

It's A Small World!

Small world is an important aspect of children's play. When engaging in small world play your child will act out scenarios from real life, stories, films and their imagination. It helps them reflect on feelings and events in life in a safe way by exploring and experimenting with different scenarios—acting them out through their play.







There are numerous ways that small world play supports your child's development as it allows children to be **creative**; develop **numeracy skills** as they sort and build; learn **science** such as cause and effect; develop **language skills**; as well as encouraging them to explore new ideas and learn about new habitats and different environments.

Small world play is fantastic for pre-schoolers development! By adding a few extra materials it is possible to extend learning even further. We have taken some favourite pre-school toys and provided suggestions on how you can easily enhance play with items that can be found around your home.

Farm Animals

Farm animals are a firm favourite with young children as they are familiar to most children. A basic set of animals can be easily picked up in most toy or bargain shops. Add a few extra pieces of equipment such as tubs, tractors, or little spoons to fill up containers with feed for the animals.

Play can be further extended by:





-  Create a farmyard area using a tray or box and filling it with sensory materials for lots of tactile play e.g. soil, gravel, popcorn, rice etc
-  Create farm buildings from milk and juice cartons (see picture)
-  Make a grassy area using painted or dyed pasta, green paper or more simply pick grass from your garden or local park
-  Fences can be created using bits of cardboard, lollipop sticks or play-dough
-  Create little feeding troughs using small containers and add items
-  Create a pond for ducks and chicks to swim in, using a plastic container. You could even add some blue food colouring. They could even take the animals to the kitchen sink for a wash!



Zoo/Safari Animals

A set of animals will support a wide range of play such as zoo, jungle, safari play. Pair it with a book or information books. A wide range of digital and audio books can be accessed at www.librariesni.org.uk

Play can be further extended by using everyday items such as:

-  Providing a few bowls or containers for the children to create ponds for the alligators, penguins and elephants.
-  Making Trees using branches/twigs secured using playdough for the monkey/chimpanzees, etc.
-  Kitchen items such as rice, beans and pulses could be provided to create a base for the animals
-  Lollipop sticks to make a cage in the zoo

Sea Life

A packet of ocean animals can also be used to create a number of play opportunities for your child—such as beach scenes, undersea adventures or even an aquarium.

Play can be further extended by:

- ☞ Using tubs and bowls for the fish to swim in. Food colouring and or jelly will provide sensory play.
- ☞ Stones, shells and play sand, creating sensory beach scenes. *(These can be substituted for other household items such as pasta shells (seashells) and oats (sand).)*
- ☞ Creating 'icebergs' using cotton wool or ice, for the penguins
- ☞ Adding beads and gems for a glistening effect **(adult supervision required)**
- ☞ Using a shoebox to create a backdrop for the ocean (see right)



Arctic Animals

Creating this habitat will teach your child about the Arctic animals. Boats could be included with this set, some blue paper for water, cotton wool or white fleece material for snow.

Play can be further extended by:

- ☞ Providing children with ice with this play set will provide lots of opportunities for scientific exploration as the ice melts. Even freeze some animals in ice and get your child to see how quickly they can set the animals free.
- ☞ Providing containers with water could mimic the sea, even add some slime.
- ☞ Snowy landscapes could be created by using shaving foam, foamy soap or even fake snow

❄️ SNOW DOUGH ❄️

You will need:

- 2 cups of corn flour
- ½ cup of vegetable oil
- Mix together for a doughy consistency.

(Baby oil can also be used but only if children are not going to be tempted to eat it.)

Dinosaurs

Many pre-school children are dinosaur mad. Why not feed their enthusiasm by extending their play by creating a dinosaur land or island. There are lots of sensory play opportunities and play could include slime, playdough or gloop.

Play can be further extended by:

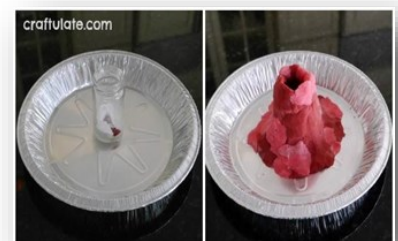
- ☞ Create a dinosaur swamp with water and handfuls of grass for sensory play.
- ☞ Create a dinosaur play scene using twigs, leaves, wood, stones, beans (pebbles). Items can be secured using play-dough
- ☞ Create an alternative lava eruption by making the fizz by simply putting pop rocks in a tube/ cup and then add cola

🌋 VOLCANO ROCKS 🌋

You will need:

Playdough, a small plastic cup/tube, red food colouring, baking soda, vinegar.

Build your volcano shape from the playdough, around the cup. Mix the red food colouring and baking soda, add a little vinegar and watch your volcano erupt!





Minibeasts

A pack et of plastic mini beasts can be picked up for a few pounds. Encourage your child to look for their own bugs and report back their findings. A little notebook and pencil will allow them to make markings and draw pictures.

Play can be further extended by:

- ✋ Providing a magnifying glass, binoculars or bug-viewing jars, adding stones and bits of wood
- ✋ Cooking up some spaghetti, adding some oil and a bit of food colouring to create a worm like consistency (see pic). Placing the bugs into the gooey spaghetti will encourage the children to engage in sensory play.
- ✋ Add a variety of household items such as wooden spoons, metal spoons, cups and containers. Large tweezers and tongs to pick up the minibeasts will help develop fine motor skills.

Construction Vehicles

This type of small world play may not need many any extension, but there are some very simple ideas which may provide additional sensory experiences for children. (See bottom right)

Play can be further extended by:

- ✋ Using pasta or breakfast cereal (some brands look very like bricks) children could transport their bricks using the vehicles.
- ✋ Providing new play opportunities using small logs, twigs and even sand
- ✋ Create the outline of a building site using cardboard, with roads drawn for the vehicles to travel along.
- ✋ Cardboard tubes/cereal boxes could be used to create tunnels and arches



Space

Lots of young children are interested in space. It is relatively easy to create an exciting moon like play area with recycled materials, tin foil, pebbles and talcum powder.

Play can be further extended by:

- ✋ Provide items which could create lunar surfaces like egg cartons or pieces of cardboard packaging taped together to make a bumpy crater surface.
- ✋ For added sparkle cover the cardboard items with tinfoil.
- ✋ Add some smooth white stones and pebbles. Play dough can be used to create craters.
- ✋ Spread 'moon dust' over the moon craters.
- ✋ Providing lolly sticks, green card and googly eyes for the children to make their own aliens





MOON DUST

You will need: Salt, black food colouring, baby powder, glitter
 Add a few drops of the food colouring to the salt and mix well, until the colour is even. Add in a tbsp. of baby powder, and some glitter and spread out to dry. Once dried, your Moon Dust should be light grey, fluffy, sparkly and soft!

People Who Help Us

Large sets of people are widely available from toys shops adding bricks to people playset will give your child the opportunity to create their own play scape.

Play can be further extended by:




-  Pipe cleaners which be provided to stimulate play e.g. hoses for the fireman, fishing rods to make trees etc.
-  Cardboard could be used to mark out a town for the people to work
-  Cereal boxes could create a village/town, some boxes could be on fire (paints or felt tips) for the fireman to put out or falling down for the workman to fix
-  The boxes could be used to create shops, hospitals, a restaurant for the chef and dental practice for the dentist, etc



Fairy Tale Castle

Either a fairy tale play set could be purchased or crowns and cloaks added to existing play figures. Blocks could be added to make castles, towers and drawbridges.

Play can be further extended by:

-  Using wooden or cardboard boxes to create castles, stones for paths and bits of wood to create draw bridges
-  Blue material/paper or even water to create a moat around the castle
-  Extend their imagination play further by introducing a dragon. **Help the child make their own dragons!**






FIREY DRAGONS

You will need: A paper cup, red & green paper, googly eyes (or black paper) : Cover the cup in green paper (or paint) & stick on eyes. Add the red strips of paper at the cup opening. Pierce a hole in the bottom of the cup and blow—they're now a fire breathing dragon!

Superheroes

Most young children enjoy superhero play as it captures their imaginations and helps them make sense of the world. Through superhero play children can feel brave, fearless and in control.

Play can be further extended by:

-  Add cars and trains; small blocks to create buildings/cardboard boxes covered in paper and made to look like house or towers. Add string or pipe cleaners to help the superheroes fly,
-  A shoebox can be used to create a background scene such as stars and planets or a city skyline, etc.
-  A tray with a base created with coloured sand, foil, coloured paper, add bits of materials and treasures to be rescued.
-  Sensory trays could include cobwebs, cotton wool, spiders for Spiderman; green water for the hulk.
-  Place elastic bands around your child's superheroes and get them to free them. This is excellent for developing fine motor skills.





Fairies And Elves

Building a fairy garden in a tub or bucket can provide a more permanent play area. You just need soil, stones, a shell or bottle tops for ponds, make a clothes line from 2 twigs, string and tiny scraps of material. A tent or tepee can be made from scraps of material.

Play can be further extended by:

- ✦ Making Paths with little stones or glittery play necklaces. Pinecones could also be added for houses, seats, trees
- ✦ Adding green material, artificial grass, leaves and bits of wood to create areas for the fairies and elves to sit and live
- ✦ Carving pumpkins, melons or pineapples with little windows and doors to create temporary houses (**adult supervision required**)
- ✦ Little wands could be made from twigs and stars drawn and stuck on the end

✦ FAIRY HOUSE ✦

You will need: Cardboard tub, a yogurt pot, a large bowl, playdough, glitter

Make a fairy house using the cardboard tub, with the yogurt pot as the roof.

Using the bowl, cover 3/4 of the surface with playdough and fill the remaining 1/4 with water. Add some glitter for a magical, sparkly effect!



Have you taken part in any small-world play recently? We'd love to see your pictures and ideas! 📷

If you have any enquiries, feedback, or would like to share your own ideas and activities with us, please do get in touch—we would love to hear from you!

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