

Loose Parts Play – Information for Parents

Children will tinker for hours with obscure objects such as a tin of mixed buttons, a box of empty jars and their lids, a pile of pebbles in the garden. What each of these items has in common is a lack of restriction. With no prescribed method of play, items can be used entirely at the discretion of the child. Children can explore, create and imagine in all the senses of those words and assign their own purpose and meaning to the objects. This type of play is called 'loose parts play.'

The theory behind loose parts play?

The pedagogical approach for loose parts is to enable children to undertake their own learning using everyday objects rather than 'toys'. Loose parts present variables that support a particular type of experimental play, beneficial because children learn most effectively in an environment where they can experiment, enjoy and find out things for themselves.



What kind of things can be used as loose parts?

The possibilities are endless and really only limited by your imagination. Once you're in the right mind-set, everything becomes a loose part! The key thing to remember is that materials must be open ended - that is they have no pre-determined rules for use and can be made, moved, moulded, manipulated into any number of things using only imagination. Some favourites are household items like cotton reels, curtain rings, blocks, beads, buttons, balls, tubes, tins, pots, bangles and pegs. Natural resources such as stones, sea shells, feathers, pine cones, leaves, sticks, conkers, acorns and sand; and fabrics such as scarves, ribbons, laces, scrunchies.

We have more loose parts in our garden; drain pipe cut offs, tyres, wooden planks, bricks, sand, stones, sticks, pine cones, even water is a loose part!

Loose parts are not toys in the traditional sense of the word, they are a collection of 'things' that can be moved, merged, collected, shared, taken apart, stacked, stored, built up, lined up and any other type of play that you can think of and, as such, they're a fantastic resource to support schemas in young children's play!



What will children gain from loose parts play?

There are so many benefits to providing open ended loose part resources. You will be providing children with an enabling environment full of interesting objects that support creativity and invention.

Here's how loose parts meet each of the seven areas of learning within the Early Years Foundation Stage:

Personal, Social and Emotional Development – Independent play, making choices about what and how to play, sharing resources, playing alongside others.

Communication and Language – Speaking with other children during shared play, new language and vocabulary.

Physical Development – Fine and gross motor skills, learning how to lift and carry.

Mathematics – Concepts such as shape, size, sequencing, sorting, counting, combining and measuring.

Literacy – Mark making and storytelling narratives during play.

Understanding the World – Using loose parts during role play; stones in the kitchen, wooden blocks as cars, testing ideas and theories.

Expressive Arts and Media – Opportunity to explore media and materials, application of loose parts for creativity and art.

