

Let's think about...

Joyful Pedagogy

A 45 minute staff meeting template to use within your setting.

Before the meeting:

- Identify what you are trying to achieve from the meeting. What is the teams current knowledge on this subject? What would you like the outcome of the meeting to be?
- Reflect on how you are going to present the information. Can you provide visuals? Things to hold? Practical activities?
- Check the sources of information being presented with a critical eye.
- Plan your prompts for after the meeting i.e. posters, reminders, peer observations etc.
- Do as much pre-reading, watching and listening as possible.

You can find out more about planning continual professional development [here](#).

Meeting Plan

Display or read this quote about the benefits of joyful pedagogy:

Research suggests that 'the experience of joy through play serves to foster children's relationships, increase self-determination and promotes positive social emotional development. But the gains of joyful play are not limited to children. Educators also receive many benefits through their engagement in and facilitation of joyful play experiences.

Engaging in shared joyful moments with children results in reduced stress and enhanced feelings of wellbeing and sense of self in educators' (Little & Karaolis, 2023).

Activity 1 - What does joy mean to you?

In partners or small groups, discuss what joy means to you and share a recent personal joyful experience and how that felt. You can ask people to feedback what joy means to them and collate it on a big piece of paper.



Is joy the same as children enjoying something? Or not? Enjoyment is often a temporary, surface-level feeling of pleasure and satisfaction derived from a specific activity or experience, while joy is a deeper, more lasting state of profound happiness, contentment, and well-being that comes from within.

Joy in young children is universal, but the ways it is expressed, nurtured, and understood are deeply influenced by culture. For some children, joy might be shown through exuberant laughter, energetic play, or animated storytelling. In other cultures, joy may be expressed more quietly—through shared moments of closeness, gentle smiles, or collective group activities.

Children also experience joy in connection with their cultural traditions, through familiar songs, dances, festivals, languages, and rituals that affirm their sense of belonging. For educators, this means being attentive to the many forms joy can take, resisting assumptions that joy must always be loud or visible, and creating space for children to express joy in ways that are authentic to them and their families. When we recognise and celebrate these diverse expressions, we not only affirm children’s identities but also enrich the collective joy of the learning community.

Activity 2 - what moments of joy have you shared with children recently? Ask for people to shout out and share a few experiences of recent joy with the children. What prompted the joy? What did you see / hear / feel?



Nursery water play

Watch Christine 'teaching and modelling vocabulary' during child-led water play with a group of 3-4 year old children.

Activity 3 - Let's watch this EEF Early Years Evidence Store video.

What do you notice about this interaction? What joyful moments do you observe?

Discuss as a whole group, small groups or with a partner and feedback any key points.

Activity 3 - Bridges and barriers to joy. Each day children are experiencing many things for the first time. We see them find joy in things that might seem simple to us; watching leaves fall from a tree, a friend making a silly face or noise, a wiggly worm or jumping in a puddle...



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In small groups, use a large piece of paper to write down the barriers to children's joy in early years (e.g., rigid routines, lack of time outdoors) and the bridges (e.g., extended periods of play, valuing silliness, opportunities to be creative). Here are some suggestions of topics to explore in your discussion:

- Being present and tuned in to children's play, creativity and exploration
- The environment and how it supports joyful moments
- Noticing joy, relishing in it and role modelling it
- The role of humour and laughter

Ask everyone to choose one 'bridge to joy' to focus on before the next staff meeting.

Conclusion and final thoughts - Now let's come back together to reflect upon what we have been thinking. Are there any implications for practice? What actions are we going to take as individuals and as a team?

Reflect on any amendments to provision or practice (ensure you allow time for the team to identify their actions so you can follow up at their next supervision).

You might choose to end the staff meeting with a joyful activity such as laughter yoga or singing along to a karaoke favourite.



Follow up prompts and activities for after the staff meeting:

- Share Chapter 1: Play and Joy from Play Matters (Bradbury 2024). You might want to print a copy for the staff room or share it on your Whatsapp group.
- Create a display in a common staff area where everyone can celebrate their joyful moments since the staff meeting (e.g. photos and post it notes).
- Follow up with individual staff members in supervisions, what bridge did they choose to focus on and how is it going? What have they noticed?
- Share this video about the science of laughter.

References

Little, C., & Karaolis, O. (2023). The lost art of joy in early childhood education. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 49(1), 81-90. <https://doi.org/10.1177/18369391231219819>
(Original work published 2024)

Would you like a staff meeting template like this one about a specific topic? Get in touch to let us know what you would find helpful at your setting by emailing us on sph@beyth.co.uk