HOW TO CREATE Child Friendly Environments
GUIDE BOOK

Early Childhood Development Project
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A safe and friendly environment for children...

**Introduction**
From conception and throughout early childhood, all infants and young children need a safe and secure upbringing in a friendly and stimulating environment. The early childhood period from 0-5 is characterised by rapid physical growth and a period where children are especially vulnerable as they explore the world around them and develop. It is also a period characterised by rapid development of brain-cell connectivity – the process that enables children’s development of cognitive abilities and skills.

In addition to basic needs for good health and nutrition, early childhood is considered to be a critical period where infants and young children are in significant need of protection, love, interactive care and stimulation. The more love and interaction children receive in a safe and friendly environment, the more brain-cell connectivity, and the better children will be equipped to interact socially, to learn and acquire new skills and ultimately develop to their full potential throughout life.

When children are actively supported by caregivers to develop to their full potential during early childhood, they become well prepared for school and thereby benefit more from education. They also become more self-confident, good at social interaction and contribute more positively in all aspects of family and social life. This is true for girls and boys alike, gifted children, disabled children, dark coloured, fair coloured, tall, small – all children.

Whether as a father, a mother, a sister, a brother, a grandparent, a neighbour, or as a service provider, we are all caregivers responsible for ensuring the best possible start in life for our children. We owe it to them because it is their inherent right – and we owe it to ourselves to see our children grow up in a safe and friendly environment and prosper in life.

With this guide book we wish to share basic information on how you can practise interactive care for the cognitive development of your child and how you can create a safe and child friendly environment in your home or at service and information centres. The book also contains some ideas on how to create fun and stimulating toys from simple everyday materials.
How to use the book

The illustrated situations in the book are by no means exhaustive, but examples that depict the basic ideas on how to practise interactive care and create safe and child friendly environments. It is therefore important that you integrate and continue to develop these ideas further so that you practise interactive care and create a safe and child friendly environment in accordance with your specific situation and needs of your children.

In the first section we introduce some ideas and illustrations of how to practise interactive care. By following these ideas and continuously develop your interactive care giving skills, you not only stimulate the cognitive development of your child, but also stimulate basic trust, social interaction and self-confidence in your children.

The second section contains some examples on how to make cheap, yet fun and stimulating toys from everyday materials. Such toys stimulate the curiosity, creativity and early learning abilities of your children and are important alternatives to sharp and breakable objects that can cause injury to children.

In the third section we have illustrated age appropriate ideas on how to make your home safe and child friendly. What the illustrations cannot depict however, is that your attitude towards children must be one characterised by love, affection, patience and positive behaviour. In addition to stimulation of your child's early learning abilities and school preparedness, this will help your children feel emotionally secure, build basic trust, feel appreciated and develop self-esteem. Such characteristics are extremely important even in young children and they will carry them with them throughout life.

The final section contains ideas specifically on how to reorganise service and information centres to become child friendly. Infants and young children spend a lot of time in such premises and they therefore represent important opportunities to nurture the full potential development of children. Any place can be made child-friendly by any caregiver using creativity and any of the ideas described in this book. Lack of resources should not be an excuse for not doing so - all the ideas can be adapted and carried out almost cost free. Just bear in mind that the environment and toys must be safe, age appropriate and that whatever you create must nurture for the full potential development of children.

On a final note, it is worth emphasising that all children need continuous special and age appropriate attention throughout childhood and adolescence. By practising interactive care in a safe and stimulating environment from the very beginning of your children's lives, you will also learn to understand the needs of children better. Consequently you will also improve you capacity to respond to the needs of you children at the later stages of childhood and adolescence.
How to practise interactive care

Support the full potential development of your child by practising interactive care in a safe and child friendly environment
Interactive care
(Always, and especially from 0 to 3)

Play “Hide and Seek” and other games with your baby and infant regularly. This stimulates the cognitive development of children as well as their ability to recognise and analyse. You can also sing and talk while you give your child a massage.
Take a position as shown in the picture, make a tunnel and encourage your child to crawl through. This stimulates the child’s motor skills, sense of balance and provide a great opportunity to have fun and bond with your child. Can you also be a tree, mountain or ... ?
Feed your child with nutritious food in a joyful environment and respond positively and constructively to her or his various behaviours. This stimulates your child’s socialisation skills, curiosity, and self-confidence. Remember that exclusive breastfeeding during the first 6 months is essential for the good health and development of your child.
Let your child ride on your back. This stimulates your child in using different body parts, build self-confidence and basic trust. You can also be a merry-go-round, an aeroplane and a car. And always remember to ensure the safety of your child while playing.
Interactive care
(Always, and especially from 0 to 5)

Hold and hug your child with love and affection several times a day. This makes your child feel safe and secure and strengthens bonding between the two of you. Never use physical or verbal punishment to correct your child’s behaviour. Instead, show and explain alternative positive behaviour. Children are learning through interaction and copying your own behaviour.
Encourage your child to play and interact positively with other children. This stimulates the child’s socialisation skills, early learning, self-esteem and self-confidence. At the same time you should always ensure that your children don’t engage in dangerous activities and are not left alone with young children. Young children should always be under the supervision of responsible older caregivers.
Creating fun and stimulating toys

Support the full potential development of your child by creating fun and stimulating toys that are safe and protect your child from injury.
Fun and stimulating toys
(Always, and especially from 0-3)

Hanging toy

Materials: Paper, cloth, string, and wood.

Method: Create and hang different bright coloured toys such as birds or balls etc., which can whirl above the child’s bed or swing within the range of eyesight. Make sure the infant cannot catch and put any small objects into her/his mouth. This kind of toy stimulates the child’s senses, curiosity and imagination.
**Fancy Hand-Fan**

**Material:** Cloth, coloured thread and a bamboo stick

**Method:** Make a normal hand-fan and add embroidery with different colours of threads and cloth. Fanning children with this delights them and enables their abilities to recognise different colours, materials and texture. By learning to use it they furthermore develop their ability to understand abstract concepts, which further stimulates their development of early learning skills.
Doll

Material: Cloth, thread, colour pens and stick

Method: Fold an adequate piece of cloth on the middle with both ends pointing downwards. Insert the stick between the two layers a little above the middle and tie thread firmly above and below the stick to fixate it. Finally draw eyes, nose, lip and hair with the colour pens. The hair can also be made of coloured thread that is tightly secured to the doll. Don’t use objects small enough to fit through a toilet roll – they can cause the child to choke.

Playing with dolls stimulates the imagination and creativity of the children. In addition they develop their abilities to understand the concepts of size, shape and use of different materials.
Fun and stimulating toys
(Always, and especially from $\frac{1}{2}$-5)

Wooden horse

Material: Wood or cardboard, cloth, leather, colour pens or paint
Method: Test your own skills as a craftsman using the materials at your disposal, or get help from a professional craftsman in your local setting. While the illustration depicts a professional craftsman’s work, a horse can also be made from a cardboard box by folding it and painting the shape of a horse on it. Or you can make a horse’s head from cloth and attach it to the end of a stick.

Through playing horseback riding with such toys, children’s development of motor and balance skills are stimulated, as well as their imagination and self-confidence.
Fun and stimulating toys
(Always, and especially from 0-3)

Bird

Material: Cloth, cotton, colour pens, coloured thread or coloured paper
Method: Draw the shape of a bird on a piece of cloth and make an exact copy on another piece. Cut around the shapes, fill cotton in-between them and sew them together. Then use colour thread to make embroidery depicting the various features of the bird. You can also use an old sock filled with old newspapers or hay. Never use toxic paint or colour that can be hazardous to your children

This kind of colourful toy stimulates the child’s ability to sense, recognise colours and shapes, and thereby stimulates brain cell connectivity.
Fun and stimulating toys
(Always, and especially from 0-5)

Body toy

Materials: Yourself, your partner and other caregivers
Method: Imagination, love and affection

A lack of resources is no excuse for not stimulating your children through play because the best toy a child can ever have is you. Through fun games and interactions like these you stimulate all the senses and learning abilities of your children, helping them to become self-confident and good at learning new skills.
Fun and stimulating toys (Always, and especially from 1-5)

Various home-made toys

Materials: Carton box, empty matchbox, old newspaper, cloth and colours.
Method: Use your creativity and develop toys with your children, like cars, a binocular, or a ball. Just always test if the toy can pass through the core of a toilet roll. If it can it is too small for young children and can cause them to choke if swallowed. These kinds of easy to make toys stimulate your child’s curiosity, imagination and their use of body parts and sense organs. They also increases the joy and self-assertion of children – especially when children themselves help create them.
Creation of child friendly environments at home

Support the full potential development of your child by creating a safe stimulating environment at home.
Child friendly environments
(Always, and especially from 0-5)

Canopy
Use a large piece of cloth or cover and multiple coloured pieces of cloth to create a positive and pleasant image that can hang above the child within range of eyesight. This stimulates the curiosity and imaginative skills of a child and helps to create a sense of security in a pleasant environment.
Child friendly environments
(Always, and especially from 0-5)

Attractive Wall
Colour and paint various new or old items such as a hand-fan, sieves (strainer), or winnowing fan that we use in daily life, to create a stimulating environment on walls that are bare and non-stimulating. This supports your child to develop in a joyful and pleasant environment that stimulates early learning skills.
Child friendly environments
(Always, and especially from 1-5)

Rolling slide
Use pillows and bamboo to create the slide. Balls can be made from colourful cloth with cotton inside or clay. Through playing with such types of toys children develop their motor skills while stimulating their early learning skills and self-assertion. Remember to make the balls bigger than the hole of a toilet roll. Anything smaller than this can be dangerous for a young child.
Attractive floor
Use a mat, coloured cloth or other soft materials and toys to make the floor an attractive environment where the child can crawl around. This stimulates curiosity and the child’s mobility. Remember to keep harmful items out of reach for the child and ensure that the floor is clean and smooth.
Creation of child friendly environment in service and information centres

Support the full potential development of your child by creating a safe stimulating environment in your service or information centre.
**Stimulating ceiling**

Involve children in painting your ceilings with different coloured decorative images. This is an easy way to support children as it will stimulate their creativity and imagination and thereby increase their brain cell connectivity. On top of that – the children will enjoy visiting your centre even more.
Creative wall

Glue a wide strip of white paper on any of your bare walls, in children’s eyesight. Keep a pot of natural dye, for example, from ripe creeper seeds or ripe blackberry, so children can make hand impressions or drawings. This stimulates creativity, self-esteem and self-confidence.
Child friendly environments
(Always, and especially from 1-5)

Wall Painting

Involve children in creating or painting different stimulating pictures of nature, animals and other positive images, and mount them in the eye level of children. You can also make add on objects such as patches with complimentary images that can be attached to the image. This stimulates children’s imagination, builds their self-esteem and makes them feel comfortable and secure.
Child friendly environments
(Always, and especially from 0-5)

Wall images
Use bare and non-stimulating walls to mount different types of abstract colourful images and shapes in the eye level of children. This is an easy way to support the stimulation of children’s abilities to understand concepts of shape and size.
Child friendly environments
(Always, and especially from 1-5)

Box in the Wall
Create an exiting wall by fixing wooden or carton boxes with doors in the eye height and reach of children. Put toys such as dolls, paper clippings and earthen fruits of different types in boxes fixed to the wall. Through playing with these, children’s curiosity, ability to recognise and self-esteem is nurtured. Make sure that the edges and corners of the boxes are round and soft and that the toys cannot fit through the hole of a toilet paper roll.
Child friendly environments
(Always, and especially from 0-5)

Mask
Mount stimulating and safe objects such as masks in the eye level of children on bare walls. These are easy ways to stimulate the cognitive development and early learning skills of young children.
Child friendly environments
(Always, and especially from 0-5)

Hanging toys in ceilings
Make colourful flowers and birds from cloth or paper and hang them from your ceiling. In combination with an imaginative motive hung in the ceiling, this creates a magical, pleasant and enabling environment that stimulates the development of all the child’s senses and abilities.
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