

Schematic Play

Schematic play is when children display repeated patterns of behaviour to explore and make sense of the world around them. There are typically nine main play schemas, and a child may be developing and exploring several schemas at one time. Children may also display different schemas in different settings (e.g. at home and at nursery or school).

Adults should support the development of play schemas by joining the child in their play and responding to what they are doing, with active participation. It is important for adults to observe the child during play to unpick which play schema they may be developing. The adult can then begin to understand what the child's motivation is for doing something, and from there, can extend and broaden the child's learning based on their interests.

Different Play Schemas and How We Can Support:

Trajectory Schema – a fascination with how things move, including themselves

What can it look like?	Resources you can provide:	Experiences you can offer:
Dropping items from height Watching things transfer from side to side. Likes blowing bubbles, playing catch, watching things move and fly. Like studying the movement of objects, including themselves, through the air.	Beanbags, balls, bubbles Balloons, chiffon scarves blowing in the wind Kites/ribbons/material on a windy day Cars, trucks, transport toys (e.g. click, clack cars) Leaves, glitter, uncooked rice that can be thrown into the air safely	Throwing things into buckets or at a target Making and flying paper planes and kites Pendulums and pulleys Dance and movement games Playing on swings and trees Chase games like tag

Connecting Schema – Exploring how things connect and disconnect

What can it look like?	Resources you can provide:	Experiences you can offer:
Joining train tracks, building towers, sticking things together with tape. Child may like connecting arms with other people, to be physically connected. Children may like disconnecting, which may include building a tower of blocks, only to knock it down.	Stickle brick, Lego, Duplo Threading beads, paperchains, junk modelling String, masking tape, clothes pegs, elastic bands Magnets and metal objects Resources already built that can be disconnected.	Threading, weaving Junk modelling Wooden blocks and loose part play Holding hands

Transporting Schema – moving objects from one place to another

What can it look like?	Resources you can provide:	Experiences you can offer:
Moving objects from one place to another	Transport toys – pushchairs, walkers, bikes Containers, bags, tins, wheeled toys, scoops, boxes, different bags Wheelbarrow and buckets	Role-play as postman or builder Block play, small world Gardening and water play Outdoors gathering twigs, pinecones, sticks, leaves etc.

Enclosing Schema – creating boundaries, containing toys in a discrete space

What can it look like?	Resources you can provide:	Experiences you can offer:
Likes enclosing toys in spaces – e.g. creating fences Drawing circles, looping the line around small marks already made on the page It can look very similar to the enveloping schema, however, enveloping removes the object from sight, whereas enclosing contains the object.	Hiding places, large boxes, tunnels Stacking boxes, Russian dolls, shoe boxes to fill Block play Blankets and bits of material for den building Fences – small world play, blocks (large and small)	Threading, weaving Junk modelling Wooden blocks and loose part play Play with tents, tunnels and cardboard boxes Playing Hide and Seek

Positioning schema – creating patterns, scenes and displays

What can it look like?	Resources you can provide:	Experiences you can offer:
Placing objects in patterns, lining up objects or sorting them into groups or colours.	Items to create mosaics and collages such as shells, pebbles, sticks Peg boards Sorting objects (groups of similar items) Number lines, alphabet cards, Numicon	Lego or Duplo Small world – cars, blocks, animals, dinosaurs Train tracks Laying the table or placing shoes under pegs or bags on pegs. Different places/heights/surfaces to position objects.

Enveloping schema – covering and hiding objects, including themselves

What can it look like?	Resources you can provide:	Experiences you can offer:
Making dens, climbing into small spaces/boxes. Dressing up in layers of clothing such as multiple necklaces or hats. Filling empty boxes with bits and pieces, wrapping dolls up in blankets or creating homes for their toys.	Dressing up clothes – particularly open-ended items such as scarves and fabric. Sicky tape, masking tape, wrapping paper. Russian dolls, nesting toys, shape sorters.	Wrapping presents Dressing dolls and teddies Beds and blankets Games that involve hiding things Playing hide and seek Playing Peek-a-Boo Den making

Orientation schema – seeing things from a different point of view

What can it look like?	Resources you can provide:	Experiences you can offer:
Swinging upside down from monkey bars, lying along the top of the sofa or sitting in the trolley facing the wrong direction.	Balance beams, steps, walking along walls Mirrors, magnifying glasses, binoculars Soft play games - Twister	Climbing, rolling, tumbling games and activities Visits to the local park to use climbing frames and explore trees “I spy” games and mini-beast hunts in the garden or park using binoculars.

Rotation - a fascination with anything circular

What can it look like?	Resources you can provide:	Experiences you can offer:
Twirling around on the spot, rolling down a hill. Anything circular: wheels, twirly straws, being swung around by an adult, watching the washing machine, Ring-a-Roses – these are all experiences of rotation.	Wheeled toys – big and small Gear boards and clocks Waterwheels in the sand and water Screws and screwdrivers Jars and containers with screw lids.	Movement and circle games Baking using whisks and mixers Painting and drawing in circles e.g. spirographs Kaleidoscopes Roads and roundabouts Pulleys