

A Parent's Guide to Schemas

Parents are often puzzled by some of their children's actions:

- Does your child enjoy putting objects in a bag to carry around and leave them somewhere completely different?
- Does your child tie your chair legs (or even your legs) together?
- Does your child watch the washing machine go round and round?
- Does your child paint or draw a lovely picture and then cover it completely with paint?



Have you ever noticed your child exhibit behaviour over and over again that puzzles you?

Do you find yourself asking the question, 'Why is he/she doing this?'

If your child is exhibiting any of these behaviours, they may be demonstrating a '**schema**'.

So what are schemas?

Early years research shows children use these behaviours to explore how objects work and make sense of the world around them. This exploration can start as a baby, but is more obvious between the ages of two and five years old.

Some children have one very clear schema; others have a number called a cluster. Others may seem to move from one schema to another

‘Schemas are repeated behaviours that babies and young children use to explore and understand the world’ (Nutbrown 1994).

A schema is seen to be a pattern a child demonstrates through their actions, language or play. While a child may play with a variety of toys, a pattern may link these seemingly disassociated activities.

Adults learn new skills through repeating a skill over and over again in order to perfect the skill. Young children do this throughout their everyday learning and play.

By recognising a child’s schema, parents can support their children’s play and learning in ways that interest them.



Trajectory

A child that has a trajectory schema is interested in things and themselves moving in straight lines, up and down, or across.

Does your child:

- always seem to be running up and down
- enjoy climbing
- enjoy exploring the running water in the sink or bath
- like to push things in a straight line
- enjoy throwing objects



Through a trajectory schema, your child is learning about length and distance, height and depth. She/he is also starting to understand beginning and end, which involve the concept of time.

How can I support them at home?

- explore the running water in the bath or outside when it's raining – pouring water from jugs
- roll, throw and kick different sized balls/ bean bags to one another
- blow bubbles to be caught
- play on the bikes and slides
- throwing games

Scattering

Some children just seem to want to scatter everything around. However, these children are also interested in sweeping up and tidying away!



Does your child:

- like to empty out all the baskets
- love to tip out all the bricks on the floor
- enjoy using their arms and legs to scatter things i.e. pasta, rice etc.
- like to clear the table by wiping everything off the surface

Whilst exploring a scattering schema, your child is learning about spatial awareness and movement. They are developing their knowledge of the world through sensory experiences.

How can I support them at home?

- supply a selection of items to scatter, i.e. dried leaves or shredded paper, in a large bowl
- provide activities and games to scatter – ball pool or bean bags
- scatter seeds in the garden

Rotation

A child who has a rotational schema is interested in things that are circular or rotate e.g. taps, keys.

Does your child:

- enjoy spinning around and rolling down hills
- like to play with the wheels on toys
- enjoy playing with toys that spin and rotate
- like to play with sand and water wheels
- love to watch the washing machine



Whilst exploring a rotational schema, your child is learning and extending their knowledge about speed:

- whether the washing machine goes round quicker than the clock
- forces
- clockwise movement and anti-clockwise movements.

How can I support them at home?

- provide pens, paper, paint and other mark making materials to provide opportunities for them to draw and paint circles
- play with bikes, cars and toys with wheels
- offer mixing and stirring activities – cooking
- provide toys that spin – windmills, spinning top,
- pointing out objects that make circular and rotational movements – clock/watch, water draining from the bath

Envelopment

A child who has an envelopment schema likes to cover or wrap up objects or themselves. It is closely related to containment. A child who has a containment schema loves to put one thing inside another.



Does your child:

- enjoy wrapping themselves in blankets or material
- like to cover themselves with paint
- enjoy wrapping objects to make parcels with paper
- like to paint a picture and then cover it with a layer of paint

Through the enveloping schema, your child is learning more about spatial awareness and size – whether she/he is going to fit inside the tent or den. Your child is developing their knowledge relating to area, capacity and estimation.

How can I support them at home?

- provide blankets to wrap themselves and dolls in
- allow children to paint themselves
- provide paper and newspaper to make parcels
- supply a selection of cardboard boxes and sheets to make tents and dens

Transporting

A child with a transporting schema moves everything from one place to another.

Does your child:

- like to put sand in a bucket and move it to another area
- enjoy putting objects in a bag/shopping basket/pram and moves it from place to place
- go backwards and forwards to bring you items from around the room

Whilst exploring a transporting schema, your child is learning about and developing their understanding of capacity – whether those objects will fit inside the container. Your child will broaden their knowledge of space, direction, weight and gravity.

How can I support them at home?

- encourage them with packing, carrying and unpacking the shopping from the supermarket
- provide pushchairs and trucks to transport objects
- supply a collection of bags and boxes for filling and carrying from place to place
- provide items to transport – pasta, logs etc.
- set up challenges by organising different sized objects to be carried from one point in the house or garden to another point



Connecting

A child with a connecting schema enjoys joining things together.

Does your child:

- like to tie chair legs (even your legs) together
- love joining train carriages together or taking them apart
- enjoy playing with all sorts of construction toys
- like to join up dots and lines together when drawing

Through exploring a connecting schema, your child is learning about spatial awareness and size. They are developing their knowledge about how things work and fit together.



How can I support them at home?

- provide trucks, cars and train sets that fit together
- supply string, sellotape, wool and lengths of fabric for opportunities to join things together
- provide a variety of construction sets and building blocks to explore joining different types of bricks together
- assemble puzzles
- play dominoes