



# Every Child a Talker

## Rug time, snug time: how rugs and quilts help children in groups

Group time is very important for young children, and how it is organised, and getting the atmosphere right, can be just as important as the activity that we share. I find that putting down some nice rugs or a quilt for the children to sit on can make a huge difference to everyone's behaviour and responses, and also our depth of involvement.

### Rugs

Let's take a typical storytime in an early years setting as an example. 25 children are sitting on the floor, and an adult is telling them a story. Most of the children will be listening, but some will not. There are many reasons why not, but let's focus on space and boundaries as a major cause of distraction. Even though the children might be sitting in a carpeted area, there may not be a clear boundary, and some children may move away. Also there may not be enough space for everyone to sit. But as soon as we put a couple of colourful rugs down, making sure there is enough space for everyone, most children can start to relax.

I often ask anyone sitting on the rugs – children and adults - to take their shoes off. This further adds to relaxation and 'softer' behaviour, as well as being part of the 'starting and finishing ritual'. If you use the laying down of rugs as part of your preparation 'ritual' for group time, then you are creating a special atmosphere, and an anticipation that something nice will happen. Try it... you will find that it will make your storytime have a good beginning. (Then you may need to take a close look at how you and your colleagues organize yourselves and behave to make sure that the story is accessible to all the children. This will include using props to tell the story.)

Putting down rugs before a group time with very young children, perhaps for a song and rhyme session, or a 'heuristic' (discovery) play session, can make a huge difference. The children are automatically drawn to sitting on the rugs, and as long as all the adults join in, they will stay there until the end. It is important to put away the rugs as soon as you have finished, and only use them at group times. This acts as an important clue that there will be a group, and also signals that it has finished.

### Quilts

Putting down a quilt for everyone to sit on: perhaps when you are having a small 'Circle Time' or a play session, can lead to some very deep relaxation and involvement. Everyone, including the adults, will need to take their shoes off. Some children will automatically want to jump on the quilt, but if you show them, using a quiet voice, what you expect, they should soon calm down. I have had sessions with large puppets, cuddly toys, baby dolls, or sharing books and chatting sessions that have gone very deep, and largely because we are sitting on a quilt.

Plain quilt cover or bright patterns? That's an important question: too bright and jazzy and children can get overexcited; too plain and it won't be inviting, and will also show any stains! I prefer my IKEA cover, which has small red spots on a white background on one side, and small white spots on a red background on the other. Then I ask the children what they fancy!

**NB Safety first! Rugs and quilts must only be used on a non-slip surface such as carpet or rough floor, or put down PE mats first.**

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