

Practice Ideas

Dens and Hideouts



Building shelter is one of our most primitive skills. Our survival as a species depended on it. Therefore it is no wonder that it forms such a common play activity for children across the globe. Children's dens and hideouts come in all shapes and sizes from an old sheet over a chair, to a cardboard box on the ground, or a bush at the back of the garden, to a wooden fort of branches. These are just a few of the many possible materials that can be used by children as they build and create a place of their own. Think back to your childhood and the dens you constructed during your play. Babies and toddlers simply

love a den of blankets or small enclosed spaces in which to play peekaboo, or the first attempts at hide and seek. These are places to test new experiences from light to dark, from the hiding alone to the fun of reunion. As children grow their play and their dens become more complex and sophisticated, they play what they know, what they have experienced. Consider how many times you have seen games of home and family, eating and sleeping, working and holidaying.

Dens can also be places of fantasy and adventure, from cave to castle, from fire station to forest, from schoolhouse to space station. Sometimes they are places of security and sanctuary, places away from the crowd, to dream, to rest, to create. All the while in these varied dens children are making sense of their world and practicing many life skills as they engage in the work of childhood - PLAY.



While children enjoy the fun of den building the actual construction of the den has much to offer them. Often working as a team they learn to co operate, negotiate, and problem solve. They experience success and sometimes failure as they find out how and why things work. They learn by doing.

Simple successes with cardboard or cloth, or sticks and crates can lead to increasingly complex ideas and structures.

Further information can be found in: Jan White's book *Playing and Learning Outdoors* www.earlychildhoodoutdoors.org/playing-and-learning-outdoors/

For ideas and images: <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/jools0307/early-years-den-building/>

