

Birth to three...

Duvet Dancing

What is this experience for babies and toddlers all about, asks **Anne O'Connor**

Duvet Dancing is an interactive dance experience for babies, toddlers and their grown-ups, providing many 'take home' ideas that can be incorporated into continuous play or specific movement sessions.

Developed by community dance artist Anna Daly, Duvet Dancing encourages adults and children to enjoy the soft 'duvet' space together, move and dance to the music and experiment with voile scarves.

While mostly non-verbal, there is a strong focus on the gestures and vocal sounds linked to movement that encourage connection and early communication. View it at: www.annadaly.co.uk/project09.

BENEFITS

Duvet Dancing supports:

- floor play and whole body/gross motor movement
- communication and language through gesture and sound
- vestibular and proprioceptive development
- expressive arts and dance experience
- attachment and bonding
- emotional well-being – participants have reported a greater adult-child connection.

TRY IT YOURSELF

Duvet Dancing performances have inspired practitioners and parents to try it at home and in the setting. Here some are suggestions:

- Use old duvets (check for allergies), fleecy blankets and pillows to create soft, safe, ambient spaces that encourage rolling, crawling, lying down and stretching or curling up and snuggling together.
- Sway and roll together as these are important activities for developing the vestibular system – an important aspect of sensory processing that



supports balance and can also aid early language development and general physical and emotional well-being.

- Encourage close physical contact between children and with adults as you explore movement, as this supports proprioception – a sense of self/bodily awareness that is important for well-being, as well as spatial awareness and moving confidently.
- Use different sized voile scarves to develop a range of activities that can soothe and stimulate. Blowing a scarf exercises mouth muscles important for speech production and provides joyful adult-child connection as you blow them to each other.
- Children of all ages often enjoy being wrapped in fleecy blankets and being held, as adults sway and swing them to music. So, tune into the child and be guided by them about the amount of close physical

Duvet Dancing's benefits include bonding and communication



MORE INFORMATION

Duvet Dancing is now touring nationally. Visit www.annadaly.co.uk to find out more or if you are interested in becoming a future arts and health partner or setting up an event.

contact they are happy with. This is also a good opportunity for holding eye contact and for whispering affectionate endearments. You can increase the vigorousness of the activity by rolling children into duvet sausages/swiss rolls or gently squeezing them between pillows to make 'kid sandwiches'.

- Use the duvets as safe, soft spaces for children to crawl and fall as well as an uneven surface for toddlers to learn to negotiate and practise balance.
- Duvets make adults want to lie down and be close to babies and children, and they help us to see the world from children's point of view. So, do tummy time together or lie side by side on the duvet. It is a great way for adult and child to connect and makes it easy for babies to use their special adults as a resource for clambering and crawling over. And everyone benefits from a little lie down!
- If there isn't space for the duvet(s) to stay out all the time, there is a lot of fun (and vigorous 'heavy work') to be had, rolling them up and stuffing them into large laundry bags together. Children love to help and will have just as much fun pulling them out again when needed.

Just one duvet and a few pillows can create not just a physical space for floor play but also help shift mood and atmosphere for quiet times – for example, just before home time.

HOW IT STARTED

Duvet Dancing as a performance originated from a research project led by Manchester Metropolitan University and Curious Minds with Newtown Nursery School in Colne, Lancashire. Subsequent Arts Council England funding enabled Ms Daly to develop it into an interactive experience. ■

