



Watch Me Play! Practitioner's Guide to Online Working

Preparing for online working

Have a quiet space ready where you can interact with the parent or carer and child and will not be interrupted during the session. Look back at notes on previous meetings about the family's needs and hopes so that you can point to changes the parents hope to see in the play session.

If you're not familiar with the video platform you're going to use, practice several times with a friend or colleague until you feel confident and relaxed. Put on a light in front of you so your face can be clearly seen on screen. Practice leaving the zoom call and re-connecting after a connection is lost.

Help the parent or carer to prepare in a phone or video call - if possible without the child- before the session. Talk through where they and the child will sit, what toys or materials (no more than six) they will have ready and how long you aim the play session to be. Five or ten minutes may be best to start with until they and you are more used to this way of working. It may be possible to build up to a longer play session, up to a maximum of twenty minutes.

Make a plan for you and the parent or carer to talk together after the play session- either immediately after the play session if that is possible, or in a later phone or video call.

Ask the parent or carer to turn off televisions and phones during the session and put away battery-operated and electronic toys. Think about where they can put the screen, laptop or phone so they feel comfortable and where you will be able to see both of them. Explain that they can adjust the position during the session as needed. Explain that their child may be fixated to begin with on the laptop or the phone, but many children respond well to encouragement to play and to the caregiver and the practitioner showing interest by talking about their toys and what they are doing.

Reassure the parent or carer that you can re-connect on the same link if the connection is lost. Agree a plan for if either of you lose signal - for example, that you will phone to carry on the conversation.

Agree with the parent when you will send a reminder with the link for the video call- a couple of days or the day before.

In the online session

Be ready to recap briefly about WMP before the session starts, recognising that this different way of working may take a while to get used to.

Greet the parent and child, check that they can see and hear you, tell the child you are interested to see how they like to play today.

Be ready to model the approach before encouraging the parent to join in. Talk with the child about what they are doing, or what they might be looking at, ask the parent to join in and say what the child is playing with or doing. Remember that in WMP, practitioners and the parent or carer talk to the child about what they are doing, putting their play into words- find the simplest words or sounds to echo the baby or child's words or vocalisations. Show interest through your voice and your facial expression, do not watch in silence.

Give attention both to parent and child during the Watch Me Play! time. Talk with the child about what they are doing, praise the parent when they support the child's free play, quietly redirect the parent if they are controlling the child's play or teaching the child.

Help the child to prepare for the end of the play session. Give a few minutes warning, tell them when you are meeting again, ask the parent to talk about what they are going to be doing next.

In the discussion about the child's play with the parent or carer

Arrange a convenient time to talk with the parent or carer about the child's play.

As well as hearing about how things are going generally, ask about any WMP sessions that have been done at home. Use the questions in the WMP diary as prompts- What has

the parent or carer noticed their baby or child is interested in; what does he or she often do; is he or she doing something new; what does their baby or child most enjoy.

For the parent or carer, ask if they enjoy, or find it difficult, taking a step back and letting their baby or child take the lead, seeing what their baby or child chooses to do, giving their full attention for 10-20 minutes. What else do they enjoy? what else do they find difficult? What do they remember most clearly about their baby or child's play? How does it feel when they are watching their baby or child play?

Make links to the parent or carers' hopes and aims when talking together about the baby or child's play. if you used the WMP interview at the beginning of this work, refer back to and review the goals that the parents or carers decided on.

If parents don't remember how to do WMP, you can look at the Why Play Matters leaflet or the Short Guide together- but often the most effective way to get the approach across is to demonstrate and model for a minute or two.

Remember that for families who struggle to find twenty minutes to watch their baby or child play, five minutes could be a good start.

If your service is able to continue working with the family, plan ahead for the next few weeks, when they will do WMP at home, when your next session together will be, whether a session or sessions just with the parents or carers would be helpful.