

EYFS — CHILD DEVELOPMENT · EYFS

# Schemas in EYFS

Patterns of Exploratory Play

## Common schemas in EYFS

1

### Schema

A repeated pattern of behaviour through which young children explore and test their understanding of the world. Identified by Chris Athey (1990). Schemas are not random — they are purposeful cognitive exploration.

2

### Transporting schema

Moving objects from one place to another — often in bags, prams, boxes. The child is exploring the concept of movement through space.

*Example: Filling a bucket with stones and carrying it across the garden*

3

### Trajectory schema

Interest in things that move in straight lines or arcs — throwing, dropping, rolling, tracking moving objects. Explores movement and forces.

*Example: Dropping objects from heights, throwing balls, rolling cars*

4

### Rotation schema

Fascination with circular movement — spinning, rolling, turning. May spin themselves, the wheels of toys, or draw circles obsessively.

*Example: Spinning on a roundabout, turning taps, drawing spirals*

5

### Enclosing / containing schema

Creating boundaries and enclosures — building fences around figures, drawing borders around pictures, getting inside boxes.

*Example: Building a pen for toy animals, getting inside a cardboard box*



6

**Connecting schema**

Joining things together — train tracks, string, construction pieces. Also connecting places, people, and ideas.

*Example: Tying things together, building roads that connect, making long chains*

7

**Enveloping / covering schema**

Covering objects or themselves — wrapping, hiding under blankets, covering paintings with one colour.

*Example: Wrapping toys in fabric, covering themselves in sand*

## Schemas — provision ideas

Extend the schema, don't red

- TRANSPORTING: provide bags, baskets, wheelbarrows, trolleys. Give purposes: 'can you bring all the red blocks here?'
- TRAJECTORY: offer opportunities for controlled throwing and rolling — gutters, ramps, ball runs. Drawing large arcs with paint.
- ROTATION: spinning tops, wheels, cogs, mixing bowls, roundabouts, tyre swings.
- ENCLOSING: construction sets (fences, walls), sand (making enclosures), drawing with boundaries.
- CONNECTING: train tracks, string and rope, construction (Lego, Duplo, wooden blocks), map making.
- OBSERVE FIRST: identify the schema before planning. Don't assume — watch carefully over several sessions.
- LINK TO CURRICULUM: schemas connect to maths (rotation → circles, trajectory → angles), science (forces, materials), English (storytelling about movement).

