



SCHEMA PLAY GUIDE

10 COMMON PLAY SCHEMAS



SUSIE BEGHIN ACADEMY
WWW.SUSIEBEGHIN.COM



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Connecting Schema Play Ideas

Helping Your Child Learn Through Linking, Joining, and Building

🔍 What Is the Connecting Schema?

If your child loves joining things together — linking toys, connecting blocks, taping papers, or building long chains — they're exploring the **Connecting Schema**.

This type of play helps children understand how things fit, attach, and work together. How do things connect and also how do they come apart?

👉 Through connecting play, children are learning about:

- **Cause and effect** ("If I connect these, they move together.")
- **Fine motor control** (tying, snapping, clipping, building)
- **Problem-solving and persistence** (how to make things stay connected)
- **Early STEM concepts** (links, joints, bridges, and balance)

💡 Play Ideas for Connecting Schema

Here are some easy ways to nurture your child's natural drive to connect:

1. Build & Join

- Connect train tracks, Lego, or magnetic tiles
- Make bridges between block towers
- Tape cardboard tubes together to make tunnels

2. Tie & Wrap

- Offer string, yarn, or ribbon for tying toys together
- Wrap sticks with yarn or pipe cleaners
- Create a "spider web" with tape or string between chairs



3. Clip & Link

- Use paper clips, clothespins, or binder clips to join papers
- Link chains with snap beads or linking cubes
- Make a “friendship chain” with paper loops

4. Create Connections in Nature

- Tie leaves or flowers together with twine
- Build a nature bracelet by connecting found treasures
- Make a “stick bridge” across a puddle or sandbox

5. Everyday Connections

- Help connect socks into pairs during laundry
- Tape a series of pictures together to make a story strip
- Connect cups or containers with tubes and pour water between them

How to Support Connecting Play

- **Provide safe materials** for tying and joining (avoid long cords unattended).
- **Model curiosity:** “I wonder what will happen if we connect these?”
- **Celebrate the process, not the product:** It’s about discovery, not perfection.



Dynamic Schema Play Ideas

Understanding Your Child's Need to Move Up, Down, Side to Side, and Across Space

What Is the Dynamic Schema?

If your child loves climbing up and jumping down, pushing objects back and forth, or moving things side to side or up and down, they're exploring the **Dynamic Schema**.

This schema is about **movement through space** — vertically (up/down) and horizontally (side-to-side or back-and-forth). It helps children understand force, direction, balance, and control.

Play Ideas for Dynamic Schema

Here are some simple ways to support your child's need to move in every direction:

1. Vertical Movement (Up & Down)

- Climb stairs, ladders, or play structures
- Stack and knock down block towers
- Pour water from high to low containers

2. Horizontal Movement (Side to Side / Back & Forth)

- Push cars, trains, or balls across the floor
- Roll balls back and forth with a partner
- Sweep, mop, or wipe tables

3. Sensory & Loose Parts Play

- Pour sand, rice, or water back and forth between containers
- Push materials through tubes or gutters
- Use ramps to roll objects across space



4. Construction & Engineering

- Build bridges, roads, and pathways
- Experiment with balance and movement
- Line up blocks or loose parts in long rows

5. Outdoor Dynamic Play

- Swing forward and backward
- Slide down slides
- Throw, roll, and kick balls across open space

How to Support Dynamic Play

- Provide space: children need room to move freely
- Offer open-ended materials: blocks, ramps, balls, loose parts
- Expect repetition: children may move the same way again and again
- Add language: “You moved it up high,” “It went all the way across”
- Support regulation: big movements help children organize their bodies and emotions



Enclosing Schema Play Ideas

Helping Your Child Learn Through Building Boundaries, Edges, and Spaces

🔍 What Is the Enclosing Schema?

If your child loves drawing borders around things, making fences, placing objects inside circles, boxing items in, or creating enclosed spaces with blocks or materials, they're exploring the **Enclosing Schema**.

This type of play helps children understand **boundaries, containment, inside/outside, shapes, and spatial relationships**.

Through enclosing play, children are learning about:

- Early math & geometry (shapes, borders, partitions)
- Spatial awareness (inside, outside, around, enclosed)
- Early design + engineering skills
- Problem-solving (“How can I build a wall that stays up?”)

💡 Play Ideas for Enclosing Schema

1. Build Boundaries

- Use blocks or magnetic tiles to make walls, pens, or small enclosures
- Fence in toy animals or cars
- Build little “homes” or garages for favourite toys

2. Draw or Mark Enclosures

- Draw circles, squares, or loops around toys on paper
- Use painter’s tape to create borders on the floor
- Make chalk enclosures outdoors — big or small!



3. Create Contained Spaces

- Use baskets, boxes, or trays to place items inside
- Sort toys by placing them into separate containers
- Make “islands” by circling objects with yarn or rope

4. Enclose with Loose Parts

- Use rocks, sticks, shells, or bottle caps to make rings or square boundaries
- Create little “gardens” or “cities” by outlining areas with loose parts
- Build enclosures in sand with sticks, shells, or sand walls

5. Everyday Enclosing

- Place food inside muffin tin sections or a sectional tray/dish
- Organize items inside drawers, bins, or cubbies
- Make “rooms” or zones during dollhouse or small-world play

How to Support Enclosing Play

- Offer open-ended materials children can use to outline, border, and contain.
- Use language like “inside,” “around,” “enclosed,” “border,” “edge.”
- Let them repeat the process—it’s how they figure out space and structure.
- Celebrate the design thinking happening as they build boundaries.



Enveloping Schema Play Ideas

Helping Your Child Learn Through Wrapping, Covering, and Hiding

🔍 What Is the Enveloping Schema?

If your child loves wrapping objects in paper, covering toys with blankets, stuffing things into bags, hiding inside forts, or layering materials, they're exploring the **Enveloping Schema**.

This type of play helps children understand *layers, boundaries, inside/outside, and object permanence*.

Through enveloping play, children are learning about:

- Spatial concepts (inside, outside, around, under, through)
- Early math + geometry (layers, shapes, partitions)
- Problem-solving (“How can I cover this completely?”)
- Emotional regulation (feeling cozy, safe, and enclosed)

💡 Play Ideas for Enveloping Schema

1. Wrap & Cover

- Wrap toys in cloth, paper, foil, or fabric squares
- Cover objects with scarves, blankets, or play silks
- Create “present wrapping” stations with tape and paper scraps

2. Hide & Reveal

- Hide small toys in boxes, bags, or foil paper
- Do peek-a-boo with scarves
- Make sensory bins with materials to cover/uncover items (sand, rice, shredded paper)



3. Layer & Enclose

- Layer felt squares, napkins, or papers over each other
- Build simple forts or cozy nooks with pillows and blankets
- Use nesting dolls, stacking cups, or boxes inside boxes

4. Creative Enveloping Art

- Make collages by layering tissue paper
- Paint over tape and peel to “reveal” shapes and patterns
- Create “secret pictures” hidden under flaps of paper

5. Everyday Enveloping

- Wrap sandwiches or snacks and ask child to unwrap it
- Put items into envelopes, folders, or pouches
- Bundle up dolls in blankets or tea towels

How to Support Enveloping Play

- Offer safe materials for wrapping and covering (avoid plastic bags).
- Add language like “inside,” “under,” “covered,” “hidden,” “reveal.”
- Let the child lead—don’t rush the process or force unwrapping.
- Celebrate the exploration: it’s about discovering boundaries and layers.



Orientation Schema Play Ideas

Understanding Your Child's Need to Turn, Flip, Rotate, and Change Direction

What Is the Orientation Schema?

If your child loves turning toys upside down, spinning objects, hanging their head off the couch, rolling their body, or rotating items in circles, they're exploring the **Orientation Schema** — a natural pattern of play focused on **position, direction, and movement in space**.

Through this type of play, children are learning how their bodies move, how objects change when turned, and how perspective shifts depending on position.

Play Ideas for Orientation Schema

Here are some simple ways to support your child's need to rotate, flip, and explore direction:

1. Body Movement & Gross Motor Play

- Hang upside down safely on playground bars or over a yoga ball
- Practice animal walks (bear crawl, crab walk, log rolls)

2. Rotating & Turning Objects

- Spin tops, wheels, gears, or lazy Susans
- Roll cars down ramps and observe direction and speed
- Turn knobs, lids, and twist-top containers

3. Art & Mark Making

- Draw circles, spirals, and loops
- Spin art (salad spinner art is a favorite!)
- Draw or paint under the table



4. Puzzles & Construction

- Use shape sorters and rotating puzzles
- Build ramps and experiment with angles

5. Outdoor Orientation Play

- Swing back and forth
- Watch clouds, birds, or objects move across the sky
- Ride scooters, bikes, or spinners

How to Support Orientation Play

- Offer safe movement opportunities: soft mats, open floor space, and supervision
- Allow repetition: spinning and turning may happen again and again — this is learning
- Use descriptive language: “You turned it upside down,” “You spun in a circle”
- Watch for regulation needs: some children seek movement to help their bodies feel calm
- Balance movement with rest: help children pause and reset when needed



Positioning Schema Play Ideas

Understanding Your Child's Need to Arrange, Order, and Organize Objects

What Is the Positioning Schema?

If your child loves lining up toys, arranging items in neat groups, creating patterns, or repeatedly placing objects “just right,” they are exploring the **Positioning Schema**.

This schema helps young children build an understanding of **order, pattern, balance, and spatial relationships**. It helps them make sense of their environment — and feel secure within it.

Play Ideas for Positioning Schema

Here are some easy ways to nurture your child’s natural drive to arrange things:

1. Loose Parts Arranging

- Offer pom-poms, shells, pebbles, buttons, or bottle lids
- Encourage children to arrange them in lines, shapes, or groupings

2. Story-World Setups

- Provide animal figures, cars, or dolls to place in rows or patterns
- Create themed trays (e.g., “zoo setup” or “train station layout”)

3. Pattern Play

- Introduce simple pattern cards to copy (AB, ABB, ABA)
- Create colour rows or shape sequences with blocks or beads



4. Tape Lines or Chalk Paths

- Place painter's tape lines on the floor or table
- Invite children to position cars, stones, or small toys along the lines

5. Everyday Helping

- Arrange pinecones, flowers, sticks, or leaves outdoors
- Invite your child to set the table, arrange cutlery, line up shoes, or organize play food
- Celebrate their sense of order and detail

How to Support Positioning Play

- Protect their work — let them finish their arrangements before tidying
- Use gentle language — “Tell me about how you arranged these,” rather than changing it
- Create protected spaces so siblings do not disrupt their setup
- Offer calm, predictable routines — positioning often reflects a need for order and security



Rotating Schema Play Ideas

Helping Your Child Learn Through Spinning, Turning, and Circling

What Is the Rotating Schema?

If your child loves spinning wheels, twirling in circles, twisting lids, or watching things go round and round, they're exploring the **Rotating Schema**.

This type of play helps children understand movement, direction, force, and how things rotate.

Through rotating play, children are learning about:

- Balance and the vestibular system (how their body moves in space)
- Cause and effect (“If I push harder, it spins longer.”)
- Fine motor control (turning knobs, twisting caps, rotating objects)
- Early STEAM concepts (circles, spirals, speed, direction, mechanics)

Play Ideas for Rotating Schema

1. Spin & Turn

- Spin tops, wheels, coins, or fidget spinners
- Turn knobs, dials, keys, or twist-off lids
- Use salad spinners or spinning paint trays for “spin art”

2. Roll & Circle

- Roll balls, cars, or hoops in big circular paths
- Draw spirals, circles, and loops with chalk or crayons
- Make “car tracks” that loop around furniture or outdoors



3. Move Your Body

- Twirl with scarves or ribbons
- Spin on a swivel chair with supervision
- Play circle dances like *Ring Around the Rosie*

4. Explore Rotating Science

- Compare which objects spin longest
- Test fast vs. slow spins
- Use gears, wheels, and simple machines (LEGO, gears, magnetic wheels)

5. Everyday Rotation

- Twist caps on/off containers
- Stir ingredients in a bowl (circular motion)
- Turn a lazy Susan to pass items around

How to Support Rotating Play

- Provide safe opportunities to spin objects and the body.
- Use language like “around and around,” “fast,” “slow,” and “stop.”
- Supervise fast spinning and encourage breaks if children feel dizzy.
- Celebrate curiosity: it’s about exploring movement, not doing it “right.”



Trajectory Schema Play Ideas

Understanding Your Child's Need to Throw, Drop, and Watch Things Move

What Is the Trajectory Schema?

If your child is constantly **throwing toys, dropping food, pushing cars off the table, or running back and forth**, they're exploring what's called the **Trajectory Schema**.

This schema is all about **movement** — how things travel through space. It's how children begin to understand direction, speed, gravity, and distance — all foundational for **STEM thinking** later on.

When we see it as *learning* instead of *misbehavior*, we can guide it safely and purposefully.

Play Ideas for Trajectory Schema

Here are some easy ways to nurture your child's natural drive to throw:

1. Safe Throwing & Catching

- Use soft balls, beanbags, or rolled-up socks to toss into laundry baskets.
- Play catch, aiming games, or “basketball” with toy bins.

2. Rolling & Dropping

- Roll cars or balls down cardboard ramps or slides.
- Drop scarves, pom-poms, or feathers from different heights — notice how they fall.
- Use cardboard tubes to roll pom-poms and experiment with angles.

3. Outdoor Movement

- Throw snowballs, splash puddles, kick balls, or toss leaves in the air.
- Try a water sponge toss or spray bottles for summer fun.
- Launch paper airplanes or blow bubbles to explore movement through air.



4. Cause & Effect Exploration

- Pour water, sand, or rice between containers.
- Watch how fast or slow objects move down ramps.
- Experiment with a “catapult” (a spoon and a pom-pom!) to see what flies higher.

5. Big Body Movement

- Run, jump, skip, or toss beanbags while moving — gross motor play supports the same schema!
- Create an “obstacle course” with things to throw, roll, and climb over.

How to Support Trajectory Play

- **Set boundaries:** “Balls are for throwing. Blocks stay on the table.”
- **Offer alternatives:** Redirect unsafe throwing to an approved activity (“Let’s throw the ball into this basket!”).
- **Model curiosity:** “Wow, that went far! What if we try a smaller ball?”
- **Observe and describe:** “You made it roll faster when you lifted the ramp higher!”
- **Encourage reflection:** “Where do we throw balls? Where do we keep them still?”

When you channel that energy into play, you turn chaos into learning and frustration into fascination.



Transforming Schema Play Ideas

Helping Your Child Learn Through Mixing, Changing, and Making New Things

🔍 What Is the Transforming Schema?

If your child loves mixing, pouring, cooking pretend food, combining materials, smashing, melting, or turning one thing into something else, they're exploring the **Transforming Schema**.

This type of play helps children understand how materials *change, combine, and transform* into new forms.

Through transforming play, children are learning about:

- Cause and effect (“When I mix these, something changes!”)
- Early science concepts (states of matter, reactions, textures)
- Creativity and imagination (turning ingredients into “recipes”)
- Problem-solving and experimentation

💡 Play Ideas for Transforming Schema

1. Mix & Combine

- Water + dirt for mud play
- Mix colours with paint, food colouring, or water
- Combine loose parts to create “recipes” or potions

2. Squish, Smash & Change

- Make play dough, clay, slime, or kinetic sand
- Smash paint or play dough in a sensory tray
- Use hammers (plastic or wooden) to break ice in a sensory bin



3. Melt & Dissolve

- Ice play: freeze small toys and melt with warm water
- Dissolve sugar cubes, bath bombs, or baking soda in vinegar
- Melt small crayon pieces to make new multi-colour crayons

4. Cook & Pretend

- Pretend kitchen with pots, bowls, and ingredients to “transform”
- Make real simple recipes like smoothies or fruit salads
- Stir, mash, mix, and pour to see changes

5. Outdoor Transforming

- Add water to sand to change texture
- Mix natural materials (leaves, petals, water) to make “nature soup”
- Collect snow and watch it melt indoors

How to Support Transforming Play

- Offer open-ended materials children can safely mix and change.
- Use language like “It changed!”, “What happened?”, “Let’s observe.”
- Provide tools: spoons, mashers, bowls, scoopers, droppers.
- Embrace the mess — transforming play is full of exploration and discovery.



Transporting Schema Play Ideas

Understanding Your Child's Need to Move, Carry, and Transfer Objects

What Is the Transporting Schema?

If your child is always **carrying toys, filling containers, moving things from one spot to another, or pushing items in carts or wagons**, they're exploring the **Transporting Schema** — a natural pattern of play focused on *movement and organization*.

They're figuring out *how things move, how much they can hold, and how objects relate in space*.

Play Ideas for Transporting Schema

Here are some easy ways to nurture your child's natural drive to move things:

1. Everyday Helpers

- Give your child a basket or tote bag and ask them to help "deliver" socks, napkins, or toys.
- Encourage grocery-style play — filling a cart and putting items "away." Your child will love to actually push a real grocery cart at the store too!

2. Sensory Transporting

- Scoop and pour dry rice, sand, or water using cups and spoons.
- Create a "construction site" with toy trucks, scoops, and gravel or sand.
- Fill containers with natural treasures — rocks, pinecones, sticks.

3. Movement & Coordination

- Push or pull wagons, strollers, or wheelbarrows filled with toys.
- Carry small buckets or boxes from one station to another outdoors.
- Play "mail carrier" — delivering letters or small packages around the house.



4. Sorting & Collecting

- Collect items by color, size, or type and transport them to matching bins.
- Use tongs or spoons to move items between bowls for fine motor practice.

5. Creative Story Transporting

- Turn transporting into imaginative play! Create a pretend “delivery service,” “restaurant,” or “post office.”
- Your child can transport play food orders, letters, or supplies — adding purpose and storytelling to their movement.
- This brings together language, social skills, and organization through meaningful play.

How to Support Transporting Play

- Offer space and freedom: Create safe zones where moving things is okay.
- Provide containers: Boxes, baskets, pails, and bags invite endless exploration.
- Embrace the mess: Transporting often leads to dumping — it’s part of the process!
- Add language: “You carried all the blocks! How many fit in your basket?”
- Guide transitions and clean up time: Help your child put items back after moving them — this builds responsibility and self-help skills.

Want to Know More About How Children Learn?

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