

A PARENT'S GUIDE TO SUPERHERO PLAY

With quite a few 3 and 4 year olds in our Nursery, the interests in superheroes, villains and monsters can be high. We accept that this type of play is inevitable and instead of 'banning it', we tend to embrace it.

Superhero play is a form of imaginative or dramatic play in which children use figures, costumes or other props as accessories to imitate the superheroes they admire. This type of play is usually noisy, physical and may or may not involve the use of props as 'weapons'.

Studies have shown that boys and girls get a surge of testosterone around this age, stronger in boys, second only to that of puberty! That's when we see rough and tumble, or 'lion club play' and extra fidgety bottoms.

As this is a natural stage in children's development, we believe suppressing it may cause more harm, especially to self-esteem. Quite often the means of acting out fantasies and dramatic situations, are the process for children working out emotions and realistic scenarios that they may have, or currently be, experiencing.

Play is also regarded as the highest level in which children are learning and building their cognitive development. The Early Years statutory framework suggests that children should learn from leading their own play and practitioners should respond to each child's emerging needs and interests, guiding their development through warm and positive interactions.

Weapons are often inexplicitly linked with superhero play, so it's a taboo subject that we, as practitioners, and you, as parents, often face.

At Nursery, we try to lay down some very clear ground rules that all the children are made aware of:

- It is okay to make guns and swords out of the construction bricks/or open ended resources
- It's not okay to shoot people if they don't want to be shot, or chase them if they don't like to be chased
- We explain to the children that we all have a right to tell each other if things upset us or hurt us
- We shouldn't run indoors and should save overly boisterous play for outdoors where we have more room to run and move freely in a safe way
- If we bring in superhero related accessories from home, they must be kept safe in the child's bag and children should be responsible for keeping them safe
- Costumes should not be worn at mealtimes
- Superhero play should never be threatening and we must never take over the home corner or monopolise the play themes and games other children might be involved in

As practitioners, we use sensitive support, discussion and thoughtful intervention to manage superhero play and to help apply our ground rules.

We ask that parents do not bring in commercially produced replica guns as they appear to have little play value and require little creativity or imagination.