**Supporting Early Years Development Through Child-Led Play**

Young children learn best through play. Child-led play is when a child chooses what they play with, how they will play, and when they will play. This type of play is important for a child’s development. When a child has chosen an activity they enjoy, they are more likely to engage in the learning of new skills. Here are some tips on how to ‘follow’ a child’s lead and promote learning through child-led play:

**F** is for ‘Follow’ – ‘Follow’ your child’s lead. Let your child choose an activity or a way of interacting that is interesting to them. Then, if they allow, join in with their interaction(s)/game(s), repeating, copying or developing their actions e.g., you could copying the sounds/vocalisations your child makes, or copy the way that they are playing with toys/objects using some similar toys/objects . It is also important to remember that you can still be a part of a child’s activity without being in it, if that is what the child prefers.

**O** is for ‘Open’ – Be ‘open’ to your child’s ideas. Try not to follow a set plan or structure - let your child show you what is interesting to them.

**L** is for ‘Level’ – Interact with your child at their ‘level’ (physically) e.g., kneel down so that your face is in line with their eye level, or sit down with them if they are sat on the floor. Try to ensure that the child’s environment (including how you appear physically) encourages your child’s learning and exploration.

**L** is for ‘Leave’– ‘Leave’ your child to play their way. Try not to interrupt your child’s play, or change the way they are interacting/playing to fit with your idea about what ‘play’ is. Support your child’s own ideas whilst they are playing and try not to direct their play (unless it is unsafe).

**O** is for ‘Opportunity’ – Look out for creative/imaginative opportunities to build on your child’s interactions and play. You can develop a young child’s learning by doing/adding something that they find interesting. For example, during role-play you could add an appropriate prop that fits with the theme, or you use an object that they have given you to play a ‘hide and seek’ game. Try to build on the child’s unique strengths and interests, whatever they may be.

**W** is for ‘Wonder aloud’ – Use simple language to ‘wonder aloud’ whilst your child is playing e.g., “I wonder if you are …[describe what you think your child is doing using simple language]”. This can encourage your child to show/tell you more about the activity they are doing and also help avoid you assuming they are trying to do something that they might not be. It can also support their language development as they hear more/new words from you.

**“Children learn as they play. Most importantly, in play, children learn how to learn” – O. Fred Donaldson**