

## Bad Behaviour or Super Schemas!



Tamsin Grimmer is a director of Linden Learning, an associate of Early Education, Principal Lecturer at Norland College and an Emotion Coaching Practitioner for Emotion Coaching UK. She has a wealth of experience supporting Early Years Teachers and educators. She is passionate about young children's learning and believes that all children deserve educators who are inspiring, dynamic, reflective and loving. Tamsin was a member of the Inclusion and Equalities working party for the Birth to Five Matters materials and has written several books aimed at educators and is a true advocate for adopting a loving pedagogy.

Have you ever been puzzled by a young child's actions or behaviour? We may notice or get frustrated by children repeatedly playing in particular ways and sometimes their urge to do these things is very strong. Many common behaviours that frustrate us or are challenging to respond to are actually schematic. Cathy Nutbrown says, 'Many professional educators use what they know of schemas to divert children from disruptive activities and to focus them on more worthwhile endeavours' (Nutbrown, 2011) so we can use our understanding of their schematic interest to tempt them to play elsewhere. In this article I am sharing my top 6 behaviours that I think are misdiagnosed as poor behaviour and suggesting possible ways of responding.

### 1. *Throwing toys*

Children often throw toys or resources due to an interest in trajectory movement and actions. Throwing things helps children to understand about strength, forces, gravity and feels good! We can offer children opportunities to throw in places where they can safely do so and with objects we are happy to be thrown.

### 2. *Mixing sand and water or pouring their drink over their food and mixing it all together*

Creating mixtures shows an interest in transforming and changing properties of materials. We can offer additional opportunities for this through play in the mud kitchen, food play or simply have an ethos of permission and allow children to mix to their hearts content!

### 3. *Knocking down towers*

This is about trajectory movement, it's also a very sensory experience! We can build towers they are allowed to knock down and talk with the child about which towers they can and which they can't knock down, getting the children to create visual signs as reminders. Remember that children under 4 do not have Theory of Mind so will find it difficult to understand the impact of their actions on others and will need adults to help talk this through with them.



#### 4. *Pulling all the tissues out of the tissue box*

This is another example of a trajectory movement as children enjoy the action of pulling the tissues. We can re-create this by offering children an old tissue box they can decorate and make their own, then we can fill it with scarves.

#### 5. *Emptying boxes or climbing inside boxes*

Many children fill and empty containers repeatedly, sometimes climbing inside themselves, and it links with investigating containment and enclosing. We can plan for this using draw string mats that make it easier for us to tidy, offer fewer boxes and put lids on ones we don't want emptied!



#### 6. *Climbing on and/or jumping off furniture*

Children enjoy this sometimes because of the trajectory movement involved and sometimes because they like being high up which links with orientation and how children view the world from different angles and perspectives. We can ensure children are safe and give them as many opportunities as possible to climb and jump in areas where we feel it is appropriate, giving a clear message where they are not allowed to and visual reminders of this.

Acknowledging these behaviours as schematic helps us to better understand why they are repeatedly acting in this way, and perhaps allows us to be more accepting in our response (Grimmer, 2017). Rather than viewing their play as misbehaviour, we can be proactive and source additional resources that link in with this schematic play, redirecting the children to more 'worthwhile endeavours'. Making everyone a winner!

### References and links to useful resources:

Grimmer, T. (2017) *Observing and developing schematic behaviour in young children: a professional's guide for supporting children's learning, play and development*. London: Jessica Kingsley

Nutbrown, C. (2011) *Threads of Thinking*, 4th edn. London: Sage.

Louis, S. (2021) [\*Schemas for Parents\*](#), Suffolk County Council

Short free course on 6 common types of schematic play: <https://www.gompels.co.uk/video/6-common-schemas-early-years-training-video.html?return=home>

Articles about schematic play and child development <https://www.tamsinggrimmer.com/parenta-childdevelopment-schemas>