



National Day Nurseries Association

★Brighter thinking
for early years

Factsheet

Parent Guide: Supporting Schemas in Your Home

Parent Guidance

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Does your child enjoy lining up all their toys or taking lids on or off anything and everything?
Does your child throw objects or food, jump on the sofa or want to play with running water?
Does your child wrap things up such as toys in blankets and want to make dens?

These are all common behaviours linked to schemas.

Schemas are repeated patterns of behaviour demonstrated by young children, which they use to explore and make sense of the world around them. You will probably recognise some of these patterns of behaviour in your own child as we go through this factsheet. By watching your child's activities, you can identify which schema they might be experiencing and start to plan experiences that they will enjoy and which extend their thinking.

This table will explore the different types of schemas and the common behaviours associated with each and give practical ways to extend play opportunities at home. The activities provide suggested resources, which you may choose to use. Please ensure your child's safety at all times.

Object permanence

Enveloping schema is often associated with young children who are developing their understanding of 'object permanence.' That is when a child begins to understand that objects continue to exist even when they can't see them. This usually develops around six to nine months.

Trajectory

What does it mean?

The trajectory schema is one of the earliest schemas observed. Children are fascinated with how they and objects move and will often throw objects or food from their pram or highchair. Playing with running water from the tap, building and knocking down towers, climbing and jumping off furniture, throwing, bouncing or kicking balls.

How can I support my child at home?

- Throw balls or sponges at a target
- Chase and catch bubbles
- Make paper planes from folded card
- Drop different objects onto a target. The objects could be different sizes, weights or shapes
- Make patterns by rolling marbles in a tray of paint
- Make treasure baskets containing scarves, leaves, keys, lengths of fabric to flick, twirl and spin

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different sizes of weights and balls to throw, squeeze or roll • Post balls, cars etc. down different lengths and sizes of tubing • Make a simple skittles game with plastic bottles to roll balls into.
Keywords I can use	Fly, spin, twirl, glide, float, drop, bounce, swing, up, down, fast, slow.
Rotation	
What does it mean?	Children showing a rotational schema may display a preference for turning taps on and off, winding and unwinding string, and playing with hoops. They may also be fascinated with the physical experience of twirling and twisting their body, spinning around on the spot, or rolling themselves down a hill. They have an interest in things that turn, such as wheels and windmills. They enjoy rolling tyres around, turning lids and watching the washing machine on a spin cycle.
How can I support my child at home?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore toys with wheels and cogs • Use different sized balls for throwing, catching and kicking • Play with rattles, windmills, roundabouts and spinning toys • Locks and keys • Musical boxes • Explore spirals (snail shells, coils, springs) • Mixing and stirring paint • Make cd mobiles to hang from the ceiling or garden fence • Rotary whisks in bubbly water • Use paint rollers to make large scale pictures • Fill treasure baskets with bowls and spoons, bracelets and bangles, cotton reels Spanners and screwdrivers • Explore different sizes of wheels • Paint, draw and chalk circles, spirals to finger trace or run around outside • Hand spinning objects from the trees outside.
Keywords I can use	Fly, spin, twirl, round, circle, spiral, dizzy, twist.
Enveloping and containing	
What does it mean?	Children with an enveloping schema are interested in covering and hiding items, including themselves. They will enjoy dressing up and filling and emptying bags and containers with different objects. This is often the time when you will lose items!
How can I support my child at home?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wrap presents • Use everyday objects such as pegs, curtain rings, keys and fir cones to wrap, hide and fill containers and bags with • Swaddle dolls and teddies with blankets • Dress up with scarves, hats and bits of material

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use old socks, pillowcases or cushion covers to stuff things into • Make sock or glove puppets • Mark making materials and envelopes of different sizes • Wrapping paper, newspaper, coloured cellophane, wallpaper, string, sticky tape and paperclips could be used to make parcels • Shape sorters • Role play – wrapping parcels in the post office, blankets to wrap babies in • Purses, boxes, tins, baskets, suitcases, glasses cases, wallets or bags with materials to fill them • Bandages, scarves, large pieces of fabric to wrap yourself up in • Make pasta parcels • Cover boxes or tubes in wallpaper paste and decorate with string, wool, shiny paper • Play pass the parcel.
Keywords I can use	Under, over, visible / invisible, transparent, hidden, wrap / unwrap, full / empty
Transporting	
What does it mean?	Children enjoy repeatedly moving objects around, from one place to another. They will carry many items at a time using their hands, pockets, containers, baskets or transporters.
How can I support my child at home?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While in the garden or out and about in your community, gather twigs, pinecones, sticks and leaves. Children will enjoy exploring, sorting and transporting using buckets, boxes, bags, baskets and wheeled toys such as prams or trolleys • Provide wheeled toys where possible to support this, e.g. pushchairs, trolleys and bags, baskets etc. so your child can move toys and play objects from one place to another freely • Use diggers, tractors, wheelbarrows, trolleys and dumpers in the garden to transport sand, bark, pebbles, balls, cones and natural objects • Build a small world construction site for moving materials • Make twig boats to sail down pipes • Go on a hunt around the garden with buckets, bags etc for collecting things in • Provide a collection of purses, suitcases, rucksacks and bags for transporting things inside • Stacking toys, sorting toys

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ice cube trays, teapot and cups that can be filled with water, rice, pulses etc. using small spoons.
Keywords I can use	In, on, under, empty / full / half full, overflowing, all gone, open / closed.
Connecting	
What does it mean?	Children displaying the connecting schema want to join items together. They find resources like string to tie things. They connect and disconnect toys such as rail tracks. They enjoy construction toys and doing arts and crafts where they can glue and stick pieces together.
How can I support my child at home?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make jewellery by threading pasta onto a string • Create models using junk materials • Peg up cards, photographs or washing • Make paper chains • Junk modelling with tape, string, glue, paperclips, ribbon etc • Old guttering, pipes, funnels, buckets for water play • Build spider webs with thread • Use natural materials such as twigs, willow, grasses to weave patterns • Build a train track or road • Construction toys that connect in different ways e.g. popping blocks, mobile, art straws etc • Outside make chalk trails to follow • Dressing up clothes using different fastenings.
Keywords I can use	Build, construct, join, separate, together, apart, flexible, rigid, bendy, stretchy, strong, fragile, tie, knot, thread.
Enclosing	
What does it mean?	Children show an interest in enclosed spaces. They construct fences and barricades to enclose toy animals or themselves. They may build a train track and put toy animals in the centre.
How can I support my child at home?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play with tents, tunnels and cardboard boxes • Play hide and seek • Make dens with blankets or bits of material. Perhaps draped fabric over washing lines secured with bulldog clips • Providing stones, shells or cardboard boxes with their toy animals and vehicles can enable children to have the opportunity to build fences/walls around these • Set up tunnels, hollow cubes or pop up tents - put cushions and blankets inside • Use shoeboxes to build homes for small world toys • Make borders out of paper, twigs for creative projects

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scarves, blankets and bandages for wrapping things • Treasure baskets to include bracelets, bangles, necklaces, bandages, scarves, lengths of ribbon, saris or tinsel.
Keywords I can use	Enclose, wrap, inside / outside, size words such as bigger, smaller, longer and shorter, corner, side, contain, positional words such as on top, underneath, beside and on top.
Transforming	
What does it mean?	Children are fascinated by how materials change and enjoy mixing substances together. Changes in the seasons offer children opportunities to experience rain, freezing conditions and melting ice. Offer materials such as sand, mud and soil for mixing and discovering how materials change consistency when wet or dry.
How can I support my child at home?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make playdough from scratch • Mix paints and paint with hands • Mix cornflour and water and add colour to the cornflour • Add water to sand • Mixing ingredients • Adding bubbles to water.
Keywords I can use	Use words such as mix, wet, dry. Ask your child questions such as, 'I wonder what might happen if...'
Positioning	
What does it mean?	Children position, order and arrange objects or themselves. At times children may be obsessive in placing items in the exact place (e.g. on top, next to, in front of, around the edge, beside, behind) of an object or person. Children may be observed lining up objects in order of size, colour or shape. It can also be noted that some children may not wish their food to be mixed together on the same plate.
How can I support my child at home?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plenty of time and space to position resources in rows or lines • Large buttons, lolly sticks, feathers and natural materials such as shells, pebbles, corks and leaves will provide them with the opportunities to sort different objects by size, colour, pattern etc. sequencing and counting • Stacking and un-stacking objects • Lining up toys or materials • Balancing objects • Hide and seek games.
Keywords I can use	Inside, on top, under, behind, between, next to, in front.

If your child attends nursery, ask their key person about any schemas that your child may display at nursery and how you can work together to further support them. Your key person may have new

ideas about how to support your child at home and may be able to provide you with some resources if you are struggling to find them.

It is important to remember that with everything, your child will change and adapt so this schema may not last for very long, or they may continue with this behaviour for a while. Continue to look out for different signs and behaviours and keep talking to your child's key person at nursery if their habits and play choices change, so you can both adapt the activities and resources you provide and use with them.

Remember, some of these behaviours may seem a little frustrating at first, but if you provide opportunities for your child to include this behaviour in their play in a more constructive manner, you may still find the remote control in your shoes, but this will become less and less and you will understand the reasons for this more.

Further information, support and resources

- Arnold, C and the Pen Green Team (2010) Understanding Schemas and Emotion in Early Childhood London: Sage Publishers
- Featherstone, S (2008) Again, Again! Understanding schemas in young children Featherstone Education Ltd
- Louis, S (2011) All about supporting schemas Nursery World 3/3/11 p15-19
- Nutbrown, C. (2006) Threads of Thinking London: Sage Publishers.



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We are the voice of the 21,000-strong nursery sector, an integral part of the lives of more than a million young children and their families. We provide information, training and advice to support nurseries and the 250,000 people who work in them to deliver world-class early learning and childcare.

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National Early Years Enterprise Centre, Longbow Close, Huddersfield HD2 1GQ
tel: 01484 407070 fax: 01484 407060 info@ndna.org.uk www.ndna.org.uk