

# Under Fives Resource Guide



**For children with special educational  
needs and/or disabilities.**

**Activities and ideas  
for play and development.**

## **PLAY AND OUR SENSES**

It is always fascinating to see how children respond uniquely, in their own ways to the activities and the environment presented, sometimes even surprising themselves or their parents with newly discovered skills and interests!

There are so many reasons why it is beneficial to play, particularly for children, it is hard to know where to start!

We do know play is an essential ingredient for learning and communication. It is satisfying and challenging personally, emotionally and socially. It can broaden our world and take us into imaginary ones and it is fun and absorbing. It fosters the joy of sharing, self-discovery and well-being. When we observe our Portage children, we notice that play may not be coming naturally or easily for them for a variety of reasons. Sometimes it is easier to give the child a screen to occupy or pacify them particularly when children are not interested in play, it is too difficult or we are not sure what play to introduce to them. But we don't want to deny the child the essential pleasures and potential for growth that play with rich and natural materials can offer them.

To help our Portage children into play we often focus on the child's senses and enticing and engaging children to play using one or more of their senses to help foster curiosity and exploration which leads to play. Play materials that have various textures, can light up or make sounds and can be activated to make us gasp and smile are often used to arouse and stimulate attention.

At our Horsham Portage Winter Fun event Chris brought us 'stomp rockets', 'space blankets', weird and wonderful puppets, crazy bubble makers, a host of musical instruments, torches and dens, an array of different balls, and more besides. All the children who attended the session found activities that excited and engaged them. The children handled and manipulated materials and resources with interest and enthusiasm. We saw the children practise throwing, jumping, crawling, talking, squealing, sliding, rolling, stamping, blowing, banging, hiding, digging, laughing, singing, pushing, sharing, offering, and much more besides! All the children joined in practising their skills and learning new ones alongside others. It was clear to see the value of play!

*Francesca Rutherford  
Portage Coordinator, Care and Well-being and Education,  
Horsham Children & Family Centre*



## **MUSIC**

**Sound, rhythm and song provide fun, enjoyment and another form of communication and expression.**

**Familiar musical instruments can be found at car boot sales, Ebay or bought at local stores.**

**It's a good idea to build up a collection which provides different ways of making the sound - bang (drum), shake (tambourine and bells), scrape (frogs and percussion instruments) blow (whistles and pipes), strum (guitars and ukuleles), electronic sounds (keyboards and synthesisers).**

**The music experience I provide is based on 'Lifemusic'; "We are all musicians, there are no wrong notes and every sound has a meaning". It enables a great freedom of expression where children can contribute their own sounds, experience for themselves cause and effect and hear that each sound conveys something different.**

### **HOW I WORK**

**When I'm working with a group of children, I lay all the instruments out in the centre and depending on needs, we either sit in a circle or where we choose to. Children can select an instrument they'd like to play and listen to what it can do.**

**Sometimes I or another adult will play a rhythm on a drum and let the children follow but often the children make their own rhythms.**

**Depending on the children, sometimes I'll make up a song and tune and include the names of the children i.e. "John is playing the drum, drum, drum, yes John is playing the drum" and "Beth is playing the xylophone the xylophone, Beth is playing the xylophone, we're making up our song."**

**This could equally be done in a 'one to one' using the name of the child, their teddy bear, the pet dog etc. etc.**

**Depending on the children in the group and using signing, you can introduce the concept of loud and quiet, fast and slow and so on.**

**Working individually and both having your own instrument, you can have fun following your child's rhythm and them following yours.**

**The key is 'going with the flow' and enjoying those amazing musical moments when something happens!**



## **FABRICS AND SENSORY MATERIALS**

There's a rich variety of fabrics and materials made more interesting because of their texture - smooth, rough, silky, stretchy, flexible - and in addition a whole range of colours and tones.

We understand our world through our senses and our sense of touch is very significant because our bodies are always in contact with something. Our clothes, water when we bath or wash, things we hold and so on.

Over the years I've gathered together a variety of materials including lycra, silk, cotton, wool, hessian and net; they are very useful in many ways (also see my 'STORY TELLING' section).

Some children love to feel the different surfaces and it provides a useful vehicle for building vocabulary.

### **FURTHER IDEAS**

Brown wrapping paper, greaseproof paper, coloured tissue paper and foam sheets all have their uses in providing opportunities for the imagination.

Brown wrapping paper can make a path or roadway and can be held down on the floor with masking tape.

Large bubble wrap is amazing for its feel and sound when walked, skipped, hopped or run on!

Children who use wheelchairs enjoy the sound of the 'pop, pop, pop' as they move over the surface. It sounds like fireworks going off or a thunderstorm!

Small bubble wrap is also good but the sound is not quite as impressive.

Using a tray with sides, you can provide different sensory and tactile fun which could include:

Shaving foam, macaroni, washing up liquid, sand, Weetabix which can be squashed with a spoon or Rice Krispies which give a 'snap, crackle and pop' also pressed down with a spoon or crunched in the hands.

Go onto 'Pinterest' for other great ideas on things which stimulate the senses.



## **PUPPETS**

Not everyone is comfortable using or being with puppets but they offer many opportunities for fun and encourage a child's development.

Most of my puppets I bought from new but others were from car boot sales and after a thorough clean, came up like new.

### **A FEW TIPS**

Use your puppet by giving it life. It can talk to you by whispering in your ear or you can try giving it a voice - ventriloquism! Just the joy of making a voice is fun for both you, and your child.

Think about how your puppet is sitting; in your hand, on your arm, on a table or ledge. Is it looking around the room? Does it look happy or sad? Give it a drink from a tumbler but does it drink quietly or with a slurp?!

I'm saying 'it' but of course puppets can have names and genders!

Sometimes a funny name works really well or your child might have an idea themselves for a name. Buzzy, Wonky, Silly and so on.

Your puppet can get engaged in all sorts of activities with you and your child -

Playing some musical instruments, playing with a toy, dancing to music, singing a song, looking around, showing 'sad', 'happy', 'worried' and so on.

Tell a story with or about the puppet (or puppets) and maybe your child has their own puppet too, which can be part of the story.

The key is - **GIVE YOUR PUPPET LIFE!**

Imagine it is a living, breathing, thinking, fun loving - **BEING!!!**

If you're with a group (or equally just one child) sometimes they enjoy using puppets to join in a song.

Some songs lend themselves to this - "Old MacDonald Had A Farm" is the most obvious.

Sock puppets are great and the children can stick on eyes or decorate their puppet with sticky paper. If it's a worm, the song "There's a worm at the bottom of the garden and his name is wiggly woo" is good for actions - under the ground, going 'boo' to the neighbours etc.



## **BUBBLES AND BUBBLE MAKERS**

Bubbles are just wonderful, wonderful fun!

They change shape when they move and if the light hits them when they move and turn, they display different rainbow colours.

### **THINGS TO CONSIDER**

You can buy individual bubble pots and either blow the bubbles yourself or encourage your child to. It's quite a difficult skill but rewarding and also good practice for lip movement and breathing.

You can also wave the bubble wand and create bubbles that way.

Big bubble makers are amazing. Children really love making the big bubbles themselves and it's magical to see the larger bubbles rising in the air and then bursting.

You can buy or make the big bubble makers using two wooden sticks and a piece of cord but needs practice - have a go! You can also experiment with other materials to make bubble wands - a plastic tube which you use to dip one end into the mixture and blow down the other!

A website about constructing bubble makers is: [www.instructables.com](http://www.instructables.com)

You can make up simple songs about bubbles:

"Bubbles, bubbles, flying in the air, bubbles, bubbles going everywhere.  
Higher, higher up they go, bubbles, bubbles, go, go, go!!"

If you have a number of children using the bubble makers, it's a great way to encourage sharing and enjoying the activity together.

Big bottles of bubble mixture can be bought at pound shops or you can make your own.

It's quite an art to make your own and at £1 - a bottle (Poundland or The Works) it's probably just as cheap to buy than make.

For a bubble mixture recipe go to: [www.bubblepop.co.uk](http://www.bubblepop.co.uk)

It's also worth looking at this website for other ideas about 'the fun you can have with bubbles!'



## **MUSIC AND MOVEMENT**

**Movement is really good for us, in whatever form it may be.**

**For wheelchair users, the feeling of someone moving your chair from side to side and round and round, joining in with others as they dance, can be wonderful!**

**One of the resources I use in dance and movement is colourful juggling scarves.**

**You can buy them from circus equipment stores or on Ebay.**

**They are various colours and very light in weight and so when thrown in the air, they float down slowly, either onto the floor or onto us.**

**Children enjoy dancing or moving the scarves to music on a C.D. (currently 'Frozen' or 'The Muppets' are really popular) but of course some of the best known nursery rhymes or other popular songs of the day work too.**

**Some children enjoy the game of 'boo!'; cover their faces with a scarf and then encourage them (or you) to take the scarf away and say 'boo!'**

**I've recently bought some cheap LED torches and covered the light with masking tape to ensure they're not too bright.**

**Depending on the children, either you or them - or both - can hold the torches facing light outwards and move the light up and down, round and round, left and right.**

**You can say the words and encourage the children to join in with you.**

**I've also found using the coloured scarves to cover the light, gives it colour which is very effective.**

**You can move the lights under a mound of coloured scarves and encourage the child to 'chase' the light like a cat and mouse!**

**This is a recent idea and you'll need to experiment and come up with some new ways of using the torches too.**

**I cut out silver and gold stars and again, it worked well when the children shone the light on the stars as we sang 'twinkle, twinkle little star!'**



## **TOYS AND GAMES**

I still remember the toys I played with as a child, many of them now part of history!

Cliptico, Meccano, Mr. Potato Head and so on.

The toys our children play with are significant to them too, in different ways.

For me, toys which were interactive and when I could use my imagination and have fun, are the ones I remember most.

Some of the electronic toys today are great when for example you've got a steering wheel and sound effects or a keyboard which creates different sounds; children enjoy the 'cause and effect'.

Here are some of the toys I use in my sessions which I find seem to 'just work' and have the necessary ingredients for 'happy play' and can encourage language and hand eye movement and co-ordination.

### **STOMP ROCKETS**

Stomp rockets are great fun because they provide 'cause and effect', they have an element of surprise and we can achieve different things with them depending on how hard we jump!

They're available from Amazon and other toy shops and are made up of a foam rocket pushed onto a stand, a plastic 'balloon' attached by a flexible tube which, when you jump on it, releases the rocket into the air.

I've seen children go back time after time after time, getting more and more excited by the effect of them jumping and the rocket soaring! If there are a number of children, it also enables the experience of sharing and a good vehicle for language and of course physical skills.

### **CARS AND ROAD MAPS**

'Road map mats' are really good and there are a variety now available. A wide range of cars can be found in the usual places - boot sales and charity shops - from diggers and dumper trucks through to police cars and racing cars. I usually leave the cars in their storage box and the children enjoy exploring what they can find as they sift through the car treasure trove!

Sand is great to play in too and run cars and diggers, load up the trucks with sand and whatever their imaginations tell them!



## **STORY TELLING**

The telling of tales goes back to the beginning of time!

There are many ways to tell a story or enjoy a story together and we find for ourselves the way that works best for us.

Not everyone is comfortable making up a voice for a character or creating a story - it's whatever works for us. The important thing, is that wonderful connection between us and our child/children within the story telling space.

Here are just one or two ideas that work well for me.

### **1. Reading from a book**

I don't often read to children from a book but when I do, I always try to make sure I show them the pictures on the page, ask one or two questions about what I've read, before moving on to the next page. The most popular books are those with 'pop-up pictures' that stand out, or books which have sound effects. I have a pop-up book about the sounds of animals in the jungle which have sounds of the animals and another pop-up book is about Gerald the Giraffe which is great.

### **2. Making up a story**

Most times when I tell a story I use musical instruments, puppets, objects, word cards and pieces of material and tissue paper. When appropriate, we make up the story together but of course it all depends on the needs of the children.

The pieces of material and coloured tissue paper we (children and grown-ups) use to make our own scene on the floor - it might be a jungle, space, the North Pole or a village.

We can then sit in the scene with puppets or musical instruments if we want to and make up our own story.

This could just as effectively be done with only one child and in any suitable space.

The important thing is to let our imagination go free! It doesn't matter if there's a dinosaur in space or a chicken at the North Pole. The story and sounds have meaning to the child or children and in different ways they've contributed!



## **DRESSING UP**

Dressing up provides fun and an opportunity to use imagination.

I have a box of suitably sized dressing up clothes and a mirror for those children who want to try them on.

It's also a good idea to have a box of fabrics of different colours, textures and sizes (which I also use for storytelling and creating different spaces - see **STORY TELLING**).

Some children enjoy draping themselves in gold material to become a princess or a piece of fur fabric to become a dog or a cat!

I also have a box of hats (including adult sized) which the children can use.

Scarves, sheets of thermal silver foil, gloves and other ideas of resources suitable for dressing up, provide fun.

Empty cardboard boxes are really good too - they can become cars, boats, rockets and so on.

Chairs draped in fabric can make scenery.

Brooms make perfect masts for pirate ships.

You can make a treasure chest out of a cardboard box and fill it with cut out gold coins, a treasure map and whatever you have in your imagination.

Cardboard tubes from toilet or kitchen rolls.

Empty cereal packets.

Larger boxes from supermarkets or other stores.

Long cardboard tubes from fabric shops.

Folded cardboard boxes from packaging companies.

Etc. etc. etc.!!!



## **REPETITIVE SONGS AND RHYMES**

Most of us love songs which are familiar, repetitive and which we can join in with. For me - The Beatles 'Yellow Submarine'! Children love them too and in whatever way they're able to join in - they love them!

Here's a list of those which I've found to be very popular and you can find them on the internet if you don't already know them.

### **1. We're Going On a Bear Hunt**

I wish I'd written it! It's such good fun, is repetitive and brings in lots of scope for mime and expression. "I'm not scared!" (shiver, shiver, etc.) On occasion I've re-written the words and made it a different animal and asked the children (when appropriate) to come up with ideas about where we're going. It could be a dinosaur hunt; an elephant hunt; a snowman hunt and so on.

### **2. Heads and Shoulders Knees and Toes.**

A timeless rhyme and again depending on the child or children, you can play around with it. Miss off a word each time, play the song on a teddy bear or favourite soft toy, etc. etc.

### **3. The Ants Go Marching One by One Hurrah! Hurrah!**

Once again well known by almost everyone and also a rhyme which is adaptable. They don't HAVE to be ants and you can make up your own actions. "One by One and ate a large currant bun". Two by Two and pulled the tail of a kangaroo!"

### **4. There's a Worm at the Bottom of the Garden and his name is Wiggly Woo**

Great fun and there's an idea for this rhyme you might like to try in my STORYTELLING section.

### **5. Incy Wincy Spider**

A good song for using different voices.

### **6. The Funky Monkey Song**

Buy a monkey puppet and try this song:

"Come on everybody, do the Funky Monkey with me! Come on everybody, do the Funky Monkey with me! Clap your hands one two three, clap your hands now just like me. Come on everybody, do the Funky Monkey with me" Other verses include "stamp your feet on the ground, stamp your feet and turn around".

### **7. Grand Old Duke of York**

An ideal song for a parachute game.

### **8. Twinkle, twinkle little star!**

An all time favourite.

### **9. Jingle bells, jingle bells**

Popular at any time of the year.



## **PARACHUTES**

Parachute games provide popular and engaging fun and sensory experiences for most children and their families.

The standard multi coloured parachute can be purchased from your local toy store, supermarket or Ebay.

Their colourful panels make them visually attractive when they're being shaken up and down and the children are either underneath or helping to hold onto the sides.

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR USE**

#### **MULTICOLOURED PARACHUTE**

1. Ideally you need a minimum of four around the edge of the parachute to hold it and move it up and down. The child or children can sit underneath and you can then move the parachute slowly; quickly; stop; round and round and you can use these and other words with the actions.

2. With the children underneath, sing the song 'Grand Old Duke of York' and move the parachute high in the air for 'up' and low on the children for 'down'. 'Neither up nor down' lift it up and then down over the children.

3. Pour a box of coloured playball balls on top of the parachute. Shake the parachute as hard as you can and watch the balls as they cascade into the air and onto the floor!

#### **CLEAR POLYTHENE PARACHUTE**

1. Using a large square sheet of heavy polythene, use it in the same way as the coloured fabric parachute. The difference is it enables the children to look up and see what's happening above, listen to the crunchy sound of the polythene when it's moved and also with some alternative games.

2. On a warm sunny day, the children sit underneath the polythene and then water is poured on top through the rose of a watering can. With the children underneath, the adults can move the parachute left and right, up and down while the children watch the water making shapes on top. At the same time you can add coloured play balls which again make different patterns as they're moved.

Although I've **not** tried it myself, you could drop coloured food dye into the water for a very different effect!!

Make sure you're all wearing something suitable for this activity, as you'll all get joyfully wet!



## **OTHER USEFUL RESOURCES**

1. **Wellspring West Sussex** is an independent newsletter for disabled children, young people and their families.

It's now in its 20<sup>th</sup> year and has gone from strength to strength.

Look at the website [www.wellspringwestsussex.org.uk](http://www.wellspringwestsussex.org.uk) where you'll find a range of useful resources and links.

2. The **LOCAL OFFER** website helps families find nearby services related to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and explains how to access them.

Go to: [www.westsussex.local-offer.org](http://www.westsussex.local-offer.org) for details. There are details of events, workshops and training and you can share your own experiences of services you've accessed.

3. **Reaching Families** provide a range of useful resources for the families of disabled children and young people.

These includes Workshops as well as fact sheets on key topics such as D.L.A. and local information.

Go to: [www.reachingfamilies.org.uk](http://www.reachingfamilies.org.uk)

4. **Contact a Family** is a national charity for families with disabled children providing information, advice and support, bringing families together so they can support each other.

[www.cafamily.org.uk](http://www.cafamily.org.uk)

5. **Family Fund**

The U.K.'s largest charity providing grants for families with disabled or seriously ill children and young people.

[www.familyfund.org.uk](http://www.familyfund.org.uk) Tel: 01904 621115

6. **Benefits Advice Service (West Sussex).**

For families and carers of children and young people up to the age of 25 with special educational needs and disabilities in West Sussex.

Tel: 03302 222 569 or 07850 240874

### **Chris North's sessions**

Chris came to deliver poetry/music sessions for the children using the Portage Service in West Sussex. Portage is a home visiting educational service supporting preschool children with disabilities and/or significant additional needs.

The service provides children and their families with a home visitor who offers them a weekly session in the family home. In partnership with parents the home visitor works on the child's development through play using a combination of child led play and structured teaching. Progress is measured in very small steps and every success is celebrated.

We held a number of sessions across West Sussex and all were well attended by children and their families and every session was extremely well received. Chris has a unique ability to engage every child regardless of their disability or individual needs. He is an expert at identifying a child's unique preferences and motivators and he uses these as a starting point for activities. Chris involved all the children in group activities using a parachute, water, balls, musical instruments and puppets. He also gave each child individual time with whatever they showed an interest in, and managed to interact with a number of children for whom interactive activities are commonly unsuccessful.

It was wonderful to witness Chris' skill at encouraging and supporting the children to engage and contribute to the sessions. He skilfully models expert practice and, as well as the obvious enjoyment experienced by the children, he also provides parents and carers with ideas for play and interaction with their children.

We cannot thank Chris highly enough for his time and for the wonderful service he provides to our families, many of whom rarely see their children so included and fully engaged.

*Tandy Roberts*  
*Portage Coordinator,*  
*Worthing*



## A LITTLE ABOUT US

Wellspring West Sussex is a registered charity for disabled children and young people and their parents and carers across West Sussex. It has its own website which together with newsletters provides information on a range of topics that may be useful to disabled children, young people and their families and carers and is celebrating its 20<sup>th</sup> year!



The National Lottery's 'Awards For All' and Wellspring West Sussex generously funded Chris's Under 5's Creative Workshops across West Sussex... *THANK YOU!!!*

## PORTAGE

Portage builds on what a child can do. Home visitors come from a wide variety of backgrounds, many are volunteers and all enjoy working with children and their families. Activities are based on play, grounded in everyday situations and provide fun and success for the child.

Many thanks to the Portage Teams for arranging the settings and organising the events which I was a part of.

## THANK YOU!

I would like to say a huge 'thank you' to 'Awards For All' (The National Lottery) and Wellspring West Sussex for making a grant available to enable me to provide my play sessions.

**MOST IMPORTANTLY**, a huge thank you to all the children and their families for giving me the privilege of spending some play time with them.

*Chris North*

[www.freedomthroughfun.co.uk](http://www.freedomthroughfun.co.uk)





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