

# Y Bont

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# Special Issue

# Playworking after Covid-19

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# Playworking after Covid-19

This special edition of Y Bont has been developed to support you, as a playworker to think about your 'playworkers toolbelt' that, going forward, you are going to need in order to ensure that you and your setting can offer a variety of enriching and flexible play opportunities for children and young people, that engages them in a variety of play types and supports their development and wellbeing. This document is to support you through this process of introducing children and young people back into the play environment whilst taking into account the new social distancing and infection control guidelines.

Do everything that you can to ensure that the environment and routine supports social distancing, but remember that rigid physical distancing is not always reasonable when caring for and looking after children. Where contact or closer working is required, you can limit the risk of spreading coronavirus by implementing comprehensive health and hygiene procedures, which you should outline in your Re-Opening Policy and within your Risk Assessments.

***Playwork Principle 1: All children and young people need to play. The impulse to play is innate. Play is a biological, psychological and social necessity, and is fundamental to the healthy***

***development and well-being of individuals and communities.***

This guidance has been developed using the Playwork Curriculum in order to show how settings can still be providing an enriching and quality play environment for children, that supports their all-round development and well-being, provides a range of play opportunities as well as the opportunity to play out their experiences of Covid-19. Hopefully these ideas and suggestions will provide you with some springboards to ideas and suggestions of your own.

## Things to consider:

- **Just because it isn't easily cleaned, doesn't mean it can't be used. Rotating resources, materials and loose parts will be key. If things can't be easily cleaned, put them away for 72 hours to avoid any possible spread of infection.**
- **Cleaning stations. Once a child has finished with equipment such as playdough cutters, they are taken to a designated area in the setting that will be used as a cleaning station where a member of staff can clean them in a ready-made Milton solution or with appropriate cleaning**

sprays or wipes. Also include anti-bacterial gel the children can freely use.

- Using the outdoor space is essential and highly advised as part of the recommended guidance to effectively support social distancing, and also to minimise the risk of transmission and supporting health and well-being. Suitable clothing will be essential, as they say there is no such thing as bad weather just bad clothing.
- You will need to have the children in “bubbles” which is a set number of children who will remain in the same group. Each bubble should have its own toys/materials/resources which can be shared between the children in the bubble. Ideally bubbles will need to reflect bubbles that are being kept at school but there is also an understanding that this might not be possible.

Using the Playwork Curriculum, this special edition shares some ideas of activities and guidance to support the children’s play while taking into consideration social distancing and infection control.



# Water

Whilst water play is not currently recommended, here are some activities that could still be done safely within settings to avoid potential spread of infection.

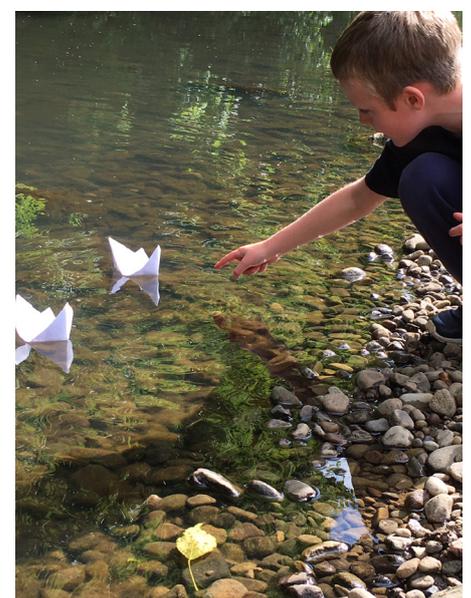
**Washing 'babies' or similar with soap.** Using the water tray with anti-bacterial soap to clean the dolls will cover the hygiene aspect as well as continuing to allow the children to play in water. Rotate the resource. Have it in one bubble group one day, clean it down at the end of the day and the next day put it into another bubble group.



**Ice cube racing.** Fill ice cube trays with water and add different food colouring to each block. Create a slope, depending on how warm it is, it may not need to be that high. Cardboard rested on benches, books or boxes are quick and simple ways to make a slope. Allow the children to choose their colour block, place the block at the top of the slope and see who's reaches the bottom first. This could also be used as an alternative for painting, using the coloured ice cubes to paint with.



**Ice block towers.** Using ice cube blocks. They can freely play with the blocks building towers either individually or together. This could be done at a table with the children sitting opposite each other to allow for social distancing. It could be made into a competition. Each child has the same number of blocks and they can see who can build the tallest tower before it falls or who can build a tower the quickest before the ice melts.



**Water fights.** Weather permitting the children can use guns or water bombs or ask the parents to provide an empty shower gel bottle, etc. This is another activity that can be done allowing social distancing. Consider how you will change the children afterwards. Older children could change themselves but if younger children need help ensure you use appropriate PPE and wash hands after you have finished or alternatively, if it's warm enough, leave them to dry.



**Water painting.** Simply use a cup of water and a brush, one per child, and leave them to it.



**Paper boat races.** Find a simple origami boat template online for the children and young people to copy. Then using a puddle, pond or pool or a local river if you have one, see whose can float the longest or go the farthest. Wellies may be needed.

**Flick painting.** Using a selection of paints and a large piece of paper on the outside floor or on an outside wall allow the children to flick paint at the wall. Either provide paintbrushes that can be used within the 'bubbles', provide one per child or wipe them down between uses.

**Water Wall.** if you have the space, then another way to keep water as an element for play within the setting could be to introduce a water wall, either fixed or freestanding. Using either a wall, a pallet or wire mesh on a wooden frame (this can then be used from both sides) and a selection of pipes, drainpipes, funnels, noodles, old hose pipes, plastic bottles, buckets and washing up bowls can create a fun and inviting space for children to play. It can then be easily cleaned and wiped down and ready to use for the next 'bubble' of children. Might be worth approaching local plumbers as many are happy to donate plumbing and drainpipe parts.



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# Air

There are lots of games that can be played with simple resources that are either easily cleaned, easily recycled or easily stored

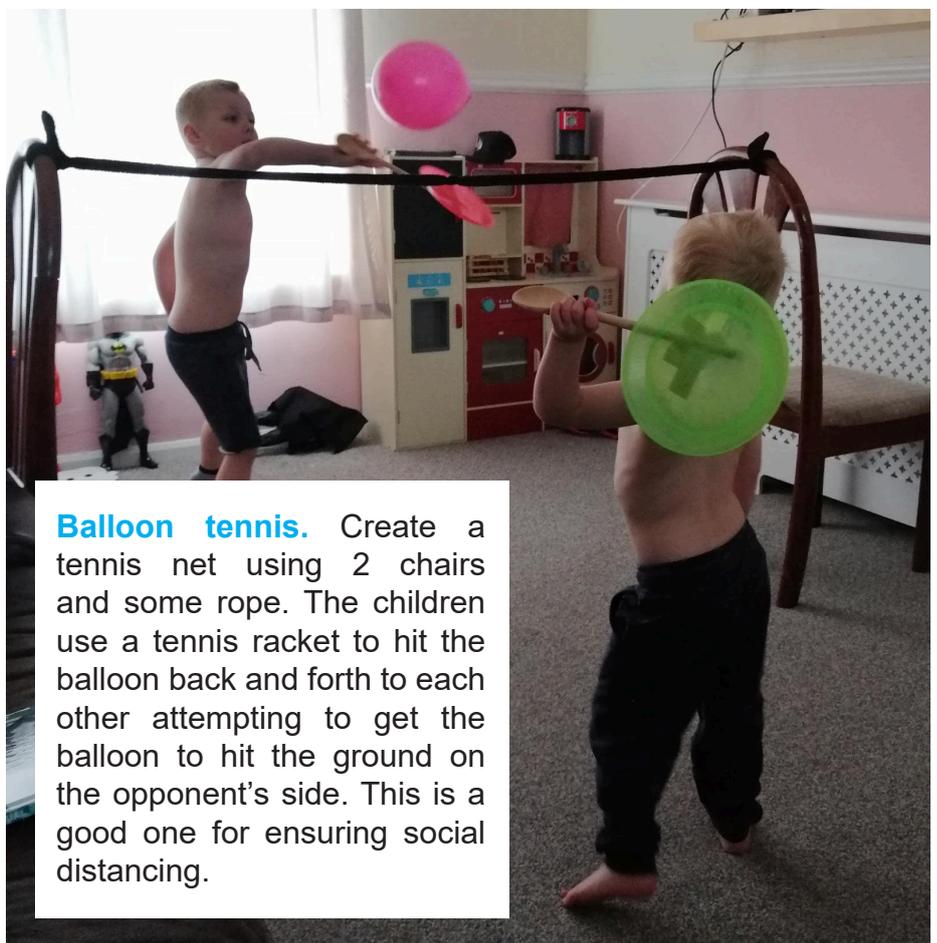
**Paper aeroplanes.** You can't go wrong with a paper plane race or paper plane challenges, again, how can children adapt planes, do they know how they work using drag and thrust? Again, you can get some simple templates from the internet.

**Balloon volleyball.** Can be done in teams within their individual bubbles. Either chalk out a court, or use electrical or masking tape; you can even use cardboard boxes to build a mini net (remember if you use boxes to either recycle at the end of the session or to store them away for 72 hours)

**Keepy uppies.** The children have to try to keep the balloon in the air at all times. This one can be done as a group game and allows for social distancing. Throw the balloons away at the end of the games and use new ones for future games.

**Kites.** Kites provide a variety of resources, such as different plastic bags, skewers, tape, paper and string and challenge the children to make a kite. Best done in their "bubbles" so having enough for each group of children is essential.

**Bubbles.** Make a simple bubble solution that can be divided into an individual cup for each child. Give each child a strip of garden wire or similar and they can make their own unique bubble wand. Alternatively bubble wands can be wiped down between users.



**Balloon tennis.** Create a tennis net using 2 chairs and some rope. The children use a tennis racket to hit the balloon back and forth to each other attempting to get the balloon to hit the ground on the opponent's side. This is a good one for ensuring social distancing.

Being hygienic doesn't mean having to stay clean and dirt free. Being outside and getting dirty is a natural part of childhood and supports sociological, psychological and biological development.

# Earth



**Nature art.** Use natural resources that you can find outside, grass, pinecones, sticks, leaves etc and create a picture with what you find. You can even make some wooden frames.

**Rubbings.** Using crayons and paper, what can you find outside to make a rubbing of? If you put the rubbings into polypockets, which are wipeable, you could also challenge children to match up the rubbings.

**Tree Boggarts.** Using a ball of clay, get children to throw it as hard as they can onto a tree trunk, so it sticks, now using natural loose parts they can make a face for the boggart or 'tree spirit'. Can they think of a story to go with the boggart, are they good or evil, happy or sad? How did they end up in the tree?

**Gardening.** If you have the space to plant pots for windowsills or even an allotment, gardening and children being able to see things grow is a great experience and helps them to understand where food comes from. Either using tools for each "bubble" of children or making sure that they are cleaned down between use, this is another good activity that can still be carried out with children and young people.



**Scavenger / Nature Hunt.**

Provide children with a list of items that they can find in the outdoors, challenge them to find them as quickly as they can. You could even do laminate sheets that can be cleaned and reused, or make it more difficult and provide close-up pictures of things they need to find.

**Chalk drawings.** Whilst not easily cleanable, chalks are a resource that are cheap enough to be able to provide per group of bubble children. As well as chalk drawings, you can also play games on the playground such as noughts and crosses, battleships or even get children to create a physical chalk challenge, wiggly lines to balance, footsteps to hop or jump to....what can the children and young people come up with?



**Bug Hunting.** Provide children with a plastic tub, what bugs can they find in the outdoors. Once finished put the bugs back and return containers to the cleaning station ready for a wipe down.



# Fire

Providing children with access to fire, with adult support, helps to increase children's knowledge and experiences of fire whilst encouraging safety. Preparation is key, making sure that you have a fire bucket or bucket of water at the ready for larger fires is essential, and having clear fire pit rules with children and young people will encourage responsibility and respect for this amazing element.

**Melting candles.** Give the children a bowl of water each and a candle. Light the candle (if you think the children can light it themselves allow them to with supervision and support). Let the children make patterns in the water by allowing the melted wax to drip into the water. The children can also take the cooled wax from the water, manipulate the wax and play with the textures. Wipe down the candles between uses.



**Foil food.** Let each child create his or her own foil food. Spray a sheet of foil with oil spray (Make sure to use a monounsaturated or polyunsaturated spray oil such as olive oil to ensure you are promoting healthy eating) Place several diced apples inside and add some oats. Fold it closed and roast for 20-30 minutes.

**Tealight cooking.** The easiest way to introduce fire into a setting is to start out by using tealights. This allows you to see how children will react, having discussions around fire and any rules that need to be in place. Also, they are a simple way to toast marshmallows on sticks. Simply hold them over the flame and if you like, use chocolate biscuits to squish the marshmallow and make a s'more. "Because you always want some more!!"



# Identity

childhood is a time to discover who you are and how you are unique or similar to those around you. Providing a range of dressing up clothes including everyday clothes and accessories of all sorts and sizes really supports children's understanding of themselves and who they are.



**Dressing up clothes.** Alternate dressing-up clothes allowing 72 hours between sharing of “bubbles”. Again, rotation and planning will be key, it is also important to ensure that dressing-up clothes are washed regularly as part of the Club routine. Dressing up clothes can still be made available for children but will need to be washed after every use. You could provide a lidded laundry basket where the children can place the clothes after use.

**Mirrors.** Providing mirrors as a resource allows children to be able to see themselves, pull faces, explore emotions and see themselves. Can they draw themselves? Can they draw different emotions? When finished simply get children to put them in the designated cleaning station for wiping down.

**Cameras.** Children love to use tech as part of their play and cameras are great for getting children to take pictures of themselves and others. Can they add funny captions to pictures? Can children pose for photos in funny ways or do a freeze frame of a scene where they have to guess what was happening. Can they use lego figures or similar, to make animations? Either wipe down equipment after use or keep equipment to be used between one ‘bubble’ and store away for 72 hours ready for the next ‘bubble’ to use.



# The Senses

Play should be stimulating and should therefore stimulate the senses. Including a range of resources that have different textures, smells, colours and sounds will encourage children to want to explore and experiment within the play setting.



## Individual Playdough.

Playdough is a great sensory resource, you can add fragrance using natural oils, different colours or bits of lavender or similar to change the texture, if you are a chocolate fan then a favourite is cocoa playdough. However, it is known that this material can harbour germs and the first instinct could be to remove it completely, but playdough can still be used if you provide children individual bags of playdough. A staff member can make up a batch and then separate them into individual bags and put the children's name on it. Children could decorate their own bags or name tags in preparation. Within the bubbles the children could create the playdough mix themselves and if the microwave can be brought into the playroom it can be cooked with the children there allowing them to be a part of the process. After each play the children re-bag their individual playdough and take the cutters and equipment to the cleaning station where they can be added to the ready-made Milton solution.

## Playdough Recipe

2 cups plain flour  
2 tablespoons vegetable oil  
(baby oil and coconut oil work too)  
1/2 cup salt  
2 tablespoons cream of tartar  
1 to 1.5 cups boiling water  
(adding in increments until it feels just right)  
food colouring (optional)

### Method:

- Mix the flour, salt, cream of tartar and oil in a large

mixing bowl

- Add water and food colouring
- Stir continuously until it becomes a sticky, combined dough
- Allow it to cool down then take it out of the bowl and knead it vigorously for a couple of minutes until all of the stickiness has gone.
- If it remains a little sticky then add a touch more flour until just right

**Music.** Play a range of music that reflects the diversity of music in all its forms. Have it playing in the background quietly or have it loud and have a singalong shouting at the top of your lungs, and sometimes have no music playing at all. What about a game of socially-distanced follow the leader, musical statues, or musical bumps?

**Repeat after me songs.** Group songs where you have to mimic the leader and copy the actions can be a lot of fun and children really enjoy them.

“Have you ever had a penguin come to tea, take a look at me and a penguin you will see... penguin’s attention, penguins salute. Left leg, right leg, left flipper, right flipper, stick out your bum.”

**Sensory jars.** Make sure that the jars or pots that you use have lids that are extremely secure. Fill the bottle half with water and food colouring. Then add glitter or sequins, waterbeads, plastic beads, Lego or anything that will fit in the bottle that will ‘swim’. Top the rest of the bottle up with glycerine (preferable) or you could try baby oil. Your sensory jars are now ready.

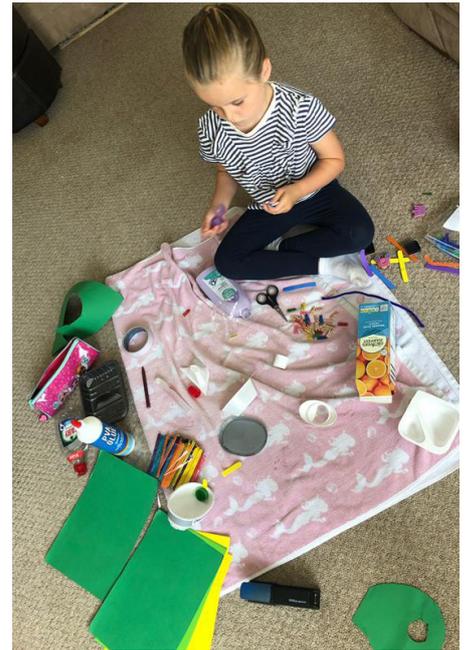
**Zip-lock bags.** Fill plastic zip-lock bags with malleable materials such as gloop or shaving foam with some coloured paints, leaves, glitter, plastic letters etc and let the children play with the materials in the bag. At the end bags can be put into the cleaning station ready for a wipe down and clean ready for the next person to use.

# Loose Parts

Providing variety and resources that have 'no assigned use' is essential for children to be able to use their imagination. There are many loose parts that can still be used in settings, that can either be easily cleaned, stored away for 72 hours between uses or recycled after they have been used. Below are some starting suggestions for loose parts that could be offered in a play setting.

- Bottle caps
- Paper Straws
- Cardboard tubes
- Empty bottles
- Recycled spools and wheels from threads
- Corks
- Plastic cups and lids
- Fabric remnants
- Threads
- Curtain rings
- Kitchen utensils
- Paperclips
- Costume Jewellery
- Newspapers
- Tape
- Balls
- Rackets
- Shells

Can you challenge children to make a boat or 'not-a-paper' aeroplane out of the loose parts, what about newspaper dressing up or simply leave them to it to see what they come up with.



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# Good Practice

**Tools** - for example, staplers, scissors, hole punch, knives, hammers, saws etc. Ideally and where possibly try to have 'bubble' tools that can be used by a group of children. Where this isn't possible, encourage the children to make use of the cleaning stations when they have finished using tools. If children are using tools that require a little more supervision from adults, such as saws, nails and hammers, then a member of staff should take responsibility for wiping these down in between users and store them appropriately rather than allowing them to go to a cleaning station.

**Choices** - "Playwork Principle 2: Play is a process that is **freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated**. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, by following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons." Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group, 2005.

Children need to be able to make choices and have a say in what they do and how, and even more so now as they have been prevented from going to school and seeing friends for so long. They require a play environment that provides them with opportunities to make choices about what they want to play, how and who with. Get them involved in discussions about new rules and encourage them to remember social distancing, just make sure that they are involved in making decisions, this will help them feel in control and part of the play setting. Remember PLAY is the work of children, THEY are the boss!

**Risk** - "Playwork Principles 8: Playworkers choose an intervention style that enables children and young people to extend their play. **All playworker intervention must balance risk with the developmental benefit and well-being of children.**" Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group, 2005.

Now more than ever risk will be something to promote because with resources being limited with implementing infection control, allowing the child to be outside taking risks is going to provide them with so much opportunity. Some children may have been reluctant to take risks before as they had the comfort of the "safer" activities inside. Also, there is every chance that this lockdown could have enhanced fears in children, they have been in a protective bubble for so long that to develop their confidence more providing them with the opportunity to experiment with risk could really support this anxiety.

**Concepts** - One of the big concepts to expect children and young people to be playing out will likely be Covid-19. Doctors, infected people and policeman games, these will be vital in allowing children to explore their feelings and emotions and concerns and worries that they are and have been feeling. Prepare, as a team to have to possibly deal with any play or discussions arising around death, illness and infection. Be mindful that play provides children with a way to process what has happened and what they have experienced so it is important that we support children to play out feelings and have honest but reassuring conversations with them.

**A varied landscape** - after being confined to a set space during lockdown, having a different environment to go to and play in will either cause worry and anxiety or joy and happiness. Where possible, environments should provide different levels of height, allow children opportunity to play alone or together as well as play games or with different resources. The more varied the landscape the more challenges the child will have. Can you provide resources where they can build bridges? Tyres and planks. Again, think about rotating anything that you provide or ensuring that it can be wiped down.

**Building** - children should be able to access different materials to build with and opportunities to create and change the environment, mastering materials that are provided and using them in a variety of ways. Junk modelling, Lego, building blocks, cardboard boxes, materials, ropes etc can all be provided and either cleaned or rotated using the 72 hour rule. Cardboard boxes of all different sizes can provide children with many play opportunities. Children can make vehicles. If there is a large enough space i.e a hall one “bubble group” can race another “bubble group” in their vehicles while maintaining a 2-meter distance with the other group. This is a good way to allow children in separate bubbles to still be able to socialise with others who are not in their group.

**Change** - children should be able to change the environment and the environment should afford children this flexibility. Whether this means taking equipment outside to play or moving around furniture or digging a hole outside, children should be supported to make suitable changes to the play environment. Can you involve them in the positioning of equipment to encourage social distancing?



# Focuses

Focuses are items, things or 'stuff' that children will consider to be different, new, novel or interesting. Providing games or resources that are interesting is important to capture a child's interest, rotating equipment and resources or offering new games to play can provide a different focus for the children that can spark their interest in different or new play. Physical play and outdoor play will be essential to encourage and support healthy lifestyles and to promote positive mental health and well-being with children. Some games that you could have ready in your playworker's toolbelt to offer children and young people are detailed below.

**Quick Sand.** Split the children into two teams. Have a start line and a finish line at opposite ends of the room a good distance apart. Choose one child from each team to stand at the finish line and the rest of the children to form a line, one behind the other facing the finish line. Place pieces of paper at various distances and points on the ground. The ground is the swamp and the paper is quick sand. The first child in the line places a blindfold on and the leader at the finish line must direct them through the swamp to the finish. If they hit a quick sand they must go back and the next child has a turn. When a child reaches the finish line they become the next person to direct. The winning team is the one who gets all their players to the finish line first.

**Coloured Hoops.** This is good if you have a large area. Spread out various coloured hoops around the space. Ask the children to run around the room, walk around, hop around, do slow-motion walking or walk like a robot (or any other commands you and the children can think of!). After a while call out a colour (calling out the colours in Welsh will support

the implementation of Welsh in the setting). The children have to run to a hoop. The last child to find a hoop is out. After each child is out remove a hoop. To make social distancing "fun" make the rule that only 1 child is allowed in one hoop at any one time. This will make them have to be quick for the colours!

**Traffic Lights.** Start off simply by assigning traffic light colours with actions, red could be stop, amber could be sit down and green run. Start by shouting out 'green' so the children are running around. At intervals shout out another colour so the children have to change the action. It can be quite funny to shout out green and amber in quick successions so as soon the children have to sit down they have to quickly get back up and run. When they are comfortable with these instructions add different colours e.g. purple could be star jumps, black could be lie down and blue could be spin around. Ask the children for their own ideas on what colours and actions you can use.

**Splat Bang.** With a big enough space this can be managed by placing the children 2 meters apart. You could prepare the area by placing an "x" with tape

that the children need to stand on. Organise the children into a circle and choose someone to stand in the middle. The person in the middle throws an imaginary pie at anyone they choose in the circle and says "splat!" That person must duck and the two people on either side throw an imaginary pie at each other and shout "Bang!" If the first person doesn't duck, they are out. If they do duck in time, the last person to throw their pie on either side is out. Continue until there are only two left. These will need to "dual". Stand them back to back. Each time the playworker says "Splat!" they take a step away from each other. When the playworker shouts "bang" they quickly turn and throw imaginary pies at each other. The first to throw the pie is the winner. A variation of this could include it being a Harry Potter 'Defence against the Dark Arts' class and instead of pies they throw Imaginary spells at each other. They can use sticks for wands, and you can choose two spells from Harry Potter that they need to say instead of "splat" "bang".

**Football Squash.** Using a football and a suitable wall or fence to kick it at, groups

of 2-5 children take it in turns kicking the football against the wall. Each player must kick it from where it stops after being kicked by the previous kicker. They each have as many lives as there is letters in the word SQUASH, if they miss the wall or fence when they kick the ball on their turn, they gain a letter. The person at the end of the game who has the least letters wins. A fun and alternative way to allow football in the setting that supports social distancing.

**Sack races** You can use the strong supermarket bags for life (not the plastic ones) Within their bubble they can race each other. Again, if you have a large hall and are able to separate with 2 meters apart, two bubbles can race each other allowing groups to socialise while keeping to social distancing.



## Alternatives

Alternatives is all about providing things that children and young people don't have access to at home and one of the main things children with have as an alternative is each other. After weeks of many of them only having themselves, siblings or parents to play with they will have other children to play with. Having a range of group games available that encourage social distancing will be important but also space where they can sit and chat together. As well as physical games there are also lots of games that you can play sitting down, some of these are suggested below.

**Alphabet Game.** Pick a subject such as animals and you have to try and get from A to Z naming a animal using each letter of the alphabet; ant, bird, cheetah, dolphin...

**Crazy Spelling Test** Get each child to make up a word. For example, "ghoodieludie", they then take it in turns to read out their word and everyone else has to try and work out how it would be spelt

**What would happen if...?** Ask the children to finish the question and then to answer it. For example, "...what would happen if you could only talk in rhyme? Or what would happen if we couldn't use cars anymore? They can make it silly or serious.

**Grandmas Knickers.** One child is nominated as 'on'. This child is not allowed to laugh and can only answer any question with the answer, grandmas' knickers. For example, if they were asked, what was your

teacher Mr. Jones wearing today, they would have to answer, without laughing, grandmas' knickers. Take it in turns to ask questions, if they laugh or say something different then another person takes a go.

**Would you rather...?** Get a child to pick the 'rather', for example, would you rather grow up or stay a child forever? And then they must choose which they would rather, they can either explain the reason or not.

**What happened next?** Pick a favourite story or film and they have to think of the what happened next? In the tale of the three little pigs, the wolf ends up falling down the chimney into a boiling pot of water...what happened next? The three little pigs had wolf soup and decided to become wolf hunters to protect all the pigs and other animals of the country. The decided to pretend to be grandmas and little girls in red hoods to trick the wolves and then would tie them up and set them to sea to live on wolf island.

**Just a minute.** One child is given a topic and a minute to talk about it. Explain before that they should try and talk steadily, not to slow and not too fast and never say "er, erm, um...", (you may want to allow three strikes). They have to stay on topic and shouldn't repeat words or sentences over, for example if the topic was castles they would have one minute to talk about castles, they could say that Wales has lots of castles, many that were destroyed many years ago, many of which have now been restored. Castle have turrets and a moat and...

# Supporting children with anxiety and worries

This final section has been developed thinking about children and young people who may be displaying anxious or challenging behaviour and suggestions as to how effectively to support children and young people through what is likely to be a difficult transition. We understand that every child attending your setting will be completely unique and that you and your team with the support of their parents will know them best, but preparation and planning will be key in order to effectively support each individual child.

Start making considerations now, ready for returning. Contact families and touch base, ask them if they or their children have any concerns going forward and about starting back at Club. Do they have any questions that need answering? Are there certain games or resources they have been missing? Consider explaining to the parents the system of bubbles so they can discuss this with the children beforehand, so they are prepared for this change. You won't be able to promise that the children will be in the same bubble as their friend, but you can reassure them that you will do everything you can to try and make it possible. Taking this first step and making contact can go a long way to reassure children that you are thinking about them, and can support you in planning for play for when the

children and young people are back.

For some children that are anxious or worrying, distraction can work wonders; the Dutch schools set up bubble machines to welcome the children back and to make the environment friendly and welcoming. What can you do to make your setting more welcoming and distracting for the children and young people?

Here are some links for mental health and wellbeing you may find helpful:

Young Minds

<https://youngminds.org.uk/>

Place2Be

<https://www.place2be.org.uk/>

Child Mind Institute

<https://childmind.org/article/what-to-do-and-not-do-when-children-are-anxious/>

Institute of Education

<https://ioelondonblog.wordpress.com/2020/05/11/what-should-teachers-be-prepared-for-when-young-children-return-after-lockdown-lessons-from-china-and-elsewhere/>

Below are some suggestions and by no means an exhaustive list of what could be done, think about your children, talk to the parents, talk to the children and find something that works for each individual child and the setting.

## Worry jars, worry / question walls or worry monsters

consider providing a space or a place for children to display or to put their worries. Maybe turn a box into a swallowing worry monster who the children can feed their worries to. Encourage them to put their names on their worries and provide them with the option as to who they would prefer to talk about it with, if they would like. Having a display of worries can also show children that they are not alone in worrying about things and may show common worries, this method may stop some children from joining in though so consider what will work best for your setting.

**Group discussions.** Listen to the children and what they are saying. Make use of times where children are sat together and want you to engage, if appropriate and at the right time ask them questions, what they enjoyed most about lockdown? What they are enjoying now that it is over?

## I feel worried/anxious when...

explain that everyone will feel anxious and worried at times and about different things and that feeling anxious or worried can leave you feeling sick, wanting to cry, with too many thoughts or a headache. Helping children and young people to understand what they are feeling anxious or worried about and how they feel or behave when they are anxious or worried can provide a starting

block with understanding the impact those worried or anxieties can have. You could provide a worksheet for children to be able to complete.

**Happy thoughts / worried thoughts.** Provide children with an A4 page divided into two. One side represents happy thoughts and the other represents worried thoughts, get them to write down the kind of things that make them happy, and what they think of when they are happy. On the other side get them to write down things that make them worried and what they think of when they worry. Get them to think about the emotions that they feel when they are happy or worried.

**Take a moment.** When things start getting too much encourage the children to count back from 4 with this exercise. Get them to stop and look around and notice four things that they can see, then three things they can hear, then two things they can touch and finally one thing that they can smell. Encourage them to say these things out loud. Sometimes focusing on what is around them can help them refocus their thinking.

**Handprint breathing** There are lots of different techniques that children could use to help them to concentrate and focus on their breathing. These techniques are useful in helping them to calm down and to feel less anxious or worried. For this simple technique get them to stretch their hand out and simply run a finger from their opposite hand up one side of their finger and down the other side, breathing in as they go up their finger and breathing out as they go down their finger. Do this until they have gone all around their hand or until they have calmed down. You could get each child to draw around their own hand and decorate it and you could laminate these to put on the walls.

**Battle Cries** Can the children either as a whole or in their bubbles, come up with a battle cry. Something that they can yell as a group to make them feel connected and to help relieve anxiety or worry. You can also encourage children to have individual battle cries that they can use when they feel overwhelmed. Suggestions for a battle cry could be: We can do this! Let's play! Let's have fun!

**Recapping Routine** Whilst the session will be generally flexible to support children's free play a simple way to support children to settle back into settings is to recap on things that happen and when, for example, registration, snack, going home. Consider using either a picture or a written routine (or both) that can be displayed for the children to easily access. To start with snack routines may need to be more flexible to account for the fact that children have been at home and eating and snacking at different times.

**Planning out worries** If children have worries that they share with you, you can support them to come up with an action plan of what to do. Get them to consider what they can do about it straight away and write it down, what could they do about it later that day or tomorrow, what could they do about it for next time.

**Comfort blanket or objects** Starting back you may find that certain children want to bring in comfort blankets or something similar, to help them and for their emotional security. Whilst it will be necessary to minimise the amount that children bring with them in the setting, it is also important to understand that these objects might be essential for these children in settling back. Discuss this with the children and the parents and suggest a plan going forward for it, for example; in the first week they have it with them, second week they can have it for the first 15 minutes and then it goes in their bag, third week it stays in their bag.

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## Supporting children with anxiety and worries...continued

### Squashy nose breathing

Taking really deep breaths can really help you to feel better and to focus. This is another technique that could be used to get children to concentrate on their breathing and to help calm them. Start by squishing down the left nostril and take a deep breath in through your nose, hold the breath whilst now moving your finger to the right nostril and squashing it down; now breathe out through your nose. Alternate sides for 5 big

breaths or as many as needed to help the child feel calmer.

**Tree breathing** Here is another breathing technique that could be used. Get the child or children to imagine that they are trees, when they breathe in they need to imagine that they are a tree and they are breathing in through the trunk of it and need to fill all of the branches with air and get the leaves to move, now breathe out and sending the air back down into the roots. Do this 5 times or until they are feeling calmer.

If you are finding that staff are unsure of what they need to do

or how to respond then consider offering appropriate training for staff on anxiety, behavioural leadership or behavioural support.

The main thing to remember is be there to actively listen, to reassure and to talk to children and young people and your team members. Remember the importance of just simply listening and reaffirming that you have heard what they have said. Sometimes the act of saying a worry out loud and know that someone has heard them and reassured them their feeling is valid can make a big difference. **Together we are stronger.**



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