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# SCHEMA guide

an introduction to schemas  
and how to recognise them  
in your child's play

compiled by  
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# What are schemas?

Children do not all learn in the same way. Often a child displays behaviour or patterns of play that seems strange or sometimes irritating! For example posting £10 notes through the floor boards or wrapping their jam sandwich up in the curtains. But these behaviours are often related to the child's 'schema', a pattern of play in which a child can develop his understanding of the world. We all have schemas, patterns in our lives that help us learn, but in children they are clearer and more frequently discussed.

By observing your child at play and noting what kinds of spontaneous play they really enjoy, you can begin to identify a schema and perhaps offer more activities that might extend that schema.

There are many potential schemas, but this booklet looks at some of the most common ones and gives **suggestions** of what to look for and how to provide more opportunities for your child.

*'Schemas are patterns of linked behaviours, which the child can generalise and use in a whole variety of different situations. It is best to think of schemas as being a cluster of pieces which fit together'. Bruce 1997*



This list is by no means exhaustive but gives you an idea of what some of the schemas are and how to identify them. If you have noticed any other repetitive patterns in your child's play that do not fit into one of these categories please feel free to discuss with one of the Children's Centre workers.

## Enclosure

A child may build enclosures with blocks, Lego or large crates, perhaps naming them boats, ponds, beds. The enclosure is sometimes left empty, sometimes carefully filled in. An enclosing line often surrounds paintings and drawings while a child is exploring this schema.

Providing opportunities to build dens, cover themselves or chairs with blankets or using cardboard boxes to enclose themselves or toys in.



## Envelopment



This is often an extension of enclosure. Objects, space or the child herself are completely covered. A child may wrap things in paper, enclose them in pots or boxes with covers or lids, wrap themselves in a blanket or creep under a rug. Paintings are sometimes covered over with a wash colour or scrap collages glued over with layers of paper or fabric.

## Transformation

A child may become interested in materials which change shape, colour or consistency, for example, ice cream melting, potatoes cooking, clay hardening or paint mixing.

Your child might also be interested in the transformation of bread to toast, freezing water in ice cube trays.

Try getting your child involved in day to day tasks that you do and can talk through the changes that are happening.



## Transportation

A child may move objects or collections of objects from one place to another, perhaps using a bag, pram or truck. You may find your keys or place mats in places you didn't leave them!

You could try collecting old cereal boxes, tins and other packaging and create a 'shop' scene for your child to role play in, using a basket, trolley or even a cardboard box to put things in and transport some where else.



## Positioning

A child may be interested in placing objects in particular positions, for example on top of something, round the edge, behind. Paintings and drawings also often show evidence of this.

When your child is showing evidence of this schema, try talking through it, things like 'Where are the blocks going? Are they on the edge of the sofa?' or 'What have you painted? I like how all the purple dots are next to the red line'. It will help with language development and understanding of what they have created.

## Dab

A graphic schema used in paintings randomly or systematically to form patterns or to represent, for example, eyes, flowers or buttons.



Give lots of opportunity to experiment with different mediums, paint mixed with sand, rice or pasta to give texture to their art works or try 'gloop', a mixture of corn flour and water, to allow your child to make dabbing patterns and watch them disappear.

## Dynamic Vertical (or Horizontal)

A child may show evidence of particular interest by actions such as climbing, stepping up and down or lying flat. These schemas may also be seen in constructions, collages or graphically. After schemas of horizontally and verticality have been explored separately the two are often used in conjunction to form crosses or grids.

You could encourage this schema through providing plenty of stacking materials such as blocks or boxes or by simply talking to your child about vertical/horizontal patterns in the outside world, such as the lines of a lawn mower in grass or white lines in the road.

## Trajectory

A fascination with things moving or flying through the air, balls, aeroplanes, rockets, catapults, Frisbees - and indeed, anything that can be thrown. When expressed through child's own body movements, this often becomes arms and legs movements, kicking or punching, for example.

Throwing and catching soft balls of different sizes might be a good way of channelling this schema, noticing with your child the differences in size, weight, how they hold it etc.



## Circles

Circles appear in drawings and paintings as heads, bodies, eyes, ears, hands and feet. They are also used in representing animals, flowers, wheels, the sun and a wide variety of other things.

You could try giving your child a variety of wheels to play with or circular toys like hula-hoops to enjoy.



## Rotation

A child may become absorbed by things which turn -taps, wheels, cogs and keys. She may roll cylinders along, or roll herself. She may rotate her arms, or construct objects with rotating parts in wood or scrap materials.

Again, wheels and hula-hoops, cars, bikes or using a sand or water wheel so your child can enjoy watching the sand or water making it rotate.

## Scattering

Emptying baskets, tipping out toys like bricks, use arms and legs to scatter, oats, pasta, rice etc. Wipe objects or toys from tables and surfaces.

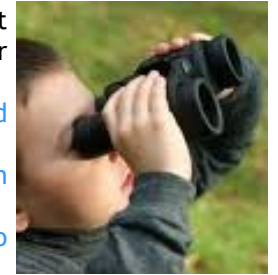
You could try scattering seeds outside in a patch of your child's own, letting your child be creative with how and where they'd like to scatter them then watching the results together.



## Orientation

This schema is shown by interest in a different viewpoint as when a child hangs upside down or turns objects upside down.

Whilst climbing equipment is great when used with supervision, you could also provide opportunities for your child to see the world in different ways, for example a kaleidoscope or binoculars- looking at things from both ends to change their size and orientation.



## Ordering

A child may produce paintings and drawings with ordered lines or dabs, collages or constructions with items of scrap carefully glued in sequence. She may place block vehicles or animals in lines and begin to show interest in 'largest and smallest'.

Try and give opportunities for your child to order things like animals, different sized pots, anything that you can talk to your child about the different sizes, using a variety of words such as large, big, medium, small, tiny, biggest, smallest etc.

## Connection

Scrap materials may be glued, sewn and fastened into lines; pieces of wood are nailed into long connecting constructions. Strings, rope or wool are used to tie objects together often in complex ways. Drawings and paintings sometimes show a series of linked parts. The opposite of this schema may be seen in separation where interest is shown disconnecting assembled or attached parts.

Jigsaws are popular with a connection schema or perhaps try simple dominoes, magnetic trains, cars or tractors with trailers to connect, junk modelling with glue etc.

