



## Cubbies

'Cubbies' are small enclosures either provided by adults or created by children themselves. Most often they are used for role-play, dramatic, fantasy play and they provide associated social, cognitive and language development, depending upon the age group. The feeling of being enclosed and hidden is an important aspect of cubby play. *Several studies (Davey, 1984; hart, 2997) have documented that environment modification to create closed spaces is high on the list of preferred activities for children. It would seem then that refuge, a prominent symbol in both natural habitats and built environment, plays an important role in children's developmental needs. (Kirkby 1989 p7)(8)*

The play value of cubbies is maximised when:

- ◆ a wide choice of props and loose materials is available;
- ◆ they can be changed at will by children themselves; and
- ◆ the immediate surrounds of the cubby can also be used for play.

***Four different ways to provide for cubby-type play are:***

### **Permanent, built cubbies**

Permanent cubbies or forts with a platform, a ladder and a space underneath often confuse two types of play which are not always compatible:

- ◆ if children want to use their toys on the platform they have to struggle up a ladder or net with them. The items then become a hazard as they may be dropped onto other children;
- ◆ climbing and busy physical activity may intrude and conflict with the role-play activity.

The design of any cubby structure should have the feeling of being hidden, but have some permanent openings to provide for supervision.

Cubbies at ground level can relate well to sand pit play if staff have a policy of sand being able to be removed for use as a dramatic play prop. This will require careful management to ensure sand is not spread, causing a slip hazard or wastage.

For children using the same play space for long periods of time it is very important that there are also opportunities for them to create their own cubbies.

### **Lean-to cubbies.**

These are constructions built by the children, perhaps with the assistance of staff, out of various loose materials in the playground. The processes of construction and change are important.

A fence, wall, tree trunk or other backdrop is useful to both provide physical support as well as enclosure and privacy. A supply of pegs, ties and small sandbags to secure materials is essential.

### **Built framework for additions by children or staff.**

A timber support, such as a tee-pee of lashed poles, or a lightweight steel framework, such as a climbing trestle, can be useful for draping cloth, tarpaulins, and parachutes over.

### **Cubbies amongst planting**

Hedges, thickets and weeping shrubs provide wonderful enclosures for children's cubbies. Some plants which drop needles (such as pines and casuarinas), are useful as a supply of cubby-making materials.

### **Quiet areas**

#### **Small spaces and secret places**

Small and 'secret' spaces play an important role in the play of young children. They are particularly important for providing:

- ◆ privacy in centres where children spend long days with a large group of children and where there are often few opportunities for solitude;
- ◆ children an opportunity to create their 'own' space;
- ◆ somewhere for two or three children to play quietly together; and
- ◆ a quiet space for a small-group activity such as reading.

Many ideas suggested for dividing up a play area can be applied to creating such small spaces. The spaces can be quite tiny and can give very small children a sense of being completely hidden even though an adult can easily supervise them.

It is important that children with disabilities also have access to such spaces, to the activities and to privacy.

Large cardboard or wooden boxes, built cubbies, small planted areas, groupings of logs or sleeper seats, and spaces under decks all create small spaces. Sometimes a small focal point such as a low 'table' or 'seat' made of a round cut from a telegraph pole or a low smooth rock placed in a small space will enhance the play possibilities.

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