

Play at home –  
reaching out  
to families

**The Redcar and Cleveland Parenting Coordinator and Redcar Children's Centre Family Link Worker** have developed a project called Play at Home. It involves a series of home visits to children and families with the aim of increasing parents' confidence and involvement in their children's play and learning. The home visits also help to build positive family relationships and increase communication between parents, children and the centres.

The families invited to take part are identified by practitioners as those who are not engaging in other opportunities offered by centres or other local services. It is felt that delivering play sessions at home allows parents to feel more relaxed and take part without feeling self-conscious about playing in front of other parents and professionals.

The visits help to build confidence by taking an individual approach, looking at parents' strengths – the things they do already – as well as the things they would like to change and learn more about.

Practitioners receive two-and-a-half days' training before becoming a Play at Home worker. This training is delivered by the Parenting Coordinator and the Family Link Worker. A range of practitioners have been trained, including family support and community development workers, play development leaders and assistants, Home Start volunteers and members of the behaviour support team.

The training includes an introduction to the structure and content of the Play at Home programme. It also examines attitudes to parents, the nature of partnership and the importance of parents as educators of their own children.

The workers then take play activities into children's homes. This helps to give parents a clearer understanding of their role in



supporting play and demonstrates at first hand how learning can take place at home, not just in settings.

The children visited have ranged from two months to four years of age. They receive weekly visits for anything between six to 16 weeks. The approach is flexible and adapted to individual needs.

Each session lasts for around one hour and usually begins with a rhyme or song, followed by a play activity and then a book or story.

During the session the workers talk to parents about what the children are doing, pointing out their interests, learning and progress as it is taking place. Each session concludes with feedback from parents, children and practitioners: what has been enjoyed and what they might do next. This supports parents in recognising how they and their children have made progress over the weeks, what they have learned, their likes and dislikes, etc.



Parents are encouraged to choose what play activities they would like to do at the following session and to talk about what activities they have done with their children during the week. As the weeks go by, and parents begin to feel confident and empowered, the balance gradually shifts and with support they begin to take the lead in the sessions.

Parents are also gradually introduced to, and encouraged to attend, group-based sessions within the children's centres and the local community.

The project is supported by a wide range of play equipment, books and props collated into packs. These are used in a home visit and can also be left in the children's homes for a period of time on a loan basis so that parents and children continue playing and learning together.

The packs might include, for instance, play dough and cutters, arts and crafts material, jigsaws, books and props, construction sets or small-world toys.

Parents say that the home visits have made a real difference to the way they think about play and that they feel more confident about getting involved in their children's learning.

Parents' comments include:

'You can make it fun and enjoy it – before it used to be stressful but now I feel more relaxed.'

'My son is starting to play with me more and he wants me to play with him now – before he didn't.'

'Without the sessions I wouldn't have known what to do with the children.'

'I've looked at things like play dough before but I wouldn't have done it.'

'I've got more patience now.'

'It has brought the children on lots, especially in their talking.'

'My children seem more confident to try new things now.'

