

Caring for Superheroes

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Dramatic play, pretend play is always considered an integral part of a child's world. In any children's services there will always be activities and resources that promote and provide for dramatic play as it is considered a valuable resource to support all areas of children's development.

Within this pretend play comes the decision of what is positive and appropriate and what is not. "Superheroes" is one aspect that comes into this hard decision area. "Superheroes" can assist a child to feel more in control of their world. It allows the child to practice safely with positive outcomes on how to respond to fearful situations, interacting with others, overcoming bullying and many problem solving skills. However, at times "Superheroes" can appear to "take over" the whole Early Childhood Setting and may also be detrimental to the safety and well being of other children and staff. In addition, children can be so consumed by the superhero play that they miss out on other areas.

In approaching issues of this context it is important to take each child and their behaviours in context and respond according to your knowledge of the child and situation. It is important to be creative in your approach and open to learning from the child.

The ultimate goal is to support the child in learning to be thoughtful and considerate to both themselves and others. Children's services may need to find a balance within this area that both support the child's development as well as promoting the inclusion of all children within this group.

Each child involved with "Superhero" play will be different and individual. In regards to issues for these children, it is important to gain information and collaborative support from the parents to implement the philosophy, policies and procedures of the service. The following strategies are just some examples which may be applied to support the process. This list is only the start and it is dependant on a variety of factors such as environment, length of time child is in care, child's interest, likes, dislikes and skills already achieved.

Suggested Strategies

- Spend time observing the overall social relationship behaviour of the child/children during the “superhero play” as well as the responses of the other children.
- Identify within your service what is acceptable and what is not e.g. it is okay to bring your “Superhero” costume for show and tell and dramatic play before morning tea but then it is to be put away until home time?.
- Identify with all staff what are the positive aspects of this type of play and what are the negative aspects e.g. creates problem solving, good physical exercise versus disrupts other activities, can be unsafe in certain areas, excludes some children.
- Consult with the parent, discussing what you have observed and what support your service needs from them in implementing the policies and procedures of your service. Let the parents know that a balanced approach is what the service aims for.
- Allow all children to talk about what is happening when the “Superheroes” come to the centre and how they feel about it. Prompt children to express their feelings e.g. they won’t let me play on the climbing frame or I want to play in home corner but the “Superheroes” won’t let me.
- Talk to all children about “Superheroes” and extend the thinking to other “real heroes” within our community e.g. firemen, by providing props, stories & problem solving activities.
- Lead children through discussions of feelings and ways to be helpful using pictures, stories or puppets.
- Provide children with the practices in using their listening skills.

References:

Dockett S & Fler M. *“Play and Pedagogy in Early Childhood”* Bending the rules. Harcourt Brace 1999 London

Holland P *“We don’t play with guns here”* War, weapon and superhero play in the Early Years. Open University Press 12003 USA

Parenting Pre-schoolers: www.ext.nodak.edu

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