



Superhero and Weapon Play Policy



Policy Statement

At The Orchard Nursery, we recognise that each child is unique and we will do everything to support children to be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured. Children learn to be strong and independent from a base of secure and loving relationships, as well as having the opportunity to learn in a positive and stimulating environment.

Most children enjoy engaging in imaginative play that relates to, and makes sense of, the world that they live in. For lots of children (particularly boys) this imaginative play contains a strong element of weapon and superhero re-enactment. Re-enacting weapon use is a universal language of play for children and usually results in high levels of engagement for the children actively involved in it. Historically, this type of play has often been banned from early years settings, in the belief that it encourages aggression and violence. This ban, as well as being difficult to enforce, may well have a negative impact on young children's development, particularly boys.

Recent research and current writings suggest that children learn important lessons by exploring these themes in a safe arena of play, for example, concepts such as good and evil, life and death, strength and power, gender, and identity.

At The Orchard Nursery we feel it is important to create a whole nursery approach of which staff, children, parents, and other agencies have a clear understanding. This policy is a formal statement of our approach to children's weapon and superhero play.

Images and ideas gleaned from the media are common starting points in boys' play and may involve characters with special powers or weapons. Adults can find this type of play particularly challenging and have a natural instinct to stop it. This is not necessary as long as practitioners help the children to understand and respect the rights of other children and to take responsibility for the resources and environment.

Aims

- For staff to understand why superhero and weapon play is so important to certain children.
- For adults to engage with and develop the play
- To channel the play positively and use it as a tool to extend thinking, learning skills and imaginative development
- To plan for superhero and weapon play which has arisen from children's interests and observations of their play
- For children to express their feelings in a safe environment
- For staff to monitor that the environment is kept safe and ensure children's expression of feelings during superhero play does not intimidate nearby children who are not part of the game
- To develop children's negotiation and rights respecting skills and help them make the connections to transfer these skills into everyday situations
- To monitor gender issues – both girls and boys enjoy superhero and fantasy play and so there should be female as well as male hero figures represented in the equipment and displays.

Children understanding the concept of real and pretend, and the difference between the two. Children understand that people who use guns in real life can kill you, but know that in the world of pretend, they don't have the same effect.

Objectives

- For staff to use a range of strategies to extend the play and drive the children's ideas forward so that it is not repetitive
- Develop children's turn taking, sharing and cooperative skills – they cannot have a capture and rescue game on their own
- Rescue games lead to problem solving scenarios
- Look at the wider 'lives' of the superheroes e.g. what do they eat, where do they live – and use this information to extend learning across the nursery areas
- Use a range of materials to make dens and develop role play indoors and outdoors
- Encourage use of different types of text e.g. write superhero stories, shopping lists, notices, tickets etc
- They could draw maps so they could find their way back to base.
- If the children talk about "Being dead", or use wording such as "I'm gonna shoot you" you can lead this play into phoning for an ambulance and dialling 999.
- You can play too - If the children are happy for you to join in then go for it – a whole world of exploration will open up with many opportunities for enhanced learning.

Weapon / Gun Play Guidelines

- We will not provide bought toy guns and weapons, however children may make weapons from creative materials or use representations e.g. from Lego
- Children may only 'shoot' others who are already part of the game
- No touching when 'shooting'
- If children cannot follow the rules then we will remove the weapon and use our behaviour strategies as detailed in our behaviour policy
- We will have discussions, based on reality or imagination, about how to help those who are hurt e.g. medical people who help us, magic potions to make them better

Staff are sensitive to the cultural / family background of the child, including whether the child's family has experienced violence, moved to Britain to escape war etc. The key person should be proactive in gently explaining the play to families who may be sensitive to it and discuss any issues that may arise from it, while recognising that children who have been in aggressive situations may welcome the play as an outlet for pent up feelings. If staff are unsure they should refer to the safeguarding policy and / or speak to a senior member of staff.

Signed on behalf of the nursery.....*Emma Middleton*.....Date:... August 2024.....