




Free-play





Using free play to create autonomy
and enhance learning in preschool
children

Leader Name : Arpita

Leader Designation: Anganwadi
Worker

School Name: Anganwadi

Location : Silvassa, Diu-Daman
Dadra & Nagar Haveli
India



What is Free-play

Children often role-play, create, manipulate material, draw-colour, read a picture book, while communicating, collaborating and negotiating with each other. All this allows the children to use their creativity and develop their imagination. It encourages them to explore the world around them and understand it. It teaches the children to work in groups so they learn to share and resolve conflicts. It helps children learn and practice self-regulation, which later helps them to adjust to school. Free-play enhances their learning readiness, problem-solving and decision-making skills.



The Challenge

Free-play has a host of benefits for young children and helps form their cognitive, social-emotional, language, and physical domains of development. However, most Anganwadis do not provide the stimulating environment and psychological safety required to facilitate free-play. Simply put, free play is that which is led by the children and is a part of the time-table in all Anganwadis. However almost all caregivers and teachers of young children believe that children learn through instructions.



The Change

Today children in Arpita's Anganwadi look forward to the free-play time, 45 minutes of exclusively their time. Their teacher has created an interesting, welcoming, safe space for them to explore and play as they like. They want to come to the centre and often do not want to stop their free-play. Arpita, her supervisor and the children's caregivers are all able to see how such free-play is helping their children develop.



Project Steps

1. Even though her Anganwadi is a rental space, Arpita decided to create five free-play 'corners'. She made circles with tape on the floor to mark these 'corners' for children.
2. She made and collected age-appropriate and contextually relevant play material, such as Kitchen set, Shop set, Doctor set, puzzles, wooden and foam blocks, beading material, picture books, linkers, number flash cards, ice-cream sticks, pebbles, bottle tops, textured material, material for drawing and rough paper etc.
3. She also got a rack, and bottles/boxes to store all this material and labelled them. This also helped create a print-rich environment for the children.
4. She made a *khelghar* (playhouse) in one corner with old sarees
5. Her day begins before the children come. After the Anganwadi Centre is cleaned she arranges select play materials in different corners. The idea is that when children start arriving and are welcomed in the centre, they can proceed to a corner of their choice to play freely.

Project Steps (Contd.)

6. The next 45 minutes of free-play are free of instructions. Arpita's role, as she explains, at this time is to help only if someone asks, and join them in play as a child. Children spontaneously move from one corner to the other, choose to engage with the play materials and their friends as they wish.

7. The arrangement (choice of materials in every corner) is changed weekly so that children have something new to look forward to every week. Additionally, Arpita keeps making/ re-stocking material as it gets used/ damaged.



End

