

Preschool Field Officer Service

Integrated Child, Family and Youth Services



Mat Time



What are the reasons for having Mat Time?

- Mat Time fosters a sense of community, all children regardless of ability can experience a sense of belonging
- Mat Time can benefit children where English is their additional language, because communication occurs not just through language but through, movement, music, puppets or props.
- Mat Time provides an opportunity for non-verbal children to participate in non-language based activities
- All children will benefit from social problem solving e.g. children can share their thoughts and ideas about an issue that has arisen and together work out how best to solve it
- Mat Time provides an opportunity for children to share their knowledge on a specific topic

What makes a successful Mat Time?

- Being prepared – have props, puppets, songs etc. ready – children will become bored and display inappropriate behaviour when there are breaks in the routine while looking for a specific song or story
- Be intentional – It's not about grabbing a book off the shelf because it's story time – Mat Times should be a planned part of your program and books, songs and topics for discussion should have meaningful purpose.
- Prepare for a consistent transition into and out of Mat Time. **Repetition of a simple song, movement, action, guessing game, activity, or icebreaker to signal the start and end of Mat Time helps children learn the basics with greater ease.** Tape a circle on the floor, create a circle of carpet squares to sit on, or place names around the circle so each child knows where to go.

- Use a variety of techniques to maintain children’s attention. These techniques may include humour, suspense, varying the tone and volume of your voice as you read and speak, including children in the story or an activity as much as possible, and choosing topics that are of interest to young children.
- *Make the story more meaningful by giving the children something they can touch and hold. Choose simple objects that will spark conversation and help the children draw connections between the story and real life.*
- ***Be focused – co-educators need to be involved too, it’s not a time for co-educators to be sweeping the floor or washing the paint brushes, co-educators are able to actively support those children requiring some additional help to participate in the group activity***
- *Make Mat Time a successful and happy experience for the children – gives them a feeling of confidence in their own knowledge and abilities. Mat Time will be more engaging to children if it is built around simple, brief, interesting, and engaging experiences that invite conversation and interaction rather than being nothing but a sit-still-and-listen experience.*
- **Have FUN!** – The children are more likely to enjoy Mat Time if you are enjoying it too.

Are your expectations realistic?

- *Make Mat Time an interactive experience by seeking out ways to keep your children actively involved in the experience rather than passively sitting while you do all the talking – alternate activities between active and passive to maintain the children’s interest. For example:*
 - *Start with a movement activity or dance to get the children moving*
 - *Read a story (developmentally appropriate for your group)*
 - *Then another active activity, such as passing around props to introduce a new concept*
 - *Then a passive activity – introduce the new idea or concept*
 - *Then close with an action song or dance*
- *Be selective and purposeful in the books you choose to read aloud to the children. Make sure the books you choose are developmentally appropriate for the children in your group. Spend time getting to know each book before reading it – you should have a good understanding of what is on each page and how you are going to present it.*
- Length of time and group size should be appropriate: For best results, the group size should be no larger than 20 children and the length of mat time should be no longer than 10 to 15 minutes. Consider halving the groups and the educator taking one group and the co-educator the other group. This strategy is extremely useful when you have a number of children with challenging behaviour or when particular group dynamics create an issue.
- *Keep the children engaged by using props and visuals to maintain the children’s interest*
- *Be mindful of the individual children in the group and be willing to adapt the story to suit their needs*
- *Having a Mat Time routine that the children become familiar with, helps the children to know what to expect, and to be a more confident participating in the process. However, within any routine it is important to be responsive to the needs and interests of the children. If a routine is not working well, then it may be necessary to adapt, change, shorten, rearrange, or somehow modify the routine.*
- Consider offering a variety of seating options, e.g. bean bags, cushions, a few chairs placed at the back of the group.

CONSIDER: Some children may not be developmentally ready to engage in a group experience. Consider a Wait Box or Calm Area where the child can sit and play. Always provide them with a choice; but make your expectations clear, eg Wait Box (box containing variety of toys or sensory items) or Calm Area / Mat Time .

Some ideas to consider:

<http://www.kidscreativechaos.com/2014/05/12-circle-time-activities-and-ideas-for.html>

http://www.earlychildhoodnews.com/earlychildhood/article_view.aspx?ArticleID=444