

It's not 'just'
a parent
& toddler
group



12 TOP TIPS
FOR SCHOOL READINESS

WWW.NOTJUSTAPARENTANDTODDLER.GROUP

Introduction

'I'm just ...' is a familiar way to start a sentence for parent and toddler leaders. 'I'm just running a weekly toddler group!' 'I'm just putting out some toys.' 'I'm just doing craft.' 'I'm just ...'. We can often underrate and downplay the value of what we do. We may know that our group is worthwhile and that families enjoy it. But that's not the whole story. Beneath the surface of our noisy, messy and chaotic sessions there is all sorts of hidden treasure. Children are learning how to interact with others, developing communication skills, gaining resilience, growing in curiosity and much more.

Before we know it, the children in our groups are leaving us and starting to put on a school uniform five mornings a week. We've helped them prepare for that. Our groups give children the opportunity to develop the skills they need to adapt to school life and thrive in their education. So, please, never say 'I'm just ...' again. You're doing more than you think.

Ideas for how to use this booklet

- Read it and simply bask in the glory of knowing you're doing a fantastic job!
- Share it amongst the members of your team and chat about what you're doing and the impact it's having.
- Talk with parents about simple ideas for helping their children get ready for school.
- Use it to develop a stronger relationship with your schools and local authority. It could open up a conversation about how you can support one another.
- Write stronger funding applications with the information it contains.

To develop social skills

What are they?

Children's personal, social and emotional development is important for children to lead healthy and happy lives.

Through supported interaction with other children, they learn how to make good friendships, co-operate and resolve conflicts. Developing strong, warm and supportive relationships with adults enables children to learn how to understand their own feelings and those of others.

To develop a sense of routine

What is it?

Developing a sense of routine is an important part of children's personal, social and emotional development. Underpinning their personal development are routines that shape their social world. Children develop socially and emotionally as they learn to set simple goals, develop confidence in their own abilities, persist with tasks and wait their turn.

It's not just having a routine and displaying a visual session timetable; **it's following** a routine so children know what they will be doing now and what comes next.

It's not just playing simple games; **it's helping** to develop turn taking and patience.

It's not just singing 'Happy Birthday' when it's someone's birthday or using the same tidy up song; **it's equipping** children to start to predict what will happen.

It's not just encouraging children to 'have a go at something new or challenging'; **it's developing** independence and resilience.



To develop a sense of independence

What is it?

Developing a sense of independence is an integral part of children's personal, social and emotional development. Through adult modeling and guidance, children learn how to look after their bodies, including eating healthily and managing their personal needs independently.

It's not just involving families in tidying away at the end of the session; **it's helping**



To develop attention and sitting

What are they?

Developing the ability to pay attention is another important part of children's personal, social and emotional development. Sitting for a short period, giving another person direct attention and repeating simple activities from an early age helps children learn to concentrate.

It's not just joining in with 'singing time' or 'snack time'; **it's teaching** children to engage purposefully in certain activities.

It's not just singing action songs or playing games like 'Head, shoulders, knees and toes' or 'Simon says...'; **it's helping** children to follow simple instructions.

It's not just listening carefully when children are communicating with you; **it's demonstrating** how to give someone else direct attention.

To develop language skills

What are they?

The development of communication interactions from an early age are the foundations of language development. Adults can help develop children's language skills by commenting on what they are doing. Echoing back what children are saying and doing also helps to reinforce new vocabulary, actions, body language and facial expressions.



To develop literacy skills

What are they?

Understanding language and words starts from birth. It develops best when adults talk with babies and children about the world around them, read with them and enjoy rhymes, poems and songs together.

Word reading and writing comes later...

It's not just writing the child's name on their picture; **it's allowing** them to see their name written down.

It's not just setting up an interactive reading area; **it's allowing** children to explore books, turn pages, point at pictures, become aware of words and 'tell' the story.

It's not just reading to children and asking questions about the story; **it's helping** children to develop their understanding and comprehension skills.

It's not just singing songs and nursery rhymes; **it's exploring** the patterns and fun of words.



To develop numeracy skills

What are they?

Many of us might find the word mathematics scary but it's just the ability to count and understand numbers and the relationships between them. It also involves recognising and understanding size, shapes, patterns, space and measures.

It's not just singing numbers and counting songs; **it is recognising** numbers and learning to count.

It's not just playing sorting games; **it's understanding** size, colour and shape and using logical thinking.

It's not just following a simple cooking recipe; **it's following** instructions and measuring.

It's not just playing with jigsaw puzzles; **it's recognising** shape and pattern.

To develop fine motor skills

What are they?

Fine motor control and precision helps with hand-eye coordination, which later helps with writing skills. Opportunities to explore and play with small world activities, puzzles, arts and crafts and small tools, with support from adults, allows children to practise controlling small movements.

It's not just

To develop gross motor skills

What are they?

Gross motor skills provide the foundation for developing healthy bodies and nurturing social and emotional well-being. Supporting children to develop their core strength, stability, balance, spatial awareness, coordination and to be active, all play a part in developing gross motor skills.

It's not just playing on balance bikes, ride-ons, scooter and pedal cars; **it's developing** balance, movement and strengthening muscles.

It's not just dancing or joining in with action songs; **it's using** big movements.

It's not just following an obstacle course; **it's using** large apparatus to crawl, balance and climb.

It's not just playing at the playground; **it's using** whole body movements to play on slides, swings, trampolines and climbing frames.



To develop learning through play

What is it?

Play helps children to develop social skills and learn to work with others. It also helps them to learn about the world around them and to develop their imagination and creativity.



To encourage outdoor play

What is it?

We all know what it is! But why is it great? All that oxygen is important for brain development. It's an exciting multi-sensory experience and exposure to daylight during the daytime means we sleep better at night.

It's not just going for a walk with our group to an outdoor space; **it's providing** opportunities to be outside in the fresh air.

It's not just planting seeds in an outside space; **it's allowing** children to see nature grow.

It's not just planning an outdoor scavenger hunt; **it's allowing** children to explore creation.

To develop a sense of awe and wonder

What is it?



twelve.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY 'SCHOOL READY'?

We mean, helping children to be developmentally as ready as possible to learn and thrive when they start school in a main stream Reception class.

We understand (and celebrate) that children do not and should not progress and develop at the same time in the same ways and when a child has an identified Special Educational Need or Disability (SEND) the teaching and learning should reflect this.

What a joy to explore one aspect of the hidden treasure of our toddler groups and see how attending such groups benefits children in developing school readiness in so many amazing ways. It encourages me, as a toddler group leader, to keep doing what we are doing!

Jo Gordon, CEO, Daniel's Den



The work that toddler groups do is invaluable in getting children ready to start school. They bridge the gap between home and school and allow children to socialise with other children of similar ages as well as giving parents and carers the chance to chat and share with others. So many parents and carers feel isolated and there is little support available now in the form of health visitors, etc.

Linda Tomkinson, Reception Teacher



WITH THANKS

Here are the details of some of the great groups and charities that have been involved in working on this resource booklet. You can find out more about what they do through their websites.



[1277.ORG.UK](https://1277.org.uk)

1277 is a national movement for parent and toddler group leaders.



[LJMAOC.ORG](https://ljmaoc.org)

We are a Christ-centred church committed to working with others to bring wholesome Kingdom transformation to places and people through our charities and association of covenant ministries across the world.



[CFF.ORG.UK](https://cff.org.uk)

Care for the Family is a national charity which promotes strong family life and helps those who face family difficulties by providing support and resources in the areas of couple relationships, parenting and bereavement.



[CFF.ORG.UK/WLTDO](https://cff.org.uk/wltdo)

We want to see churches creating spaces where dads and their children can have fun together, form friendships, and build community.



[KIDSMATTER.ORG](https://kidsmatter.org)



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