

9 How children in an after-school service are involved in decision-making

Kidz@Play is an early learning and care service and has full daycare, preschool and after school services for babies, toddlers and young children. This example is about how the youngest after-school children (four and five-year-olds) are involved in decision-making in Kidz@Play. There is a loose schedule or routine for after-school children, but this is moveable.

- When the children arrive after school, they sit wherever they like in the dining room area. They can choose a hot meal or toasted sandwiches and soup, depending on their own and their parents' preferences. Children can choose how they want their food served, as a lot of children don't like sauces on food. Children are offered choices from a varied menu and a colourful fruit tray that regularly changes and are asked for feedback about the foods on offer.
- After eating, children usually want to play and are invited to make choices about the way they play.
- The environment is set up based on consultations conducted with afterschool children on what they would like to do and what equipment they would like. One of the main things they asked for was a 'couch' to relax on a comfortable seat after a day on school chairs. The couch was bought, and a relaxing area was set up with blankets, throws, cushions and sensory toys.
- The environment is set up into areas of interest, which have moveable dividers so any number of children can play in them. Children can choose to play wherever they want (home corner, arts and crafts, sand, water and other sensory and messy play, indoor construction such as Lego, board games, outdoor free play, outdoor ball games and equipment, story time). Educators became aware of the importance of sensory and messy play for afterschool children by listening to and acting on their views.
- Children want to be outdoors as much as possible, and educators enable them to make choices about what they do outdoors. For example, following building work in the preschool, the afterschool children asked if they could use shovels and wheelbarrows to transfer spare gravel into a large gravel pit to play with, and the educators supported this request.
- Children choose when to do homework based on discussions with the children, parents and teachers. There is a space for homework with educators to support the children. Older children also often help younger children with homework.



- ‘Rules’, ‘inclusion’ and ‘behaviour’ are developed in consultation with the children, educators and parents in line with health and safety and anti-bullying policies. Children are asked to discuss how to include new children, how the environment and resources can be cared for and how disagreements between children can be resolved in a collaborative and non-judgemental way. The ‘rules’ of inclusion are visible for the children and discussed with them.
- Children are also consulted on many other aspects of the afterschool and offered voting options such as names in jars. These aspects include:
 - The books they want to read
 - Toys and other resources
 - Special events and parties
 - Movies



How children in Kidz@Play are given Space, Voice, Audience and Influence

Space

- Children feel safe to express their views because they are in a familiar environment in which their views are sought on a regular basis.
- Educators in the service are very committed to listening and acting on children’s views and prioritise allowing time to listen to children.
- All children are heard through the many ways they are offered to share their views.

Voice

- The educators prioritise hearing children’s views and make sure that they are offered chances to give their views on all aspects of the after-school session.
- Children raise things that matter to them all the time, such as how they want to play, the things they want in the environment and when they want to do homework.
- Educators enable children to give their views through consultations, making daily food and play choices and voting on activities and events.

Audience

- Children know that educators are always ready and willing to listen to them because this is the daily practice of the educators.
- Educators explain when children's views cannot be acted on because of safety concerns or other limitations, such as sticking to the agreed rules of inclusion or bullying policy.

Influence

- Children know how much influence they can have because they are involved in decisions about all aspects of the service, such as the bullying policy, the rules of inclusion, daily activities and the set-up of the environment.
- Children are given regular feedback by educators and can see the impact of their views on decisions by their views being acted on when possible.
- Educators explain the reasons for decisions that are taken based on things such as health and safety, inclusion and resolution of disagreements.

