Superhero and Weapon Play Policy

Policy Statement

At The Orchard Nursery, we recognise that each child is unique and we are committed to supporting children to be resilient, capable, confident, and self-assured. Children develop strength and independence through secure, loving relationships and opportunities to learn within a positive, stimulating environment.

Many children enjoy imaginative play that reflects the world around them. For some children—particularly boys—this includes a strong element of superhero and weapon re-enactment. Weapon play is a universal form of imaginative play that often engages children at a deep level.

Traditionally, this type of play has been banned in early years settings due to concerns about aggression or violence. However, such bans are difficult to enforce and may hinder aspects of development, especially for boys. Research shows that exploring themes such as good versus evil, life and death, strength and power, gender, and identity through imaginative play can be an important part of learning when managed safely.

At The Orchard Nursery, we believe it is important to adopt a consistent, whole-setting approach to weapon and superhero play—one that is clearly understood by staff, children, parents, and other agencies. This policy sets out our formal approach.

Adults may find this play challenging and instinctively want to stop it. However, it is not necessary to ban such play provided that practitioners guide children to respect others' rights, maintain safety, and take responsibility for resources and the environment.

Aims

- Ensure staff understand why superhero and weapon play is important to some children.
- Encourage adults to engage with and extend this type of play.
- Channel the play positively to promote thinking, learning, and imaginative development.
- Plan for superhero and weapon play based on children's interests and observed play patterns.
- Provide children with safe opportunities to express feelings.
- Monitor the environment to ensure play does not intimidate children who are not participating.
- Develop children's negotiation skills, respect for rights, and ability to transfer these skills to everyday life.
- Ensure both genders are represented—superhero and fantasy play is enjoyed by boys and girls, so both male and female hero figures should be reflected in resources and displays.
- Support children in distinguishing between real and pretend (e.g. understanding that guns in real life are dangerous, while in pretend play they function differently).

Objectives

- Use varied strategies to extend and enrich play so it does not become repetitive.
- Promote turn-taking, sharing, and cooperative skills (e.g. rescue games require multiple players).
- Encourage problem-solving through rescue scenarios.

- Explore the wider lives of superheroes—where they live, what they eat—and link this to wider learning areas.
- Use materials to make dens and enhance role play indoors and outdoors.
- Incorporate literacy by encouraging children to create superhero stories, notices, shopping lists, tickets, or maps to navigate their play world.
- Redirect phrases like *"I'm gonna shoot you"* or *"being dead"* into constructive scenarios, such as phoning an ambulance and practising calling 999.
- Participate in the play when appropriate; staff joining in can open new opportunities for exploration and learning.

Weapon / Gun Play Guidelines

- The nursery does not provide toy guns or weapons. However, children may create their own representations (e.g. from Lego or craft materials).
- Children may only "shoot" others who are already part of the game.
- No physical touching is allowed when "shooting."
- If rules are broken, the weapon will be removed, and behaviour strategies from the Behaviour Policy will be applied.
- Discussions will be held—either realistic or imaginative—about helping those who are hurt (e.g. medical workers, calling an ambulance, or magical healing potions).

Cultural and Safeguarding Considerations

Staff must be sensitive to the cultural and family backgrounds of children. Some children may have families who have directly experienced violence, war, or displacement. For such families, this type of play may feel inappropriate or distressing.

Key persons should:

- Proactively explain the purpose of superhero and weapon play to parents/carers.
- Address any concerns raised by families with empathy and clarity.
- Recognise that some children who have lived through aggression may use this play as a safe outlet for emotions.

If staff are unsure about how to approach a situation, they must refer to the **Safeguarding Policy** and/or consult a senior member of staff.

Signed on behalf of the nursery.....Emma Middleton.....Date:… August 2025…….