

Block play – What’s it all about?

Children need many opportunities to become competent in their block play, to master, control and practise their skills. Gradually, through exploration and interaction, the child explores the properties of each of the different blocks, separating out their differences and similarities, establishing common physical characteristics, and ‘knowing the blocks’.

Through block play children are encouraged to explore mathematical ideas of area, shape and spatial relationships. By playing with blocks children acquire a basic repertoire of building techniques. As the children get older, their symbolic representations and abstract sculptures become more detailed and intricate.

Block play encourages collaboration, co-operation and conversation: building together, and helping each other to lift heavy blocks.

Block play can also support and extend stories (for example, using blocks to retell the story of the Three Billy Goats Gruff) and interaction with non-fiction books (e.g. about buildings).

Block play as a context for development and learning in the EYFS

Block Play enables children's **personal, social and emotional development** by providing opportunities for making independent choices, sustaining interest and involvement for increasing periods of time, and collaborating with others.

Whilst using the blocks, children can develop their **communication, language and literacy** as they discuss ideas with each other, talk about what they want to do, listen to the ideas of others, and use language to describe size and position. Children can also refer to books about building and structures whilst taking part in block play, and they can record their constructions by drawing and making marks.

Block play supports the development of children's **problem-solving, reasoning and numeracy** by providing opportunities to count for a purpose and use the language of quantity and size (more, fewer, longer, shorter etc). Children gain direct experience of the properties of shapes, how to describe shapes, how to use the correct mathematical terms to describe shapes, and how the different blocks fit together. Both building with blocks and tidying up at the end provide opportunities to sort blocks by their properties and sizes. Block Play enables children to develop problems which they need to find solutions to, for example balancing different shapes in a structure or finding the right block to place.

Children can also develop their **knowledge and understanding of the world**, exploring the shape, texture and smell of the blocks at first, and finding out how to build different types of structures and how to make them stable.

Block play helps **physical development** because children need to develop their gross motor skills, picking up and moving the blocks (sometimes needing to work with another to move the largest hollow blocks), and also their fine motor skills to position and manipulate smaller blocks precisely.

Children's **creative development** is fostered by the open-ended nature of the blocks, allowing them to create many different types of structures, explore ideas and use their imagination. Block play can be linked with small world play, with children developing stories around their constructions (e.g. princes and princesses in a castle) and large-scale role play, like the swimming pool created with hollow blocks recorded in the Tuning into Children video. Children can reflect on how far they have achieved what they intended to with the blocks and think about how they might modify what they have made or do it differently next time.