Childcare Level 1 – The Types of Imaginative Play and Their Role in Learning

1 of 18 – Welcome

Welcome to this session on the types of imaginative play and their role in learning. (Imaginative means ability to form images or create ideas in the mind).

By the end of this session you will be able to:

* Understand what imaginative play is
* List the 4 different types of imaginative play
* Distinguish between the 4 different types of imaginative play: domestic play, fantasy play, superhero play, and small world play
* Understand how children of different ages play imaginatively

2 of 18 – Imaginative play

Creative thinking and imaginative play are linked to the way children, from birth to 5 years of age, learn. Children learn from the world around them and from using their senses (meaning sight, sound, taste, touch and smell), while playing. Imaginary play helps children understand and use all the information they get through their senses.

Imaginative play is when children are role-playing situations that they find interesting.

The most important benefit (meaning to gain an advantage in something) of imaginative play is that it prepares children for situations that they will have to face when they get older. It is a safe way for children to practice growing up, as they just pretend.

3 of 18 – Types of imaginative play

There are 4 different types of imaginative play:

* Domestic play
* Fantasy play
* Superhero play
* Small world play

We will now look into these types of imaginative play in more detail.

4 of 18 – Domestic play

Domestic play is when children pretend to be in the home. In a school setting, their play usually takes place in the home corner (an area of the classroom set up to look like a home with a kitchen and chairs).

Domestic play is based on the children’s own experiences in the home. Children can easily understand and copy household chores. Here are some examples of what children can pretend to do:

* Clean
* Iron
* Feed, bathe, sing to a doll or teddy bear
* Have a tea party

5 of 18 – Domestic play - continued

Domestic play has many benefits for children. It helps them to understand difficult feelings and helps them to learn how to behave with other people.

For example, when a child does something dangerous, the parent may shout at them. This causes uncomfortable feelings like fear or sadness. Children face these feeling by playing out what happened through imaginative play; by shouting at a doll or soft toy. They relive what made them feel bad and it helps them to understand what happened as well as which behaviours are acceptable, and which are not.

6 of 18 – Fantasy play

Fantasy play is when children play out situations that they have not lived themselves. Here are some examples of the types of things that children fantasy play:

* Stories they have heard
* Photographs they have seen
* Movies they have watched
* Places they have visited, such as museums

7 of 18 – Superhero play

Superhero play is usually based on characters that children read about in comic books or watch in cartoons.

Children pretend to be specific characters, ‘good’ and ‘villains’. Villains are the bad characters in a cartoon. Being the ‘superhero’ makes them feel strong, powerful and confident. Being the villain helps them express angry feelings and understand the difference between making good and bad choices. This teaches them about facing the results of their actions in the pretend world.

Superhero play is a good way for children to use their energy as it usually involves movement and rough-and-tumble play. Rough and tumble play is play involving children and adults which has no rules and can be fighting between children that is not serious.

8 of 18 – Small world play

Small world play is when children play with small figures. Small world play may include:

* Cartoon characters, for example: Peppa Pig and her family
* Cars
* Animals, such as farm animals or dinosaurs
* People, such as Playmobil or Lego people

Children create a small world for their characters that includes their surroundings, for example, a farm for farm animals. They create stories based on something real or they use their imagination. They move the figures around and may even make different noises or voices for each figure.

9 of 18 – Imaginative play accessories

Imaginative play can be made more fun with accessories. Accessories are things that can be added to something else to make it more useful.

Fantasy and superhero play, specifically, are based on children getting into character and role-playing. Dressing up with costumes and wearing superhero masks help children to feel more powerful.

Fantasy play can also be supported with everyday clothing items, such as handbags, hats, scarves and gloves.

Domestic play can be supported by items such as tablecloths, kitchen utensils, sponges or other household objects.

10 of 18 – Imaginative play for babies

The first signs of imaginative play appear in children as young as 12 months old.

Adults can support imaginative play by providing children with different toys and creating treasure baskets. Treasure baskets can contain toys that have different roles and that stimulate the children’s senses. Some examples include:

* Sight, for example, mirrors
* Sound, for example, rattles
* Taste, for example, wooden spoons
* Smell, for example, smelling bags
* Touch, for example, different fabrics

11 of 18 – Imaginative play for toddlers

Toddlers from the age of 18 months old to 2 years old start to use objects by pretending to do something with them, for example, speaking on the phone.

When children first start to pretend, it is helpful to give them objects that have specific uses and are known to them to support their play. For example, telephones, plastic plates and cups, baby dolls etc.

Toddlers’ imaginative play is based on the things they have seen and experienced and they need an adult’s support to extend their play. 2-year-old children may often become confused when pretending and can, for example, become scared when seeing themselves in the mirror while wearing a costume.

As toddlers get older, they learn more words and actions to support their play and need less adult supervision.

12 of 18 – Imaginative play for young children

Young children, around 3 years old, act out stories, based on their own experiences. They like to name what they are playing, for example, ‘restaurant’. Through imaginative play they learn to identify their emotions. 3-year-olds also like to say what they are feeling, for example, “happy to go to the restaurant to eat chicken nuggets”.

Children over 3 years old start to play imaginative games with other children. Imaginative play starts to get more detailed when children turn 4 years old. Their stories become more realistic, they use or create more appropriate accessories for play, they dress up for their roles and can become very attached to what they are playing and the roles they assume.

13 of 18 – Question 1

5-year-old Ethan is wearing a ‘Batman’ costume and runs around in the house, pretending to be Batman. Which type of imaginative play is he engaging in? Select the correct answer:

1. Domestic play
2. Fantasy play
3. Superhero play
4. Small world play

The correct answer is c).

14 of 18 – Question 2

4-year-old Jessica is pretending to be an astronaut flying away in her spaceship to the moon. Which type of imaginative play is she engaging in? Select the correct answer:

1. Domestic play
2. Fantasy play
3. Superhero play
4. Small world play

The correct answer is b).

15 of 18 – Question 3

3-year-old Maisie is playing with her dinosaur figures. Which type of imaginative play is she engaging in? Select the correct answer:

1. Domestic play
2. Fantasy play
3. Superhero play
4. Small world play

The correct answer is d).

16 of 18 – Question 4

Imaginative play starts to get more detailed, stories become more realistic, more appropriate accessories are used, children dress up their roles and can become very attached to what they are playing and the roles they assume. Children, of what age are playing imaginatively in this way? Select the correct answer:

1. Babies to 1 year old
2. Babies 12 – 18 months old
3. Toddlers 2 – 3 years old
4. Young children 4 – 5 years old

The correct answer is d).

17 of 18 – Question 5

Using the following choice of words or phrases: **save**, **own experiences**, **copy**, **cook/clean/feed**, **Domestic**, **Fantasy**, **other’s experiences** and **Small world**, fill in the blanks for the paragraph below. You do not need to use all of the words or phrases.

**Blank** play is when children pretend to be in the home. This type of play is based on the children’s **blank** in the home. Children can easily understand and **blank** household chores. During this type of play children can pretend to **blank** a baby doll or have a tea party with soft toys.

The correct paragraph should read:

**Domestic** play is when children pretend to be in the home. This type of play is based on the children’s **own experiences** in the home. Children can easily understand and **copy** household chores. During this type of play children can pretend to **cook/clean/feed** a baby doll or have a tea party with soft toys.

18 of 18 – End

Well done. You have completed this session on the types of imaginative play and their role in learning.

You should now be able to:

* Understand what imaginative play is
* List the 4 different types of imaginative play
* Distinguish between the 4 different types of imaginative play: domestic play, fantasy play, superhero play and small world play
* Understand how children of different ages play imaginatively

If you have any questions about any of these topics, make a note and speak to your tutor for more help.