

Holistic Development Adult Guidance

What is Holistic Development and Play?

Holistic development is an approach that focuses on the whole child and all aspects of their growth, development and wellbeing. This approach emphasises the importance of children's physical, personal, social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing as well as intellectual/cognitive aspects of learning.

Play is an essential and powerful tool in young children's holistic development. Offering open-ended, playful and sensory-infused opportunities will ignite an inner drive for a young child to explore. Through these playful moments, babies will interact with their world, make connections, develop neural pathways and express themselves.



Aspects of Holistic Development

For babies, holistic development includes the following types of development:

- ★ **Physical:** fine and gross motor skills, such as rolling over, sitting, balancing, grasping toys, passing objects from one hand to another and beginning to walk;
- ★ **Emotional:** becoming self-aware, comfortable with daily routines, forming positive attachments and expressing primary emotions (such as happiness and sadness);
- ★ **Social:** interacting and communicating with others (pointing, babbling and using vocal sounds) and developing positive relationships with key caregivers;
- ★ **Spiritual/Moral:** developing a growing sense of self, being gentle and caring of others and their world and developing a sense of belonging;
- ★ **Intellectual/Cognitive:** making choices, being creative, building attention and focus, developing early thinking skills, remembering and connecting experiences and developing motivation to explore using their senses.

What Are the Benefits of Holistic Play?

Holistic play can help babies to:

- ★ develop overall wellbeing, confidence and a positive sense of self;
- ★ build essential skills and motivation to learn;
- ★ develop communication and social skills;
- ★ support brain development by stimulating neural connections;
- ★ connect and appreciate the world around them;
- ★ build a sense of belonging.



Creating an Environment That Promotes Holistic Play

Provide an environment that reflects babies' interests and meets them at their individual stages. Regularly evaluate your play environment to ensure it is meeting babies' needs holistically. The following points may help you to review your provision:

- ★ **Allow babies the freedom and time to explore:** Encourage and support babies to take the lead and choose how they want to explore the space at a pace that is appropriate for them.
- ★ **Create comforting and home-like spaces:** If play environments are cosy, safe, warm and personable, babies will feel more relaxed, comfortable, confident and more likely to be able to regulate their emotions more effectively.
- ★ **Provide space for movement and exploration:** Babies need physical space to move between places and enable them with freedom to actively engage with their surroundings. By increasing the amount of space, babies will have more opportunities for physical movement, communication and social interaction.
- ★ **Engage the senses:** Playful opportunities which engage the senses encourage curiosity, thinking, creativity and babies' inner drive to learn and explore. Offer open-ended resources and [sensory play](#) activities with different textures, materials, sounds and scents.
- ★ **Ensure resources are developmentally appropriate:** Provide resources that match babies' developmental needs, stages and current fascinations. Ensure there is a balance of resources that are familiar to them as well as those that offer new, exciting opportunities to enrich play and exploration.
- ★ **Provide access to the outdoors:** Playful opportunities in the outdoors will bring new discoveries and offer multisensory and experiential learning as babies interact and respond to their surroundings and seasonal weather changes. This [nature play](#) guidance will provide you with a wealth of ideas for outdoor fun.



Safety Considerations

Supervision: It is essential that babies are never left unsupervised and are watched closely at all times during play and exploration. Gently support babies when they are interacting with objects and their surroundings to nurture and foster curiosity, confidence, decision-making and problem-solving.

Loose parts: Babies can engage with loose parts from birth, but ensure that the approach and objects offered are developmentally appropriate. Ensure loose parts are larger than babies' mouths to prevent risk of choking and consider the materials that resources are made from, ensuring they are non-toxic and avoiding sharp or rough resources.

Suitable clothing: Communicate clearly with caregivers the need to dress babies ready for play. Ensure babies are comfortable, warm, dry and able to engage in full movement to ensure they can become safely and fully involved in exploration. This [outdoor clothing](#) resource is worth a read when taking babies outside in all weathers.



Safety Considerations Continued...

Safety in the outdoors: To ensure babies (and adults) have successful and positive experiences outdoors, it's important to take time to reflect on all aspects of health and safety in the natural environment. This outdoor [health and safety](#) handout is a really useful document to refer to when planning and preparing for nature play.

Flooring: Consider soft, comfortable flooring to provide a safe environment for babies which offers them a sense of security. You may wish to add soft non-slip mats or textured rugs to create sensory zones/areas.

Examine/inspect resources: Regularly check resources/equipment for any signs of wear and tear or rough edges to ensure they are maintained over time.

Top Tips for Holistic Play

- ★ **Open-ended resources:** Offer babies a range of open-ended sensory experiences and items of different weights, textures as well as objects made from different materials. By providing these opportunities, it enables babies to interact with items creatively, developing curiosity, independence, physical development and much more! [Treasure baskets](#) are often a wonderful resource to draw on for ideas of open-ended resources.
- ★ **Tuning into babies' interests:** Consider babies' patterns of play and behaviours ([schemas](#)) and provide experiences that mirror their current playful fascinations.
- ★ **Develop language skills through interaction:** Language skills help babies to communicate and express their feelings, needs and interests. As you explore through play together, model language, use gestures, point out objects of interest, repeat words and phrases and explore new experiences with gentle and nurturing encouragement.
- ★ **Build trusting relationships:** Build confidence by being consistent, present and responsive to babies' emotions. Tune into their cues, whether it is through gesture, 'voice' or eye contact and model shared attention to ensure they know that their needs/interests are important. Become babies' safe 'base' to return to when they need encouragement or support. When babies have the support of a trusted caregiver, they are more likely to feel confident and begin to embark on first steps to become independent and take risks.
- ★ **Baby-led play:** Observe and join babies in experiences by getting down to their level, providing many opportunities for eye contact and face-to-face interaction. Follow babies' lead and read their play cues, responding by showing excitement in objects or activities that babies have become interested in.
- ★ **Working with caregivers:** Develop partnerships with caregivers and share information back and forth regarding babies' interests, patterns of play or new experiences. This will enable everyone involved to care and nurture the child to ensure their needs are being supported both at home and in the setting.



Holistic Play Activity Ideas

Seasonal Moments in Nature:

Throughout the seasons, provide time outside for babies to experience and interact with nature. Explore textures together by offering natural objects, such as pine cones or feeling the bark of a tree. You could also try barefoot walking on grass to support sensory stimulation. Our [nature babies](#) resources may provide you with further ideas.



Splash, Slosh, Trickle:

Provide different experiences to engage with [water play](#) to stimulate, energise and calm babies. Offer opportunities to interact with water by pouring, splashing, sloshing and mixing water in shallow containers as well as times to listen to and enjoy watching water move.

Move and Sing: singing with movement and gesture is extremely powerful for holistic development as it supports so many aspects of development. Try singing action songs, songs with sounds, and exciting [peek-a-boo](#) songs. For young babies, songs about the [face](#) are particularly relevant as they enjoy looking and responding to facial expressions.

Sensory Play: Set up opportunities to stimulate babies' senses. Sensory hoops, busy boards, play gyms, sensory bags and bottles or offering toys that light up or produce sound are all great examples. You may also wish to offer taste-safe [messy sensory play](#) activities.

Play Schemas: Provide activities and resources to integrate babies' schemas of play into daily practices to allow patterns of play, awareness and understanding of the world develop. Try taking a look at these [activities](#) to develop fascinations with rotations and circles.

Treasure Baskets: Create interesting treasure baskets to provide babies with open-ended play, exploration of their world and offer them choice. Try adding different items to introduce babies to new concepts, topics, [natural resources](#) or seasonal interests.

Nature Totters: Take babies out in buggies, or short totters if walking, to stimulate their senses. Experience different perspectives, surfaces and tune into seasonal weather. For further ideas, check out this guidance on [buggy walks](#).

Finger Painting: Encourage babies to express themselves freely through their actions by exploring hand and finger painting using this [recipe](#). You may wish to attach different textures to the painting surface for babies to experience textures as they smear and make marks.

Snack Times: Speak with caregivers to provide you with information around babies' food likes/dislikes as well as eating routines so that you can build on these experiences in the setting. This [taste-safe activity](#) may also provide you with an opportunity to enjoy new tastes and sensations.

Mirror Play: Mirror play develops self-recognition, body awareness and spatial development. Add low-level, child-safe mirrors on the floor as babies participate in tummy time for them to watch their own reflection and movements.



Disclaimer: As this resource refers to activities aimed at children under the age of three, you must ensure that an adequate risk assessment is carried out prior to using this resource. These activities can engage learners in their play, learning and development, but supervising adults should assess any potential risks before the activity and only proceed if it is safe to do so. Twinkl is not responsible for the health and safety of your group or environment. It is your responsibility to ensure the resource and the information/activity it contains are safe and appropriate to use in your situation. Please be aware that learners under the age of three will need to be supervised at all times due to potential hazards with participating in these types of activities; for example, even the shallowest amount of water can be extremely dangerous.

