

WHAT'S YOUR NAME ?

A Play Group film with children aged three or more.

Interview with a Play Group Supervisor

"You've been supervising play groups in Duebendorf for a number of years now. Why do you think play groups are important ?"

"Today children often grow up very isolated within their own immediate family. In earlier years, family groupings were larger and children had contact with many more adults. They could also spontaneously go out and meet other children. Today the mother has to organize everything. There are too many dangers outside the house.

Earlier on, I was often in this house and in this yard (where the play group now meets), since my grandparents lived here. Back then we had a lot of possibilities to play: we could play on the street and not have to worry about the traffic. We would go alone into the woods. We used to play with mud near the creek; today it's covered over. We've restricted the whole environment for our children. Earlier we had a lot more freedom; today mothers have to be careful and organize everything for the children. In this sense the play group is a symptom of the times. I want to offer an amount of freedom in the play group that children can no longer experience in other places.

The play group offers a chance for both mothers and children to break out from the immediate family and get more contact with the outside world. Every child needs a different amount of support and attention; that's what I would like to give them in the play group. I only want to give them as much help as they really need, so that they learn to help themselves. I provide them with a lot of material to work with, plus a lot of freedom within clearly defined limits. Each child should be able to take what he needs from that which is offered according to his or her available time and his or her stage of development. The thing that makes my work exciting is that I don't need to follow a set course; I can let things happen as they come, observe them and gather a lot of enjoyment as the children develop."

Voice of the Narrator (distributed throughout the film):

Every child approaches other children in its own way. Some are very active in this respect, others watch first and only make an approach at a later stage.

Sometimes the start in the play group is difficult for both mother and child.

The play group supervisor can ease the initial difficulty with separation. She can't take away the pain of being separated from the mother, but she can offer sympathy, be there for the child and make it easier for him to take the step himself. Sometimes it is still too early for the child and it is better if they stay at home for a few more months, where they are only together with one or two other children. In this case understanding is needed on all sides. Once they have made the step, however, a lot of doors to play and interact with other children will open up.

The play group is also a place for the mother to come into contact with new people and build up a new network of friends. Mothers get to know each other through talking; children on the other hand do this by playing and interacting.

Children help each other, learn from each other and thereby can grow up together. Children give each other impulses to learn and experiment.

In the play group, children find friends of both sexes to play with and be with.

Sometimes there are difficult moments in the play group. If the adults give children enough time, they often find their own solutions to many problems. If one gives them this chance, they can learn from their experiences and develop from them, even if it sometimes results in tears.

The roles that the children take in the Play Group change quickly: sometimes they are friends, then they are shut out again; sometimes they can tell others what to do, then they must do what they are told again.

It is very important that the children can touch the play group supervisor. Children in this age take in more through their hands and what they do than through language. (Foreign children will also be accepted in the group without problem because of this, even if they do not speak the same language.)

If children feel comfortable in the play group, even those who are shy will be willing to take a

risk and try something.

Every child needs a different amount of attention and support and a different amount of supervision. The supervisor only helps enough so that the child can go further on his own.

Children can test their own abilities in a protected environment. They learn to judge how far they can go.

In many play groups, the mothers or fathers can alternate in taking part. This allows children to build up relationships to both parents. Parents have the opportunity during this time to observe how their children play with other children.

The best preparation for life is to have spent a lot of time playing. Playing is life ! Only a few simple materials are necessary. These can always be changed according to the current conditions and a new type of play will start.

Movement is absolutely necessary to children of play group age for their physical and mental development.

Sometimes children need a few moments of quiet and they withdraw from the group. From periods of boredom come the start of some new activity.

Children want to examine their environment with all their senses. They learn through reaching and touching, through grasping and understanding.

It is not important to produce beautiful, perfect creations in the play group. It is much more important to experience the joy of doing things and trying things.

Today we need play groups which allow children the freedom to laugh or be angry, to be friendly or to fight, to be creative; once in awhile to do nothing and in general to have plenty of opportunity to try things.