



Let's Play

Context & Background

Let's Play is a short programme of creative play groups for parents and carers with their children, including music, movement and free play, and is designed for families with 0-24 month babies and 25-48 month pre-schoolers, with those age groups attending in different sessions.

The programme grew from commissioned work by Theatre Hullabaloo to create Hullabaloo Baby Play Packs for 0-12 month olds (and subsequently 0-24 months and 3-5 years). This project was initially a response to concerns about social isolation for new parents and rising levels of Post Natal Depression during Covid-19 lockdowns.

Through the pandemic, the original Play Pack programme was evaluated by the Institute for Social Justice who began a journey with Theatre Hullabaloo to build a solid evidence base for the integral value of creativity for families with very young children, noting positive impacts on parental confidence and wellbeing.

Let's Play was developed once the world reopened in recognition of the value of creative play from the start of life to support parental wellbeing, encourage positive engagements, and to support vulnerable families to build stronger social networks in the first 1001 critical days.

Let's Play is modelled as a socially-prescribed programme because this enables us to engage with families who are seeking help or who are already supported by health services or other professionals. Whilst deliberately not a therapeutic intervention, it underscores the holistic benefits for families that we can evidence in the research. Creativity has a core part to play in the positive experiences of early childhood. This partnered approach enables us to reach those who will benefit most from these interactions.

Let's Play, along with the creative play packs for a range of ages, plus the creative play installations that are a core feature of the programme at The Hullabaloo and in Family Hubs in other parts of Tees Valley, form a suite of play interventions. These three creative play interventions are integral in our quest to make creative play available to all children. We've been able to begin scientifically demonstrating the positive outcomes for young children and their families through this suite.

The programme is artist-led and supported by a Research Fellow and a Hullabaloo Host and some the principles of the programme include;-

*Clear framework of structured and semi-structured play offers (including music and movement and messy play that builds and changes weekly)

*Inclusive and child-centred environment where children are encouraged to respond in play with limited adult intervention

*Deliberate inclusion of explanations about why certain activities are developmentally beneficial to your child and weekly handouts with ideas of activities you can develop at home

*Hosted sessions – it is explained that there will be opportunities within the session for the adults to socialise and this is hosted by the facilitators who make them tea and model imaginative play with the children whilst they have an opportunity to meet other parents

*A calm and trusted space to play