

## The Importance of Play.

### Interaction

It is vital that children are not always left alone to explore toys or play with them, as this will make the child isolated. Where appropriate, it is necessary to encourage interaction between the child and other people. To follow a few shared ideas of a variety of homemade, bought and adapted toys and resources that will encourage interaction.

#### **Ideas demonstrated:**

##### **Fluffy and tactile pencil cases are cheap ways to produce 'feely pockets'.**

Place items in the pencil cases and/or just show an interest in your pencil case. The curious child who has his/own pencil case may become interested in what you have and want to explore and eventually swap your case for his. This is foundation of interaction, play, and copy interest.

Sew a tea towel lengthways making a long pocket, place inside before sewing closed the top, various big bells.

Ask the child to hold one end of the tea towel and you hold the other. Lifting the ends of the tea towel will cause the bells to roll to the other bottom end of the bag. The child can be encouraged to lift his end of the tea towel to roll the bells inside back.

**Homebase** store - at Christmas time had wreaths with lots of big bells on them – a cheaper way of obtaining big bells – although not suitable to give to the child to explore in their hand.

To encourage a child to take turns when in a group: board games are not always appropriate as too many rules to follow, pictures and cards not accessible to some children and hard to explain why the child has to wait for their turn. Try a 'pass the parcel style tactile ring'

**Neutral, empty, fabric pouches, sewn to varied tactile, colours of, fabrics that have different objects sewn into them. Join all pouches to form a closed loop, for the children to pass around, exploring the contents.**

As one child finds an interesting sound, or fabric or content, they will explore, this will raise interest in another child who will want to explore it too. The ring can be passed through the hands of all children in the circle at the same time. Children will learn to negotiate, and pull the ring of pouches from one person to another.



*You may know of groups in your area that would be happy to make some of the resources for you. WI, Church groups, craft clubs etc.*

*You should be specific about what you need.*

*Describe a resource to them, explain how you will use it, show them a picture if you have one:*

*Washable*

*Short pile furry fabric*

*Size*

*Colours textures*

*This way you will get resources that you can use and the 'makers' have a full idea of what you need from them.*

### **The foil wine bag from inside a box of wine makes a great cheap resource for a turn taking game.**

- Fully inflated it will need both hands to hold it and manipulate/explore it.
- Half inflated can be held with one hand and will make a different sound as it is scrunched.
- Place the inflated bag onto a firm surface and on top of it lay a soft ball or toy. Encourage the child to bag hand on bag to make the toy or the ball bounce off into the air. Then it is your turn or the turn of another child.

### **Interaction – Drama games.**

This does not have to be formal role-playing games or anything elaborate.

Simple short descriptive stories with a repetitive theme will engage children e.g.

With a large sheet of **net curtain** ask child to hold one end. Net is good as it can be seen through, will allow light through and can be used for other games – or as a projection cloth.

Waft the net up into the air and slowly down saying 'Oh it's snowing!' Waft back up and down several times encouraging child to 'waft' too, as you build the tension in the story with your voice.... Then... gently waft the net over the head of the child and say 'OH! A snowman!'. The child who is shy, or nervous may be watching this as you interact with another child. The nervous child will see what is happening and learn to anticipate the ending.

### Friendly Spider game

**Ikea's big friendly looking spider**, and a sheet of anti-slip squared fabric used for stopping carpets slipping.

Have child sitting with cloth on knees and wrap spider into bottom of cloth. As you unwrap the spider from the cloth and unfold the cloth bigger and bigger, build a story saying that the spider is building a web.

- Ask where the children think the spider will go next.
- The cloth is anti-slip, so the texture is different and the spider can sit on it on quite a steep angle without falling off, just in case the spider wants to sit and think about its next move!

**Trust game – children stand in a circle behind one another.** Tell a story and demonstrate the actions that each child must do on the head, shoulders and back of the child in front of them e.g. It is raining – the child gently taps his/her fingertips on the head/shoulders of child in front. It is raining harder – child increases intensity. It is windy – child blows hair of child in front etc Build a story around the actions. After one story the children turn around and each is now performing actions for another story on other child.

## **WOW!**

What is the use of having neon strips that just glow?

What can you do with fluorescent bars, other than bang them together?

It is important that games and play have a WOW! Factor to encourage and stimulate the child into wanting to explore more, or repeat an action.

A variety of cheap resources were demonstrated and described and the alternative uses for them.

**Magic eggs** – soft, white, plastic, battery powered eggs that have led lights, change colours – **Argos or ASDA**

**Push, light up shapes** – pick the white ones, as it is easier to view the light colour changes – **Ikea**

**Mood Beam** – shaped white figures that light up and change pulses of light when placed near to speakers, reacting to music. Push to start the toy - **Boyztoyz style shops or firebox.com**  
**£9.95**

**Spa Lights waterproof lights** can be used in baths, water bowls or in air. Have sucker foot to stick to walls or glass. Operated with small button, but will change colour or simply light a corner with soft orange glow – **AVON**

**Glow in the duck** – water comes into contact with this soft duck and it lights up – come in various colours but the white is best for light change viewing.

**Push lights** – used for illuminating dark under stairs areas or areas where no electric supply available – available in most cheap bargain shops or **Betaware** catalogues usually 2 for about £5. These are ideal to start to teach a child how to use 'switches' as the reward is instant and in same location as where the child pushes.

Various light-up balls available from **SPACEKRAFT, John Lewis, Acorn Education**

**WHSMITHS** had packs of three light-up pens – available at other good stationary suppliers.

Light up fans, and mini torches, try **HAWKIN'S BAZARRE** for traditional light up, wind up, neon, noisy toys cheap and cheerful but all with the WOW factor.

**ELC** has a selection of magic cubes – kaleidoscope cubes – when xenon torch shone through them they come alive and present new visual stimulation opportunity.

**Xenon** torches used often by climbers and hikers – long range beam of bright light, hard wearing and you can change the colours of the lenses by using gel paints.

Some key rings have mini xenon torches attached (look like bright blue coloured light.), these are good but you have to keep your finger pressed on the button to keep the light on.

## **UV Light**

UV light needs to be directed onto a specific area and not filling a whole room.

You can build your own UV dark box. Buy a mini 12" tube (often sold with UV bulb for use to decorate teenagers bedrooms and are mains operated with a transformer.) and fix to a black painted pine box (**Homebase** for a few pounds) that has been painted with matt black paint.

Make sure that you attach a black eye guard at the top of the box to hide the bulb too, this will protect eyes from light and also if bulb shatters.

UV boxes are sold in specialist catalogues for up to £200 – yours can be made for about £25, some are not sold with a guard. Need guard at these bulbs can shatter into many pieces of fine glass.



Cover your clothes with a black shirt or smock to stop the UV light highlighting your clothes and causing a distraction. This will eliminate the need for you to think about what you wear from day to day.

#### **TIP**

**Don't buy rechargeable UV lights for use in light box, as they don't pack enough punch.**

Black gloves can be worn to 'hide' your hands and this can also give the impression that resources are 'floating in mid air.'

Black gloves can also be decorated with luminous threads for alternative effects.

Some items may appear to be luminous to the human eye in daylight, but not all things are under UV light.

You can test this with a mini security light – like the ones shops use to test money notes.

N.B 2' away from 2' UV tube = 38 seconds in British sunlight.

Short bursts of 15 minutes or so is fine. Although a child is relatively safe up to 5 hours where adults only 2 hours. Usually only short bursts of 20 minutes max for a session.

**Claire's Accessories** – UV nail polish, clear when painted on toys or finger nails – but under UV light will glow different colours. Excellent under UV light to attract visual attention and show movement etc.

**ASDA, Betaware**, DIY stores have the fluorescent fluffy dusting mitts.

**Black plastic whisks** wrapped with kite fabric, scoobies, neon cords, or containing iluminous balls make safe and effective toys to move about under UV light and are safe enough for children to hold and move too.

'**Scoobies**' can be used as threads to sew into black thick card, encourages manual dexterity, pincer grip, hand eye coordination, and look great under UV light.

To teach pouring activity try pouring tonic water from jug to glass under UV light, the tonic water glows! WOW!

White cotton gloves from **BOOTS** or other chemists can be decorated and glow bright white under UV.

For deaf BSL users to sign in the dark you can purchase white gloves impregnated with glow in dark threads/chemicals too.

Check out the shops that sell '**clubbers wear**' as it is fashionable to wear clothing and jewellery – bangles, beads, scarves, socks, wrist bands, hats make-up etc that glows in the dark – cheaper than the specialist catalogues and just as effective.

Sometimes you may come across a child who does not like to paint, but can be encouraged to use fluorescent paints in a dark room painting on black paper in a dark room will give the child another perspective. You can use glitter sprays, hairsprays etc.



Check out your local fishing shop for luminous fishing floats – these can be sewn onto black cloth in patterns for tracing with fingers – or recognising shapes etc

Pet shops are an excellent place to find resources. Pet toys are made to the same safety standards as children's toys. Balls, ropes, bells, kitten toys, etc are excellent to adapt or include in play with children.



Cat toys



You can teach counting (1,2,and more) to children by displaying balls and items in non-stick baking tins under the UV lamps. (The tins stop the balls running out of the UV box)

You can play with 6 section bun tins and luminous balls to introduce Braille shapes, and play games out of UV and with UV light box.

### **Tactile Resources**

Fill kitchen rubber gloves with flour, marbles or rice to make hard wearing squeeze hands. Secure them well but are again cheap methods for producing a variety of resources to keep children interested and interacting.



## Creating 'mini environments'

Sometimes light/dark rooms are too big for some children; they may not be available to children at home. Vulnerable children may not like to be in rooms with others some cannot cope with different types of lighting etc.

Here are several ways of creating 'mini-environments' and can be portable for use by the peripatetic worker or designed with family members for use in the home.

Mini environments bring things closer to the child, within reach physically and visually. They give the child an opportunity to focus and explore, without distractions from their immediate surroundings.

Where possible the child should be in an upright but comfortable position.

**Beanbags** are ideal to use in these situations as they offer support and comfort and keep the child off the floor and away from drafts; they can be plumped or flattened to suit the needs of the individual child.

Use adult sized beanbags, as children's sizes are too small to offer the surrounding support.

Don't leave children in beanbags for hours on end as this may affect their ability to support themselves.

**Mosquito nets (Ikea - £4.99)** are an excellent idea to project images onto, hang objects off and allow light and images to shine through into the surrounding room to include other children in the room. Make sure that they have something secure to be suspended from, as they are quite heavy.

Projection Umbrella ([www.mathmos.co.uk](http://www.mathmos.co.uk) £30 approx.) – made and supplied by specialist companies, child friendly and work well with the mini portable projector. (Mathmos £80 approx. – colour wheels extra).

Oil colour wheels can be chosen to fit with specific themes, and some can have own designs drawn on them. Also supplied by Mathmos are laser cut metal wheels of flying planes, flowers and are interchangeable with the colour wheels.

The **portable projector** does not get hot and is also silent in operation; it can also be used as a white light source without causing damage.

**Torch play** either side of white umbrella – catching each others light beam with own torch or find a 'pet light beam' used for dancing light on walls for cats to chase are effective light sources too.

If you don't have space for a mosquito net – then use a **sheet of white net curtain** (finer mesh type) drape it over linen airer frames or simply hold it up for the child, lay it over their cot, play pen.

**Fold away net linen baskets** (white) often found in pound shops are ideal all surrounding environments for babies and you can project onto these too. It may be possible for the baby to be placed inside the basket as a mini environment.

**Lakeland** sell large, fold up, mesh jumper drying racks for drying jumpers over baths. Great for projecting onto.

**Ikea** – long floor to ceiling lobster pot style mesh storage containers – choose a white one and fill it with a variety of luminous objects – good for projecting onto and using in UV light.

Ordinary umbrellas can be used in similar ways. they are portable, fold away and easy to use. Just make sure that the tips of the umbrella are made safe and also the ends of the frames are covered to avoid injury.

- Black umbrella can have led lights hung on it, or neon toys, streamers etc.
- Black and white umbrellas can have black and white items hung from it or contrasting coloured toys etc
- Clear umbrellas make lovely water themes – hang fish and water themed toys from them.

Mini environments can also be constructed out of cardboard boxes, longer-lasting out of plastic storage boxes, clothes airers with blanket or cloth draped over them.





## Storytelling

Encourage children to take an interest in story telling by making the subject more appropriate to age and interest. Make up your own stories and ask the children to make up their own. Story sacks have been around for a long time, and those manufactured story sacks are not always suitable for the child who has a visual impairment.

If you are making your own or asking some group to make them for you – you can read the story and pick out sections that can be adapted for your child's specific needs.

### ***'The Rainbow Fish'***

Make a fish that has some velcro attached scales on its sides. Make some smaller fish for children to hold and explore. Velcro spots can be sewn or stuck onto the little fish and when Rainbow fish gives away its scales they can be stuck each onto a smaller fish that children are holding. Make the fish out of different fabrics and you can fill them with different fillings for a tactile experience.

Rainbow fish puppet can be bought from [puppetsbypost.co.uk](http://puppetsbypost.co.uk) (16.50)

### ***'The Hungry Caterpillar'***

Use a short, smaller lobster pot storage container from Ikea in green. Sew on eyes nose and a mouth and use the compartments to place all of the items that the caterpillar eats. Make a brown bag for him to hide in as a cocoon and a small shiny butterfly ready to emerge. You can shine a torch onto a glittery butterfly for brighter effect.

You could use a long scarf tube, in green, with face sewn onto it. Open one end of the scarf and form into mouth, stitching it secure and as with a 'pillow case flap' it will hold your thumb and fingers to make a 'mouth-open and close' motion as he 'eats the food'

### ***'Sports bags'***

Place in a book of a famous sports person, the ball or equipment they use, e.g. a football, (with a bell or rattle), whistle (squistle £9.95 a whistle operated by squeezing a rubber bulb that the whistle fits into this can be passed from child to child to activate. ([daviessports.co.uk](http://daviessports.co.uk)) flags, team emblems made tactile, netting etc.

### ***'Pop star bag'***

Poster, cd, microphone, pot of hair gel, Tee-shirt, concert tickets, made up award etc.

### ***'Rabbit in the lettuce'***

A beautiful story bag available from <http://www.puppetsbypost.com> (24.50)  
<http://www.otherlandtoys.co.uk> (£22.50) [fledglings.org.uk](http://fledglings.org.uk),  
<http://www.dandelionhomeandgifts.com> (£19.95)

### ***'Beach bag'***

Use a beach bag to hold items such as:  
shells, sand, beach ball, towel, toy fish, bottle of sun cream, opened up, plastic, body scrubs in watery colours to drape over the child as if in the sea, a bucket and spade, a rainmaker or ocean drum, pebbles and maybe plastic cups to have a drink on the beach.

All items that can be explored by the child then passed to other children.

## Treasure boxes

Pretty boxes can hide many small treasures, make them on a theme or simply fill with a variety of objects that children or adults rarely have opportunity to explore.

*If working with elderly people with a visual impairment, dementia etc story bags and treasure boxes can be used, but need to include items that may bring back memories of childhood, working life etc make them age appropriate.*

*Story telling* can lend itself to including different scents and odours, 'Rompa' sell a Lotto game with little pots of various scents, although may be expensive it is effective.



You can make your own scent pots by storing strong smelling items in camera pots, or mix some essential oils into solid carrier waxes or petroleum oil. They don't last as long but are effective. **Ensure that the pots have a mesh cover to stop fingers poking into the pots. You can play matching games with the pots if you have two of each.**

Small yoghurt pots with cotton wool soaked in the scent can be used for older children, make sure that children don't have allergies to certain scents or oils.

Some people may recall '**Galaxies**' multisensory slides of outer-space. No longer available. Sally Slater has produced three leaflets for 16 year old PMLD young people – dvd, book and guides cost about £35.

**Make books with different tactile pages** for the older child or young person. In a ring binder use plastic wallets to hold objects, gel paints, mixtures of food colourings and olive oil (edible if bag leaks), Seal the open end of the wallet with 'Cellotape'. Hole punch holographic card and include, bubble wrap, corrugated card, crinkle cellophane, mirrored foil type materials. Each page will offer a different experience or activity and can be changed or replaced to include themes, new interests etc.

You can use laminating pouches to display or hold coloured paints, glitters etc and seal them with an iron – don't try to put them through the laminating machine!

## Other Games

1. Make a cloth **Os and Xs** game with contrasting fabrics and Velcro spots to secure shape onto back cloth. Segment the back cloth with tactile piping cord, ribbons or binding cloths. You can vary the weight or texture of filling in the shapes too in order to make identification of Os and Xs easier.

2. Circles of fabric sewn together and filled to make increasing sizes of circles and have Velcro attached top and bottom make simple **soft stacker toys**.



3. Star fish made of different cloth and filled with variety of filling sand, polystyrene balls, can be thrown into a 'net' bag. Lycra fabric filled with sand has a more malleable property than a cotton star filled with sand which is stiffer. Polystyrene balls don't add weight to a star and this can be difficult for some children to hold and manipulate.

**Sound matching** – use small canisters like the camera film pots to match sounds. Seal the pots securely those demonstrated had crocheted covers, children to match sounds as pots are shaken. You could use toothbrush cases to same effect.

4. **Pot matching** Camera pots with Velcro dots can be decorated and matching games played.



**'Lenor bottle' game** a clean empty bottle from fabric conditioner can have Velcro dots or strips attached to the outside and a collection of plastic bottle tops, or other items with Velcro dots on them can be matched, counted, sorted, posted (nice and noisy) or placed on the bottle. The bottle can then be used to store the smaller objects for convenient portability.



## Colour match games –

- Sew a cloth of four colours together as a square, red, blue, yellow and an other. Ask child to place objects of same colour onto the correct square on the cloth



- **Ikea canvas collapsable** pots are deep containers to sort shapes and items of same colour – these activities begin to introduce concept of shades of the same colour.
- **Wet wipe tub** – wash out the tub and remove labels. Knot lengths of kite fabric together and store in the wetwipe tub. Start the game for the child by pulling a small length out of the hole in the lid. As the knots reach the opening of the tub they will require a firm tug from the child. Here the child is introduced to resistance and need to exert force to complete an action to gain a reward.



**Play aprons** – make aprons to fit the child, you can attach objects to the front of the apron. The child or person who has difficulty holding onto items or is prone to drop them can explore items and if dropped they are secured to the front of the apron. It is often handy to have a pocket on the front of the apron for the child to keep safe their treasure whilst engaging items on the apron.



**TIP – don't always use the soap dispenser bags to hold textured items or the vi child may come to think that the world is covered in the soft netted texture of the bag!**

**Tactile dominoes** – make your own with stiff card cut into rectangles, glue various textures to half of each end of the card. The card will last as long as the textures and they can all be disposed of when child has finished with them. Some children mouth objects and often specifically purchased tactile toys cannot be washed or disinfected without damaging the textures.



## Dressing Skills

It is often hard for children to learn skills such as fastening buttons, zips etc. If they cannot manage to fasten buttons etc on the clothes that they are wearing – why do we think that an apron or waistcoat with buttons or zips will be easier to practice these skills?

Try making toys that incorporate these skills like this button threader with felt squares



Button snake – sections of cloth with a button one end and a buttonhole the other can be fastened together to make a long fabric snake.



Black and white contrast bag - place items of clothing that are black and white and as they are pulled out of the bag the child can put them on.

Make wands out of mirrored cds and kite fabric glued to a plastic fly swat, (best to avoid sticks!) to encourage tracking, fixation and interest. Streamers move when wand is held in front of a small fan and make flapping noises.



'TacPac' – Tactile Approach To Communication – there are three sets available now re-launched on cd.

*'Tacpac' is based on the idea of tactile play, using the skin, the largest sensory organ in the body, as a primary means of contact. By varying the type of touch (regular/irregular, continuous/intermittent, textures, warm/cool etc), the helper provides a range of stimuli that heighten the receiver's levels of awareness and arousal and promote responses. Each touch stimulus is accompanied by a short, specially composed piece of music designed to match it in mood and enhance the experience.'*

(ref: [www.tacpac.co.uk](http://www.tacpac.co.uk), 17.34hrs 08.03.07)

There are other establishments who have adapted the 'TACPAC' idea, to suit the individual needs of children, and incorporate different themes. It may be possible that they would share resources, you may be able to contact them through the VI forum or similar professional groups.

