

What do WMP practitioners do?

1 Introducing WMP

- Describe WMP in brief: child-led play, undivided attention, talking with their child about their play, entering into the child's world for a short time
- Reflect on some possible benefits, linked to the family's wishes, needs or hopes for their child or for their relationship with their child
- If parents have mental health difficulties, carefully consider when to introduce WMP alongside the other kinds of support for the family that may be needed
- Recognize that WMP comes naturally for many parents and carers, and that for some families it can take a while and may be more difficult.
- Offer to model WMP with the parents or carers or with their child for a few minutes
- Watch the **Welcome to Watch Me Play!** video together
- Think with families about how they could find between 5 and 20 minutes with each child, or with one of their children to begin with
- Reflect together on what might be difficult, perhaps stepping out of a busy routine to enter the child's world
- Recognize that guidance, direction and teaching are important aspects of parenting but that in WMP we suggest following the child's lead for a short time
- Offer the **Why Play Matters** leaflet, **Short Guide**, or **Manual for Parents**
- Offer the **WMP Diary** for parents who are interested to record their WMP sessions
- If it seems helpful, agree goals with parents or carers using the **WMP interview**
- Give parents or carers links to **WMP websites**

2 Preparing for a WMP session

- Agree with the parents or carers how long to watch their child play, suggest 5 minutes to begin with
- Fit in with the baby or child's routines- if a baby or child is sleeping, ask the parent or carer not to wake them; use the time instead to catch up with the parent or carer
- If a baby is not ready to interact, notice his or her cues and signals and wait until his or her needs are met
- Help the parent of a baby to see when their baby is alert and ready for play
- Ask parents or carers to turn off televisions and put away phones and battery-operated and electronic toys and put out a small selection of toys and materials

- Help parents to select toys that their child likes or could be interested in
- If there are worries about things being thrown or broken, choose soft toys
- In a clinic setting, prepare a small selection of toys and a quiet and comfortable place where you can sit on or near the floor
- Remind the parent or carer about the core elements of WMP- following the child's lead during the play session, talking with the child about what they do or echoing their sounds and vocalisations
- Explain to the parent or carer that you will guide them during the session and talk together about it afterwards
- Think with the parents or carers about how to help their child be ready to finish and encourage them to prepare their child for the end of the WMP time

3 During the WMP session

- Give your full attention to the child and the parent during the play session; write notes later
- Sit at the level of the child on the floor or a low chair
- With a baby, ensure the parent or carer is sitting comfortably and that the baby and caregiver can see each other's faces
- Tell the baby or child what you are going to do and how long for
- Encourage the parent to give their full attention to their baby or child's play and show interest in whatever the child chooses to do, as long as it is safe
- Praise the parents or carers when they allow their baby or child to play freely, or show interest in their play
- Use your voice and your face actively to show your interest in and support for the child's play
- Notice, and share with the parent or carer, how the child responds when they talk about their child's play
- Notice if it is difficult for the parent to let their child take the lead
- Describe the child's play in simple language, encourage the parent to do the same
- Echo the child's words or vocalisations, encourage the parent to do the same
- Acknowledge this way of being with their child can be hard at first but often gets easier and more natural with practice
- Guide the parent if they talk about other things, direct the child's play, use their phone, video their child, or remain silent during the play session
- Encourage the parents or carers to let the child know a few minutes before the end of the WMP time and help them be ready to move on to something else
- If a baby disengages or becomes distressed, think with the parent about what their baby might need and wait until the baby is ready to interact again
- If the parent is overwhelmed or something seems too much, suggest bringing the play session to an end, talk with the parent and listen to their worries

4 After the WMP session

- Reflect with the parent or carer about the child's play, either directly after the WMP time, or arrange a time to talk later just with the parent
- Explore the parent's experience of being with their baby or child in a different way
- Give your full attention to listening to the parents or carer's thoughts, comments, questions, worries and insights
- Show interest in everything the parent saw or remembered about their child's play or was struck by
- Praise the parent or carer for taking an interest in their child's play, giving their full attention, providing a small selection of toys, talking to their child about their play
- Respond to any concerns or worries that come up but try as well to include a detailed focus on some moments in the play you watched together
- When it feels appropriate, explore sensitively with the parent or carer how it felt for them when they were watching their child play
- If parents or carers have been doing WMP with their child at home, ask how it has been going, any changes they have noticed, and what has stayed in their mind about their child's play
- Use the pointers in the **WMP diary** to structure the conversation- what they saw and noticed, what the child seems interested in, what has changed or not changed, what the parents or carers enjoy, what is difficult in WMP for the parents or carers
- If the parents made goals for WMP, link the play session to their goals
- Share your impressions of what was striking, hopeful or enjoyable in the child's play, or any changes, however small
- Discuss with the parent moments when they were controlling their child's play
- Explore possible worries about letting their child play freely and offer a reminder of the benefits of child led play
- Problem-solve with parents or carers about what is difficult for them in WMP and what could help

5 Following up

- Make a time to talk again with the parent or carer to discuss anything that is not appropriate to talk with the child present, or to reflect on worries, concerns or difficult feelings that have been stirred up.
- Offer to get back to the parent with suggestions after talking with your supervisor.
- If it seems helpful, encourage parents or carers to continue doing WMP! and make a time to follow up
- Encourage parents or carers to share what they have gained from WMP with other adults who look after the child at home, or at school or nursery
- If you work in a team or a professional network for a child, share concerns and good progress with the team or network to inform thinking about ways forward
- If the child's main caregiver changes, connect with all new caregivers in order to support as much continuity for the child as possible - they may include another parent, wider family

members, foster carers, social workers, child care providers and nursery or school key workers.

- If you can offer a continuing programme of support, review with the parents or carers from time to time how far they have come and changes they and you have seen
- For parents or carers who struggle to allow their child play freely, offer joint play sessions in which parent and child play together, or play sessions just for parents
- If WMP is too difficult for the parent or carer, or does not work for them, consider possible ways forward or other services that could help the family
- Link up with the health visitor and other services supporting the family where possible
- Report any safeguarding concerns in your notes and in supervision and team discussions and follow your organization's safeguarding procedures
- Advocate for the child in professionals' meetings if there are safeguarding concerns or a change of caregiver

6 Accessing support and supervision

- Access supervision regularly to support you in the challenges of entering into the world of a baby or child and coming closer to their experiences
- Write notes on the play session and the discussion with the parent: the sequence of the child's play, any striking details in the child's play, and any changes or concerns
- Explore questions, consolidate your understanding, share progress, discuss any worries, and think about ways forward in supervision
- Learn with and from your peers in a supervision group where possible
- If you don't see any changes or developments over a period of time, check that each step in the WMP approach is in place
- Re-read the **Short Guide, Manual for Parents, FAQs** or **Further Information** to explore your questions and consolidate your understanding of WMP
- Use the **Practitioners' Checklist** to score your sessions for fidelity to the WMP model

7 Training and supervising other practitioners

- Gain experience of work with 5 or more families in different situations and children of different ages and with different needs
- Be familiar with the WMP materials in the website, including the **WMP interview, Diary, Short Guide, Manual for Parents, Checklist for Practitioners** and **Further Information about WMP**
- Shadow or co-teach with an experienced WMP trainer
- Consult with an experienced WMP trainer as you begin training and supervising
- Start with a small group of colleagues who have time and motivation to develop a WMP practice before introducing the approach more widely in your service or organization
- Read and discuss each WMP resource with your colleagues
- Link up with other services in your area using WMP
- Keep in touch with new resources and research in the WMP website