



Care and
Learning
Alliance

IDEAS & TIPS

PARENT, BABY & TODDLER SESSION ROUTINES



Ideas and Tips for Session Routine

The following is not an exhaustive list, just a few suggestions of what you might include to provide a well-balanced session. Each group should take account of the individual circumstances e.g. venue, location, number/age/stage of children, time of day, length of session, adults present.

SET UP

- Some groups have a parent rota which is helpful in sharing responsibility for arriving a few minutes early to open up, heating on, check for health and safety, purchase snack, start to set out play items, activities etc.
- Having a flexible approach to arrival time helps reduce any potential stresses for parents /carers with young children having to 'be there on time.' Having the playroom set up with a variety of toys/activities for children's 'free play' for the first part of the session supports this.
- Register – it's helpful to keep a register for parents to sign in for each session, this help reminds parents/carers that they are responsible for their own children. It can be daunting to walk into a group for the first time! Having a designated parent as a 'welcomer' can help new members settle into the group.

SESSION

- **Welcome** - try to have someone around the door to welcome families.
- **Free play** – having range of items set out for children to explore e.g. cushions, books, puzzles, soft toys, dressing up, home corner, dolls house, garage, construction, play tunnel, sit and rides, hoops etc and space to move freely and be energetic.
- **Sensory Play** - exploring trays of leaves, shaving foam, shells, making simple shakers, finger painting, water, sand play etc and a whole host of ideas are available within the [Play@home baby, toddler or young child books](#). Play experiences should be planned taking account of number/age/stage of children and closely supervised by adults present, ideally with parents/carers joining in. Adults labelling some of the key words for what children are playing with or doing during this time will help to develop children's vocabulary.

Tip: Young babies and children will come and go from the play, others will be very engaged, some prefer to look on and join in after watching – these are all normal stages of play development. Encouraging parents to dress children in 'play clothes', having table and floor coverings, wipes and access to a sink nearby to wash hands, mop up and tidy away is helpful.

- **Wash hands & Snack Time!** Ideally with children sitting together at child height tables and chairs with adults supporting. See '[Setting the Table](#)' for healthy snack ideas.
- **Story time** – many groups choose to have a whole group story time with a parent/carer reading, others prefer to read books with individual or small groups of children. Tip: Check books are age/stage appropriate. It's helpful to use some props/vocal intonation/facial expressions/pointing to pictures etc to help engage children's interest.
- **Song time/Music & Movement play** – playing songs rhymes to sing along, dance or do actions to or where appropriate and only if children want to - try a little circle time story or song. A home time song is helpful to draw the session to a close and confirm arrangements for the next session.
- Tip: Some groups find it helpful to have parents clear away larger items /tidy up whilst other parents engage children in story, songs or music play. Use of props such as a play parachute, lycra sheet or bed sheet can help provide a focus for little (and bigger) hands to hold onto whilst they sing and move the fabric. Playing music, using home-made shakers, empty milk tins with wooden spoons etc also provides opportunities for exploration and creativity!!

CLEAR UP

- Ensure everything is tidied away and the premises are left as you found them. Tip: liaise with the venue provider as appropriate.

OVERALL

- Session routines will be individual to each group and ideally should be flexible in response to children's needs and interests. Including the key elements above will help to support children's all-round development and parent involvement.

