

Making the most of block play for Two Year Olds.

Children of all ages love blocks and blocks are considered the staple of any early years setting. As well as being great fun, construction and block play offers huge potential on a young child's development.

Research suggests that

very young children develop better language skills when they engage in regular block play both in the home and in the nursery. This is because parents and adults in settings spend more time talking to their 2 year olds when engaged in block play which impacts on language two year olds are exposed to. We know children learn to talk by engaging in plenty of one – to – one conversations with different people. Block play offers potential for conversational exchanges, exposure to positional language – on top, underneath, next to, behind, under, over, inside – questioning, problem solving and story building.

Studies show that toddlers watch less TV if they regularly play with building blocks.

Two year olds are always successful in block play as blocks can be put together in a variety of ways. The possibilities are endless. These variations prepare young children to problem solve and think creatively.



Regular block play and construction has also been linked to higher mathematical achievement as children grow older.

When two year olds play with blocks they are developing their fine and gross motor skills, strengthening hand – eye coordination and develop problem solving abilities as they lift, stack, carry and balance blocks.

Watching how a two year old uses blocks can reveal much about their developmental stage

For two year olds block play is very much a sensory experience. At first, they are learning about what blocks are and what blocks can do. 2 year olds will initially spend their time carrying and transporting blocks, throwing, dropping and bashing blocks together. As they do this they experience the weight, texture, size and different sounds made. Then two year olds move into a new stage of development where they stack blocks on top of each other and delight in knocking them down again. They will lay blocks in a row on the floor, horizontally and vertically. As two year olds grow older and gain more experience with blocks they experiment with connecting blocks together, explore how blocks balance and begin to make structures and name the creations they have made.

Did you know that cooperative construction play helps two year old's improve social skills?

Role of the adult

- Join 2 year old's in building and engage in talk – lots of talk, commentary, introduce spatial language (on top, under, behind...) and ask open ended questions but not too many!
- Model different techniques for building. Show how blocks can stack on top of each other, how to make a bridges and tunnels for cars, con
- Encourage cooperative play by prompting children to pass blocks to each other or when the tower gets knocked down to rebuild it together.
- Encourage imagination. Show the children how to construct buildings, castles, airplanes, boats, robots...
- Enhance block play by adding props that link to children's interests - small world animals, dinosaurs, trains, cars...
- Add heuristic resources and loose parts to encourage investigation and curiosity.
- Give enough time to become fully immersed in their block play.
- Provide opportunities to return to structures at a later point in the session or week.

Top tips on developing effective block play provision

- Establish a designated block play area that is protected from passing foot traffic both inside and outside that has ample floor space enabling children to build independently.
- Provide resources in accessible trolleys / storage for easy access.
- Clear labelling supports independence and sorting skills. Where possible label with outlines or photos of blocks
- Provide different types of blocks of varying sizes and shapes;
Interlocking blocks – Duplo, Lego and Mega Blocks, large construction blocks, waffle blocks
Non interlocking blocks – wooden, plastic, cardboard boxes, foam, arches
- Ensure there are enough blocks to build several large structures
- Store small world resources close by for quick and easy access
- Provide role play costumes to develop imaginative play
- Cardboard boxes can be decorated by the children before hand.
- Translucent coloured blocks develop sensory play on the light box