50 things to do before you're five

Making everyday experiences count

Impact report 2026

Eight years of play, place and partnership



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Section 1

Our impact

50 Things to Do Before You're Five began in 2018 in a nursery school in Bradford. We had a simple but powerful goal: to make it easier for every family to enjoy everyday playful experiences that help their young children thrive.

We do this by providing families with 50 fun, achievable things to do together before their child turns five. Through play, children have more opportunities to be active, curious, creative and adventurous, discovering new things about themselves, other people and the world around them.

Every activity offers opportunities to develop skills whilst enjoying time together. These shared experiences naturally create the space for communication to flourish, and when children are interested, excited and having fun, they want to share what they have discovered, ask questions, express their ideas and talk about what they are doing.

> 50 Things to Do provides a joined-up approach and runs like a golden thread through the support available for families and young children. It provides a consistent message for our local partners, frontline practitioners and parents, and ties the different strands together to positively impact on outcomes for children."
>
> – Wakefield Partner

Our activities have been developed to be low or no cost, to need little preparation and in a way that makes the most of the people, places and opportunities that can already be found around families – meaning everyone can join in, whatever their background, circumstance, daily routine or postcode.

What makes 50 Things to Do so special is that our initiative is entirely underpinned by evidence about how young children learn and develop through play, including the importance of communication and language approaches in the early years and the close links between parental engagement and progress.

It has also been developed to support and promote a family's use of their home learning environment, transforming evidence into practical ideas for everyday life and highlighting the important role they already play in their child's learning.

As the 2004 The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education Project Report put it, "for all children, the quality of the home learning environment is more important for intellectual and social development than parental occupation, education or income. What parents do is more important than who parents are".



Rooted in Bradford, built for all places

What started in one nursery school in Bradford has since expanded into an innovative and adaptable place-based approach used by families, practitioners and local authorities across the British Isles.

Through this community-based model, each localised version of 50 Things ends up sharing the same core principles while being rooted in the unique character and spirit of a particular place.

Where a mixture of local parks, libraries, museums, community spaces, organisations and more become part of the 50 Things To Do experience. In turn, this helps more families in a specific area discover what is available on their doorstep while building stronger connections with their communities.

This, in turn, helps families feel a greater sense of belonging, encouraging them to explore their local area with confidence and make the most of the opportunities around them.

50 Things at a glance

20+

local areas have adopted 50 Things since 2018, introducing more place-based playful experiences to more families

50

evidence-backed low or no-cost experiences that encourage play, talk and exploration

1

shared ambition to give every child more opportunities to play, talk, explore, discover and learn through everyday life



More than *just* a list of activities

50 Things to Do brings together evidence, place and play in a format designed to fit in and around everyday family life.

Available through an app and a suite of digital and print resources and supported by practitioners and local partners, our initiative provides a practical bridge between what we know about early childhood development (the evidence) and the experiences families share with their children every day.

603,000
children reached

113,261
unique app downloads

20+
localised offers across the UK

58,634
activities and events accessed



Section 2

Making a difference for families

Parents and carers are their child's first and most important educators. What families do together at home and in their communities can make a lasting difference to children's learning and development, as well as the opportunities and outcomes that follow in life.

This is the home learning environment – and it is at the heart of 50 Things to Do Before You're Five.

To bring this to life, 50 Things To Do transforms the evidence about what matters in early childhood into inspirational ideas families can use in everyday life.

It isn't about recreating in a home environment what's already happening in nurseries or schools. Instead, it is about recognising the learning happens naturally when children and the adults who care for them spend meaningful time together.

> "50 Things to Do helps to top up children's cultural capital pot. It can be used in a bespoke way to support specific areas of need and help them to achieve their potential."
>
> – Kirklees Partner

50 Things To Do encourages these moments through activities that families can enjoy together, using everyday experiences as opportunities for interaction, conversation and connection.

The activities provide families with inspirational ideas on how to introduce more play into their lives, while also helping them understand why these experiences matter.

What families tell us

86%

of parents said that the 50 Things to Do activities provide different opportunities to communicate with their child

70%

of parents said that since using 50 Things to Do, their child has had more opportunities to socialise within their local community

75%

of settings say parents have engaged with more home learning activities since having 50 Things to Do in their setting



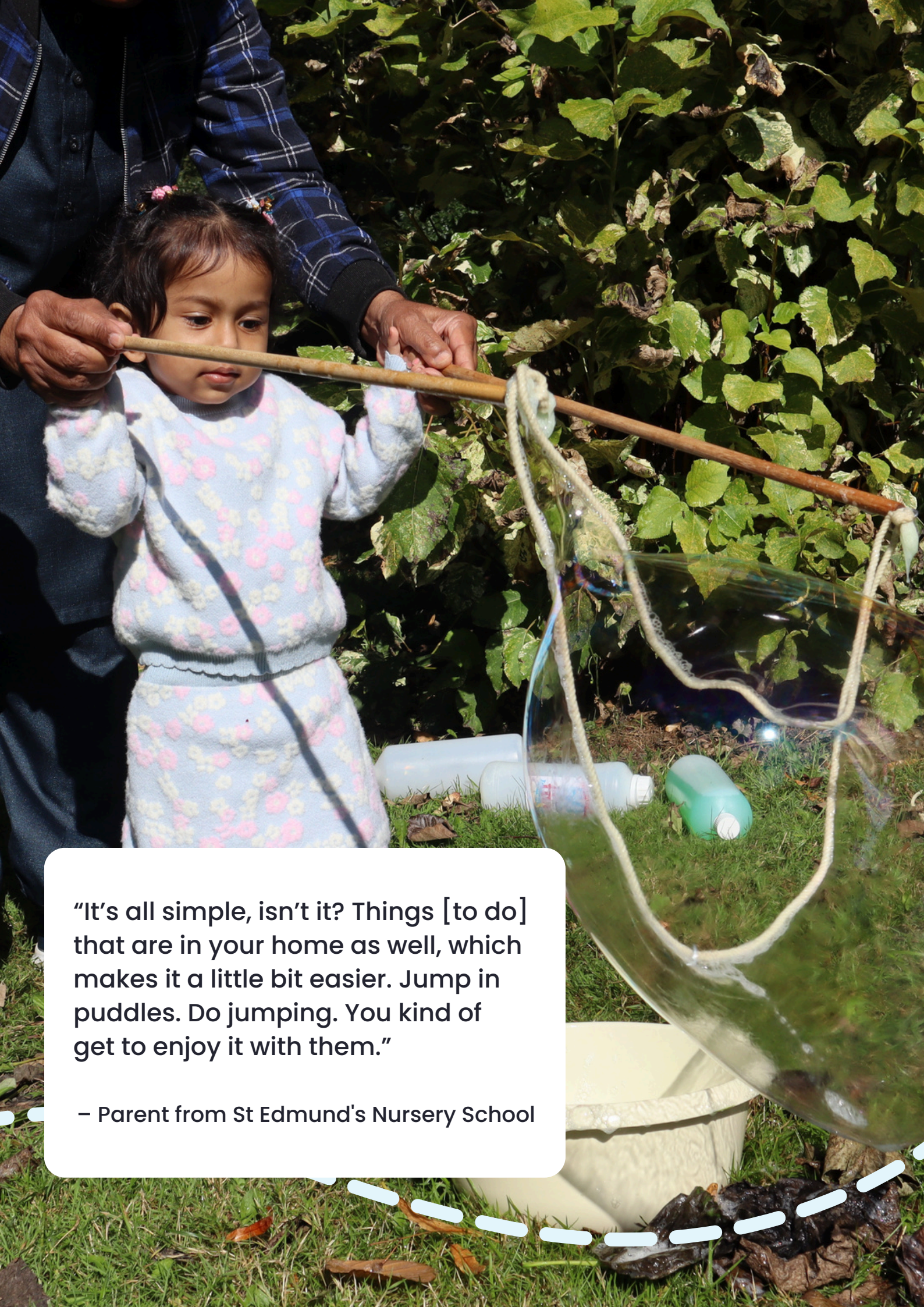
Book suggestions, words to use, ideas for extending activities, and links to local places and opportunities provide families with lots of different ways of exploring each activity time and time again.

This approach supports parents to follow their child's interests, try new things together and recognise just how much learning can happen through everyday life and play.

In Fife

75%

of respondents rated the 50 Things app and website 'excellent', with the remaining 25% rating it 'very good'



"It's all simple, isn't it? Things [to do] that are in your home as well, which makes it a little bit easier. Jump in puddles. Do jumping. You kind of get to enjoy it with them."

– Parent from St Edmund's Nursery School



Practitioner-powered play

Practitioners play an important role in bringing 50 Things To Do to life. For instance, early years settings, Family Hubs – which provide a range of local advice and services under one roof – libraries, health professionals and community organisations use the activities and resources to kickstart ongoing conversations with families to encourage them to enjoy more playful experiences beyond settings.

Every one of them is a vital link between a setting and a family's front door, helping ideas travel from one conversation to the next and from one home to another.

> "It has given parents who are new to the area an insight into the local community and facilities. Enabling them to meet families from the nursery."
>
> – Practitioner



Section 3

Making a difference through place

One idea. Made local

50 Things was designed to be adapted – not replicated.

While the core activities and evidence-informed principles remain the same, each local offer is designed to reflect the unique character, assets and priorities of a community it is based in.

This means 50 Things always looks and feels different from one place to another while retaining the same playful approach that sits at its heart.

Local knowledge makes the difference

Every local 50 Things offer is shaped by the people who know their community best, with commissioning partners acting as a bridge between all stakeholders.

Commissioning partners collaborate with early years services, community organisations and local practitioners, among others, to identify the opportunities that matter most to families.

Local knowledge then informs the content, connections and ways in which families are reached, helping to create an offer that belongs entirely to a specific place rather than a generic, one size fits all approach that is delivered without local context or consideration across different locations.





Local parks



Libraries



Museums



Community Spaces

Local parks, libraries, museums, community spaces, organisations and more become part of the 50 Things To Do experience.

Building on what is already there

Where children are born and grow up can shape the opportunities and experiences available to them. For families experiencing disadvantage, barriers such as cost, transport, isolation or simply not knowing what is available can make those opportunities harder to access.

A place-based approach helps address some of these challenges. It's why 50 Things To Do focuses on low and no-cost experiences and makes greater use of the assets that already exist within communities to help connect families with opportunities they may not otherwise discover.

Rather than creating a separate set of services, it helps places make more of what they already have and encourages organisations to work together around a shared ambition for young children and families.



Local enough to belong, consistent enough to grow

As 50 Things To Do has expanded beyond Bradford, we have learned that localisation and consistency can work together in harmony.

This has allowed us to develop a model where our core framework provides a recognisable identity and evidence-informed foundation, while local ownership provides the relevance, relationships and knowledge needed to make it more impactful in different communities.

That balance has enabled 50 Things To Do to grow across places with very different populations, geography and priorities without losing what makes our approach distinctive.

50 Things To Do isn't simply delivered in a place. It is shaped by it.

> "
>
> "50 Things to Do links in well with our vision to enhance children's health, wellbeing and quality of life through play."
>
> – Fife Partner



Section 4

What we've learned

Eight years of learning, a lifetime of difference

Since the launch of 50 Things To Do in 2018 in Bradford, West Yorkshire, one of the biggest things we've learnt as an organisation is that supporting families in early childhood doesn't mean giving them more information.

What matters most is transforming what we know about early childhood – the evidence, the data, the information – into simple, fun and effective ideas that families are able to experience day in and day out.

This is how simple, everyday moments between children and parents or carers become powerful steps toward giving every child the best possible start to life.

> "The localised approach of 50 Things to Do has helped to provide a targeted approach to areas of deprivation and get a greater reach to families in Oldham. It feeds into a holistic and early intervention approach, which aligns with our goals."
>
> – Oldham Partner

Across more than 20 local authority areas and counting, working closely with families, practitioners, settings and commissioning partners, five lessons have emerged over the last eight years. It's these five lessons that we believe will shape what our work is today and in years to come.

1 Keep it simple

Families need ideas that feel achievable. They're already busy enough and the last thing they need is another thing to think about and add to a list. Our 50 activities are low- or no-cost, they require little preparation and make the most out of what is close to hand.

And that means they're more likely to become part of daily family life – and repeated to the benefit of young children.

2

Start with existing strengths

Most families are already doing what they need to do more than they actually realise. Think singing, talking, interacting, whether it's counting the steps at home, pointing things out on a high street or splashing in puddles at the park. All of this counts.

By recognising these moments as important to learning and development and embedding them into our activities, 50 Things To Do helps families build on what they already do, giving them the confidence to do more of it and begin to understand the life-changing benefits play brings.



3

Make it local

Place – where we live, work and raise our children – creates an abundance of opportunities and moments of connection. Meaning that families are more likely to try out free or budget-friendly things to do in familiar surroundings that are not too far beyond their doorstep.

By rooting our initiative in every area and across different services and attractions – such as libraries, museums, cafes and community centres – 50 Things To Do helps families discover more of what is available locally, connect with other families and a wider network of support and feel, more deeply, a part of where they live.



4

Work through trusted relationships

Early years practitioners across the board help ideas travel. What we mean by this is that they're one of our greatest strengths in turning evidence into actual practice. Moreover, they're trusted, too and a daily point of contact for most families – what they say and do carries far more weight than, for example, a leaflet.

So whether it's an early years educator, a health professional, a Family Hub member or staff or even a librarian, all practitioners can use 50 Things To Do to start and continue two-way conversations with families about the benefits of place-based, playful experiences at home and beyond.



5

Give families permission to play

Which leads nicely into our final idea – everyday experiences matter. For many families, play can feel like something that needs to be planned, perfect or expensive – or, as we've noted earlier, that it's something else to do on top of a growing list.

50 Things To Do, with practitioners leading the charge in delivery, has been designed to strip away that pressure, showing families that play is anything but – and that, if they continue doing what they're done, with a little help from us, they can spend more moments throughout the day playing in a stress-free way that fits into their life. Even a few minutes can have a huge impact on young children.



Less Screen Time More Play Time

The view from the frontline: what practitioners tell us about screen time

One of our key priorities as an organisation is addressing the growing challenge posed by increased screen use in early childhood. It's why we launched the Less Screen Time, More Play Time campaign in February 2025 and why we hosted our first ever national conference in London in November 2026.

Practitioners are at the heart of this effort to help families swap screen time for screenless playful alternatives that contribute to the healthy development of young minds.

Which is why we wanted to better understand what they are experiencing day in and day out in their practice and what they need to have an even bigger impact. Here's what we found out

Key stats

90.4%

of practitioners who use 50 Things to Do say it makes conversations with families about screen time easier

93.1%

of 50 Things to Do users feel confident talking to parents and carers about screen use compared with 79.6% of non-users

97.2%

of 50 Things to Do users have seen screens negatively affect children's development and learning

What we found

Nearly every practitioner sees it

Most practitioners agreed that screens were negatively affecting children's learning and development, with well over half describing it as being “to a great extent”.

It touches every area of development

Spoken language and vocabulary, attention and emotional self-regulation were the biggest concerns, with practitioners also noticing children who “don't know how to play”.

50 Things to Do makes it easier to talk to parents

More than nine in 10 practitioners who use 50 Things to Do said it made it easier to talk to families about screen use and confidently suggest screen-free activities.

Looking ahead

Looking back over the last eight years, we're more confident and inspired than ever of the impact that everyday play can have on families – and how 50 Things is uniquely placed to shape brighter futures for families where they are based.

What began in Bradford has grown into an initiative reaching families and communities across the UK, demonstrating the power of bringing together evidence, local knowledge and a shared belief in the importance of play. But we know there is much more to do.

As we look to the future, our ambition is not simply to reach more families, but to deepen our impact, strengthen partnerships and ensure that every child has opportunities to play, explore, discover and thrive, regardless of their circumstances or where they live.

Our next chapter will focus on three connected priorities:



1 Expanding our reach, nationally and internationally

We want to bring 50 Things to Do to more families and communities, working alongside local authorities, health professionals, early years settings and community organisations.

Building on our place-based approach, we will explore new partnerships across the UK and internationally, ensuring that 50 Things to Do reflects the cultures, experiences, opportunities and aspirations of the communities it serves. Our ambition is to support a growing network of places where play is recognised, valued and championed.

2 Strengthening the home learning environment and parental confidence

Parents and carers are children's first and most important educators – and everyday experiences provide rich opportunities for learning and development.

We want to help more families recognise the value of what they already do, feel confident in their role and discover new opportunities to play, talk, move and explore together.

We will continue to develop resources, strengthen connections between families and practitioners, and build our understanding of how 50 Things to Do influences parental confidence, engagement and children's experiences.

3 Continuing to learn, innovate and evolve

50 Things to Do was born from a willingness to think differently, listen to families and turn evidence into everyday practice. That spirit remains central to our future. As concerns grow about children's screen use and the experiences it may be replacing, we have an important role in championing play, relationships and real-world experiences.

Through our Less Screen Time, More Play Time campaign and the development of 50 Things to Do Beyond a Screen, we will continue to offer families positive, achievable alternatives to screen time. We will keep listening, evaluating our impact and developing new approaches that respond to changing childhoods and the needs of families.



Ultimately, our ambition is about more than growing an initiative. It's about helping to create communities where play is part of everyday life, where families feel confident and connected, and where every child has opportunities to flourish.

Eight years on, we're proud of how far 50 Things has come. And we're even more excited about where it could go next.

50 things to do



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