



## 2 DEVELOPING CHILD

Children grow and develop in interaction with the environment, their family and friends and other children. Growing requires a lot of time, plenty of playing and an abundance of idleness. Adults should treasure the daily moments of cuddling, creativity and playfulness, during which they can cherish the child's uniqueness and ability to grow and learn.

How did you participate in children's games today? How did you answer children's questions today?

### Intimacy and a myriad of questions

Adults can express their support and the feeling of safety to children, for example, through an approving touch, intimacy and by respecting children's thoughts. Adults operate as the instructors and assistants between developing children and the world they experience. Children's desire for knowledge should be supported and respected; many things in the world are new and strange to them. Children need adults who understand them, can talk with them and who take the time to answer their questions.

Children ask questions that puzzle them right there and then when it is topical and not only when it suits the adults to stop and think about them. However, when adults take a moment from their busy schedule to stop and pay attention to children and their thoughts, they promote independent thinking and foster the children's curiosity and thirst for knowledge.

In addition to their quest for knowledge, children's questions often arise from worries and fears. When children are heard and their feelings are taken into account and when they are given safety and comfort, they feel that adults understand and accept them and their emotions. When children experience love, they feel valued and important. Every child has the right to be an incomplete individual learning life skills.

### Children's sexuality

Sexuality develops throughout our life from birth to old age. Safe development, good self-esteem, the capacity to love and be loved and the ability to express emotions protect and strengthen children's sexuality. Children's corporea-



**In a positive encounter, children do not need to perform, act exemplary, be adorable, manage or enjoy themselves. -- They do not need to pretend to feel certain emotions, think certain thoughts or act in a certain way to ensure that the adult stays available to them and maintains good humour and friendliness. A positive encounter means that children can come as themselves and stay themselves. (Mattila 2011)**



According to the WHO Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe (2010), it is important that children receive age-appropriate, factual information on emotions, intimacy and sexuality from infancy. An experience of personal value combined with safe and positive relationships and age-appropriately provided information promote children's development and the sexual wellbeing of children growing into adults. (Kallio 2014)

WHAT KINDS OF VALUES, IDEAS AND PREJUDICES DO YOU AS AN ADULT COMMUNICATE TO CHILDREN?

HOW DO YOU DISCUSS ISSUES RELATED TO SEXUAL HEALTH WITH SMALL CHILDREN?

HOW DO YOU SUPPORT PARENTS AS THEY STRIVE TO GIVE ANSWERS TO THEIR CHILDREN'S QUESTIONS ON SEXUALITY?

lity and sexuality are life's natural forces that aid development. Childhood sexuality is about wondering, curiosity, finding information, exploring the body and learning about intimacy, and it is based on safety, care and experiences of pleasure from infancy. For example, through play, children often practise things characteristic to the different genders, and it is important that children are encouraged to be themselves irrespective of their sex.

Children have the right to receive answers to questions related to sexuality. Adults' task is to give answers to the issues puzzling children using age-appropriate language. Adults and children can form a mutual understanding, which means that children have a better chance of having their feelings and experiences heard. It is important that adults show genuine interest in children's questions, whilst they also protect them and set boundaries for them. Early childhood educators and child health clinic professionals can support parents and give them information on children's development and sexual education.

### Importance of values

Children's moral development – the awakening of their conscience and value awareness – begins with an early experience of love, which gives a basis for the development of value emotions. Children need other people and a sense of community to support the development of their values and morals. Thus, adults in close contact with children should acknowledge the values that guide their life and stop and think about them from time to time, because their values will reflect and have an impact on children.

### Idleness supports development

Children's growth and development also require quiet times and idleness. Children should be protected from becoming overloaded. Child health clinic and ECEC professionals can remind the parents of small children that families' idle moments are also important. Each day does not need to be filled with activity groups, family clubs or playdates. You can also just stay at home and do nothing special. Children have the right to rest and calm down at home after day care. It might be a good idea to encourage parents to find time to do things as a family and be available for their children by playing together, reading stories or just cuddling the child.

## Adults supporting the mental health of growing children

### SEE CHILDREN AS SPECIAL

- Be interested in children and their experiences.
- Accept children as they are.
- Value and give significance to children and childhood.
- Be inspiring and encouraging: That went well. You are such a great kid.

### RESPECT CHILDREN

- Take responsibility for your mistakes.
- Say it if you have done something wrong: I don't think I listened properly to what you said. I didn't know how to act. I was wrong to shout, and I want to say I'm sorry.

### SHOW EMPATHY AND COMPASSION TO THE CHILD

- Support and verbalise your child's feelings: That was tough. What a fantastic story.
- Give names to actions and activities.
- Say before and after activities: Thank you for helping me.  
(Jukka Mäkelä)

## Children need

- nutrition, exercise and rest
- to be seen as themselves
- to experience themselves as someone who brings joy and delight
- to be heard
- to be valued as a person with ideas
- freedom to explore and succeed
- education on values and expectations
- acceptance of their group
- joy, laughter and boisterousness
- to share feelings.  
(Jukka Mäkelä)



## Bunny hopping

Children pretend to be bunnies, starting off in a squatting position. When the adult plays a gliss on the piano from the lowest to the highest note, the children hop up to standing. Playing a gliss does not require previous knowledge of piano playing; it can be played by sliding the index finger along the white keys. If there is more than one adult in the group, the others can help the bunnies jump even higher.

The bunny hopping allows children to notice the rising scale and act according to plan. It is inspiring and fun to notice that you can move with the music and experience the joy of success, when you get to take part in the action. Doing things together and succeeding create joy and release energy.

(Paasolainen, T. 2009. Pienestä laulusta iso ilo)



## Stormy and gentle wind

Two children pretend to be a stormy wind and a gentle wind. They hold scarves in their hands. The other children are musical trees. Each child holds a rhythm instrument. The children pretending to be trees can sit or stand in a circle. The stormy wind moves frantically waving the scarves, and the trees play their instruments powerfully. The gentle wind moves lightly and peacefully, and the trees play softly. The adult guides when each wind gets to have a go. If neither wind is moving, everyone stays silent.

This exercise enforces the opposites of “quietly and loudly” and “sound and silence”. This is also an excellent physical activity for the children pretending to be the wind. It is a good idea to allow an energetic child to rage like the wind, in the safety of adult presence. This activity also gives the children a visual and musical artistic experience. The children are instructed to quietly wait for the wind to rise. The activity starts and ends with silence.

(Paasolainen, T. 2009. Pienestä laulusta iso ilo)



## Painting your body

Children get to playfully paint their bodies. Each child needs a paintbrush. An adult guides the painting. The painting can be started by recognising your own body. The children are asked to paint the five fingers of their left hand, the toes of their left foot, right arm, forehead and left knee. During the painting, the group can discuss different body parts and growing and take delight in the children’s strengths and different features.



## Beads

Children sit in a circle. A jar full of beads is passed around the circle. The children get to take as many beads as they wish out of the jar. It is a good idea to limit the maximum number to, for example, six. When all the children have chosen their beads, they take turns in telling as many things about themselves as they have taken beads. (For example: “I have blond hair; I have a little brother; I am 5 years old; I like to play house.”)



## Boys on a Skerry (from Porkkala)

This artwork is by Venny Soldan-Brofeldt. The artwork is called *Boys on a Skerry* (from Porkkala). The artwork was painted in 1898 with oil paints on canvas. The size of the artwork is 26.5 x 53 cm.

Here you see a painting by Venny called *Boys on a Skerry* (from Porkkala). The sea was important to Venny, and she spent a lot of time with her family by the sea during summers. She painted many artworks with a sea theme and people by the sea.

Here, Venny has painted two boys with oil paints on canvas. The boys have lit a bonfire on a rocky skerry by the sea. The boys must have gone on an adventure. How have the boys ended up on the skerry? In the painting, the boys seem to be busy doing things. It must be a warm day since one of the boys is not wearing a shirt and both boys are barefooted.

Looking at the painting, you can almost hear the fire crackling and the sea surging on to the rocks and retreating again in a continuous motion. Can you hear the water rushing?

What kinds of colours can you see in the sea? You can see many different shades of blue in the water. Blue is a cold colour as are green, turquoise and purple. In the foreground of the painting, the water is almost black, and further out, you can see more vivid, brighter shades of blue.

There is a secret hidden in this painting. Look at it very closely. How many children can you see on the rock? In the foreground, you can see two boys, but further out on the skerry, you can just make out the shape of another boy. Can you see him now? You can just observe a faded figure of a boy.

When Venny was painting the artwork, she might have first wanted three boys on the rock, but then changed her mind and just wanted to depict two boys. Venny covered one of the boys but only partly. She could have covered him altogether, but for some reason, she wanted to leave the figure visible. Maybe she wished to tell a story with that child's figure. We don't know what that story is, but can you imagine what it could be?



## Let's make a sculpture!

Children make a sculpture of a safe and comfortable den. The group discusses what would be a good place for a den, what materials work well for it and what kind of a den is comfortable and safe. The finished sculptures can be made into a den village or the dens could be bigger, the size of a real den.

Making a sculpture is exciting and challenging because there are so many dimensions to consider. It is interesting to note how different the sculpture may look from different directions.

- How does the wind feel?
- How does it feel to be in water?
- Is it easier to move in the water or out of water? How does your body feel when it is in the water?
- Have you ever walked on slippery rocks? How does it feel?
- Why do you think it might be dangerous to walk on slippery rocks?
- What time of year is it in the painting?
- Which season do you like best?
- How does it feel to be outdoors or by the water?
- What is your favourite place?
- Where would you like to go on an adventure?
- Have you ever experienced an outdoors adventure? What happened?







