and how to **organise play activities**, and how to **organise and store play materials**.

### **Activities for younger children**

Children will know many traditional songs and games. They can be encouraged to play these. Some children with disabilities may need extra help to take part in play activities. Older children can help to make sure that they are included.

#### ***Water, sand and mud***

Children will play for hours with water and sand, especially if they have a few materials like plastic bottles, different sized tins, gourds and calabashes to make the play more interesting. Holes can be put in these containers. Thin bamboo, banana stems or hollow reeds make good pipes and gutters. They can be used with soap and water for blowing bubbles. Tins, seedpods and pieces of wood make boats. Children can experiment to see what things float and what sink. Older children can find play materials and encourage little children to notice new things and talk about what they are doing.

#### ***Building games***

Maize cobs, matchboxes, scraps of wood and cardboard can be used by children for building. Soft pith from palm fronds, grass stalks and banana leaves can be used for making and building things. Sisal, bark and other materials can be used for weaving. Children can find other materials for building and weaving.

**Sorting things**

Young children like to sort things. There are many different kinds of things to play with and sort, such as flowers and fruit with different colours and smells, scraps of cloth that look and feel different, dull things and shiny things, big things and small things. Many of these activities can be incorporated into the everyday routine of the household – sorting vegetables for size, finding the correct eating utensils and so on.

**Using the senses**

Children's sense of touch, smell, taste and hearing can be stimulated in play activities and in routine activities such as during mealtimes and when preparing food. Games can be played with scraps of cloth, shells or stones put into bags for little children to identify by feel. Scraps of soap, onion, flowers or anything else with a strong smell can be wrapped in paper with tiny holes in it. Children can guess what it is by smell. Other things can be put into tins to identify by sound when the tin is shaken. This could be especially good fun for children who have difficulty in seeing.

**Pretend games**

Children love to pretend that they are mother, father or teacher. Adults or older children could supply them with materials to make these games more interesting, like things for making a house, preparing food, making dolls, playing at shopping or going to market, and dressing-up clothes. Children only need a little help to dress up. Paper, leaves, sticks and bits of cloth can easily be used to make hats, dresses and other pretend clothes.

**Making and using books**

Older children can make story and picture books for younger children. Little children love to hear stories about themselves. They enjoy the excitement of turning the page to see what will happen next in the story. They also enjoy the repetition of well-loved familiar stories. Reading stories to children helps to expand their vocabulary and models correct use of language.

**Active play**

As soon as they can walk and run, children love to practise using their bodies. Older children can help them to run and jump, throw and catch, skip, climb and slide. When younger children can throw a little, older children can make or find things for them to aim at. They can learn to throw things into a box or knock down a can or stick. Older children can help children who have difficulties grasping and holding objects to throw things.

**Drawing and painting**

Most children love to draw and paint. Scrap paper, cardboard and newspapers can be used to paint and draw on. Paints can be made from inks, dyes or local plants. Brushes can be made from chewed sticks. Glue can be made from flour and a little water.

**Talking and listening**

Children can learn so much by being talked to and by being listened to. Listening to children is one of the most important things that we can do to help their development. Older children can collect stories, songs and riddles for younger children. They can find opportunities to encourage the younger children to talk for themselves. Through stories, songs and play they can introduce ideas like 'bigger than, smaller than, the same as, smoother, rougher and heavier'. Younger children will grow in confidence if they are listened to and their ideas are valued. It is important to try to answer their many questions.

**Activities as children grow older**

As children grow they will become more adventurous. Later, given the opportunity, they will begin to learn to count and take an interest in reading and writing.

**Adventure games**

Young children need to be very active. They like to run around and play games like tag. Fallen trees and steep banks are good places to climb and slide down. Simple swings can be made with rope and old tyres, which are also good to roll and climb

through. A child with difficulties in moving will enjoy the experience of being in a swing or hammock. Children could get help to make a cart with wheels to ensure that children who cannot walk because of a disability can explore with other children. Large stones can be placed so that children have to take giant steps from one to the other. A line on the ground (marked with a stick, drawn with chalk or indicated by a long creeper) is good for balancing along.

### ***Learning what adults do***

Young children will enjoy a visit to a workshop, a bakery, or other places where they can see work being done by adults. Adults and older children can encourage children to talk about what they have seen.

### ***Playing with the sun***

Children can play tag with their shadows. They can draw round each other's shadows in the dust, or make a shadow of their finger to point at stones. Children can play games with mirrors or shiny pieces of tin. Younger children cannot make these on their own. Older children can help and teach them how to control them.

### ***Music***

Music can be used in many ways. Children can be active while music is playing or drums are being beaten, and stop when the music stops. This teaches them to listen carefully.

Musical instruments can be made out of reeds and gourds. Children can clap their hands, sing, beat on tins or plastic tubs for drums, or shake gourds or plastic bottles with seeds in them.

Older children can make instruments for little children to play. They can notch a length of wood with a file and rub a stick along it to make a rhythmic noise. They can line up a row of tins or bottles with a different quantity of water in each and listen to which one makes the lowest and highest sound. Wrapping string or rubber tightly around a container with an open end, or piece of wood with another piece on top can create plucking instruments.

### ***Collecting play materials***

These are some examples of things to collect and where to find them. Children will think of many more.

**At home:** sand, gourds, tins and boxes.

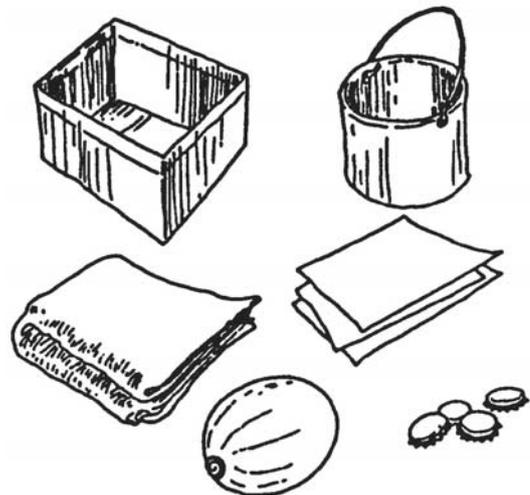
**From shops:** scraps of cloth, packing material, bottle tops, cartons and paper.

**In the community:** cornstalks, stones, clay, grasses, seedpods, and dye from local plants.

**From local craftsmen and women:** scraps of cloth, wood, metal and leather.

**From local musicians:** materials and advice for making simple musical instruments.

**From older people:** local traditional stories, songs, dances and games.



### ***Making play materials***

**At school:** time can be made available for older children to make play materials for young ones.

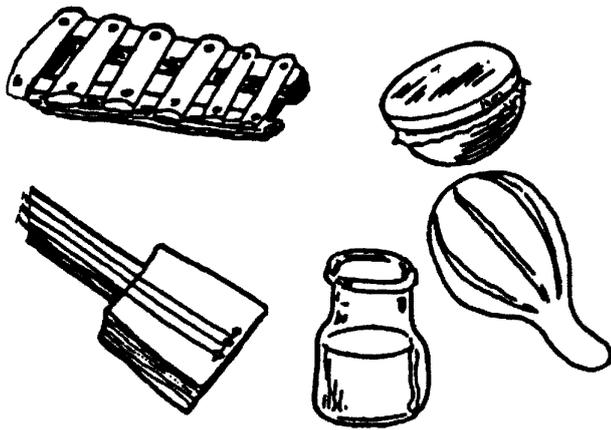
Here are some examples:

**Art and craft lessons:** children make toys like cars, dolls and models; games equipment like balls, hoops and ropes; paints and brushes for making pictures; puppets; instruments like drums and rattles; building blocks.

**Language lessons:** children can design books with stories and pictures, posters and charts.

**Music lessons:** children can collect songs and singing games.

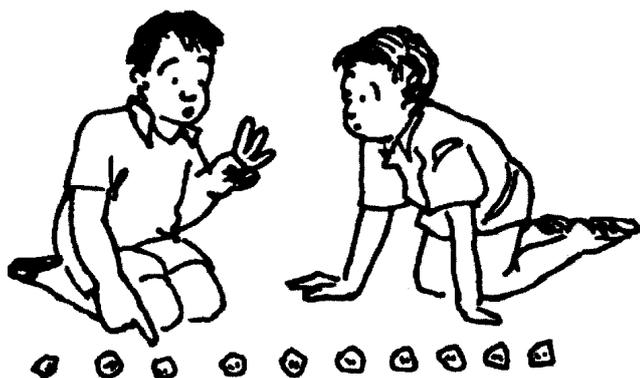
**Maths and science lessons:** children can make puzzles, shapes and dominoes and games such as snakes and ladders and ludo.



In Zambia teachers introduced child development as a topic and taught it over a range of subjects, including in English language and Zambian language lessons. As part of their work, children collected local games. They modified a traditional circle singing game to help younger children learn letters and numbers whilst playing.

Sometimes a school or a class may agree to set aside a day or two in school time – perhaps when examinations are being marked or during a holiday – for a ‘toy and game-making workshop’.

**Health into Mathematics** (available from Teaching-aids At Low Cost) has a whole section on making toys and games that involve many mathematical skills such as accuracy and measurement. Remember that making and creating toys and games for others helps the child who makes them as much as it does the child who plays with them.



## Organising play

**In school** older children can set up play areas, and organise and help to care for materials for younger classes (see Activity Sheet 1.5 **A Place to Play** for more ideas on this).

**At home** older children can help by talking about play activities with their mothers and fathers. They could make a special box for babies’ and young children’s play materials.

**In crèches and nursery groups** older children can learn from the teacher. They can make materials for the little children and play with them.

**At clinics and other meeting places** they can organise play materials for younger children attending with their parents.



In Gujarat, India, older children in Child-to-Child groups run resource centres in school premises where children of all ages come to play. The older children look after the play materials and make sure that they are kept in good condition. Especially popular is *carrom*, a board game widely played in the Indian subcontinent.

## Organising play materials

Play materials that have been collected need to be stored and cared for. Maybe a special place for children’s play materials such as a special box can be set aside in the home, at school and at the clinic. Older children can help to care for children’s play areas in these places.

## Activities for preparing children for school

All of the activities in this Activity Sheet and Activity Sheet 1.1 **Playing with Young Children 1** help children to learn. They lay the foundations for the more formal learning that children will experience once they start school. Before going to school, it is more important for little children to have opportunities to play and enjoy a variety of experiences than to do more formal 'school-type' activities. Older children can take their cues from the younger child. Counting fingers and toes, rhymes and songs that use numbers and letters, and looking at books together can help to introduce more formal concepts in a way that is fun. Some children will want to learn about letters and numbers around five years of age. Other children will not be interested until they are a year or two older. It is usual in many countries to wait until children are in their seventh year before starting to teach reading, writing and mathematics in a more formal way.

### Discussing the results of activities

After doing these activities children ask each other questions such as:

- *Are we playing with younger children more? Differently?*
- *Has this made a difference to the younger children? Are they talking and doing more? Are they more adventurous?*
- *What skills did we help the little children to learn better?*
- *What play materials have we made? What are children's favourite toys?*
- *What games have we played? Have we changed games or invented new ones that are more fun?*
- *What songs and stories have we learnt? Which ones did the little children like best?*
- *Are we really listening to what the younger children like to do?*
- *Have we set up new play areas in the school and community?*
- *Are they well used? Are they well organised, safe, clean and tidy?*
- *Are there some older children who are at home all the time?*
- *Why do they stay at home? Would they enjoy and learn from play activities?*

### Doing it better

This is an ongoing process. There may be activities that the teacher, youth leader, health worker or the children themselves feel need repeating in order to improve their own understanding and skills towards other

people in the community. There may be mistakes that need correcting or written materials that need rewriting to make the messages clearer. It is important that time is spent doing this. Other issues, problems or anxieties may have come up that the adults need to explore further with the children. New topics can be discussed and selected with children at this stage.

### USING THIS SHEET

**Mothers and fathers** will be especially interested in how to play with, and respond to, young children in ways that help them to develop better. Older children can share their experience of play with them. Many other people can help.

**School teachers** can introduce ideas on child development in the curriculum, carry out school projects and help to raise money for play activities.

**Head teachers** can make time and space available at school for play activities for younger pupils and pre-school groups.

**Health workers** on home visits and in clinics can explain the importance of talking to and responding lovingly to babies and young children.

**Pre-school leaders** can use and demonstrate better play ideas in their own programmes.

**Youth leaders and community workers** can help older children to organise play activities for younger children.

**Local papers, magazines and radio** can broadcast and publish children's ideas on helping babies and young children develop through play and loving and responsive relationships.

**Women's groups, religious groups and political and cultural organisations** can

## ACTIVITY SHEET 1.2

### CHILD-TO-CHILD TRUST

take up these ideas and promote them at their meetings.

Most important of all, older children can help by playing with, listening and responding to younger children. They can make toys, books, learn new games and have fun with young children and know that by doing this they are making a real difference to the younger ones' health and development.

### **Child-headed households**

In many communities affected by HIV and AIDS, children are living alone, when their parents have died. In Uganda, a local NGO is helping older children to cope with looking after their younger brothers and sisters. As well as receiving practical support, the older children also learn about how younger children need time for play. One older girl said that she used to make her younger sister work very hard, but now she realises that the little girl needs time to play with her friends. The little girl is much happier now – and this makes her older sister feel better too.

This sheet should be used together with Activity Sheet 1.1 **Playing with Young Children 1: *Playing with babies***, which talks about why babies need to play to help their bodies develop, and how older children can help.

For further information, please contact:  
Child-to-Child Trust,  
Institute of Education, 20 Bedford Way,  
London  
WC1H 0AL, UK.