

WAC

WAC 170-295-2010

What types of play materials, equipment and activities must I provide for the children?

You must:

- Provide a variety of easily accessible learning and play materials of sufficient quantity to implement the center's program and meet the developmental needs of children in care.
- Have a current daily schedule of activities and lesson plans that are designed to meet the children's developmental, cultural, and individual needs. The toys, equipment and schedule must be:
 - Specific for each age group of children, and
 - Include at least one activity daily for each of the following (you can combine several of the following for one activity):
 - Child initiated activity (free play);
 - Staff initiated activity (organized play);
 - Individual choices for play;
 - Creative expression;
 - Group activity;
 - Quiet activity;
 - Active activity;
 - Large and small muscle activities, and
 - Indoor and outdoor play
- Ensure the lesson plan, daily schedule of events, available toys and equipment contain a range of learning experiences to allow each child the opportunity to:
 - Gain self-esteem, self-awareness, self-control, and decision-making abilities;
 - Develop socially, emotionally, intellectually, and physically;
 - Learn about nutrition, health, and personal safety; and
 - Experiment, create, and explore.
- Post the daily schedule and lesson plan in each room for easy reference by parents and by caregivers;
- Keep the daily schedule of events and lesson plans for the past six months on site for inspection;

- Maintain staff-to-child ratios and group size during transitions from one activity to another during the day;
- Plan for smooth transitions by:
 - Establishing familiar routines; and
 - Using transitions as a learning experience.
- Ensure the center's program affords the child daily opportunities for small and large muscle activities, outdoor play, and exposure to language development and books; and
- Afford staff classroom planning time.

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Materials, Equipment, and Activities

You will need to offer an assortment of culturally relevant activities, experiences and materials that are based on developmentally appropriate practice. Developmentally appropriate practice supports the belief that all children are unique and progress through predictable ages and stages at their own pace. Make sure that the activities, materials, and experiences are appropriate for each child in your care.

To engage children in active, meaningful learning it is important that you:

- ◆ Foster positive self-identity and a sense of emotional well-being
- ◆ Develop social skills and knowledge
- ◆ Encourage children to think critically, reason, question, and experiment (as used in pre-reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies)
- ◆ Enhance physical development and skills
- ◆ Encourage and demonstrate sound health, safety, and nutritional practice
- ◆ Encourage creative expression, representation and appreciation for the arts
- ◆ Develop a sense of belonging to the natural environment
- ◆ Ensure the materials and practices of your program reflect the backgrounds and current practices of the children and families enrolled, and
- ◆ Respect and celebrate cultural diversity.

Note: When sensitive caregivers meet children's individual needs, they also may be meeting cultural needs. However, without specific cultural knowledge, caregivers can inadvertently use practices that undermine parents' efforts and may be disrespectful of their cultural values. Encourage the families enrolled in your program to share their home culture, language, and family practices. Provide your staff with training and educational opportunities to increase their understanding of diversity and cultural competence.

The following lists provide examples of developmentally appropriate materials for your center. Younger and older children may enjoy the same materials and a single material can satisfy multiple needs. Consider the interests and abilities of the individual children in your care before deciding which materials are appropriate.

Infants (1 to 12 month-olds) **Social, Emotional, and Creative Development**

Possible materials include:

- ◆ Colorful, simple photos/pictures hanging near a crib or low on the wall, including faces representing different ethnicities, ages, and gender and simple designs
- ◆ Unbreakable mirrors, both small mobile ones and ones mounted on the wall close to the floor
- ◆ Stuffed animals and culturally diverse soft dolls
- ◆ Toy telephones, and
- ◆ Favorite object such as a doll, stuffed animal, blanket, or pacifier.

Intellectual, Language, and Sensory Development

Possible materials include:

- ◆ Objects with different textures such as fuzzy, bumpy, or smooth
- ◆ Rattles with different sounds and shapes
- ◆ Music tapes including classical, lullabies, children's songs, music from different cultures

- ◆ Cloth or sturdy cardboard picture books with realistic drawings or photographs of familiar objects (non-fiction and fiction)
- ◆ Mobiles
- ◆ Busy boxes
- ◆ Nesting cups
- ◆ Floating toys, and
- ◆ Boxes, tubes, spoons, bowls, and buckets made of cardboard, sturdy plastic, wood, or cloth.

Large and Small Motor Development

Possible materials include:

- ◆ Squeeze toys
- ◆ Filling and dumping container with objects that children can drop or scoop something into and take out again
- ◆ Large wooden cubes to push about and climb into
- ◆ Push toys and pull toys
- ◆ Supervised bucket swings
- ◆ Mirror and/or pull up bar mounted on the wall, and
- ◆ Small stairs, platforms, ramps, and other furniture and equipment children can safely climb into, over, and under.

Toddlers (1 to 2 ½ year-olds) **Social, Emotional, and Creative Development**

Possible materials include:

- ◆ Dolls that accurately reflect different cultural groups
- ◆ Props for dramatic play of home and work environments such as stove, sink, baby carriage, vacuum, shopping cart, and play telephone
- ◆ Dress-up clothes
- ◆ Hand and finger puppets
- ◆ Plastic, realistic animals, cars, and people figures representing different ethnic backgrounds, ages, and gender
- ◆ Musical instruments such as bells, triangles, rattles, and wood blocks
- ◆ Art supplies including large crayons, washable felt pens, playdough, chalk board with chalk, paints with wide brushes or blunt ends, and low easels
- ◆ Stuffed animals, and
- ◆ Mirrors



Consider the interests and abilities of the individual children in your care.

Intellectual, Language, and Sensory Development

Possible materials include:

- ◆ Shape and/or color sorting toys
- ◆ Simple interlocking puzzles with knobs (3-7 pieces)
- ◆ Music and story tapes
- ◆ Sturdy, colorful books with simple stories, few details, and familiar objects
- ◆ Magnet boards with shapes, and
- ◆ Smelling jars.

Large and Small Motor Development

Possible materials include:

- ◆ Large push toys and pull toys
- ◆ Cars and riding vehicles with no pedals
- ◆ Low slide, small steps and ramps, tunnels, and balance beam
- ◆ Low, soft climbing platforms
- ◆ Large building blocks
- ◆ Oversized balls
- ◆ Oversized pegboards
- ◆ Jars with lids to screw and unscrew
- ◆ Large beads or spools for stringing on colorful shoelaces
- ◆ Hammering and pounding toys
- ◆ Stacking toys
- ◆ Fill and dump materials and containers
- ◆ Water table, sand table (or large dishpans on low table), kitchen utensils for water or sand play such as cups, funnels, spoons, and tongs, and
- ◆ Tools for dusting and wiping tables.

Preschoolers (2 ½ to 5 year-olds)

Social, Emotional, and Creative Development

Possible materials include:

- ◆ Dramatic play area with multi-cultural props, occupational props, furniture and clothing
- ◆ Occupation prop boxes containing materials to play doctor, office, store, scientist, restaurant, bus driver, construction worker, farm worker, cook, etc.
- ◆ Real housekeeping equipment such as small brooms, dustpans, dusters, window washing supplies, sponges, mops, and dishwashing equipment
- ◆ Self-care activities including dressing and tying frames, hair brushing and tooth brushing (individual sets), face washing, and shoe polishing
- ◆ Puppets with a simple puppet stage
- ◆ Felt boards
- ◆ All sorts of art materials such as paste, clay, chalk, crayons, collage materials, etc., and
- ◆ Sandbox and water play toys.

Intellectual, Language, and Sensory Development

Possible materials include:

- ◆ Puzzles of all types for differing abilities including some with knobs
- ◆ Objects for sorting and classifying by size, shape or color such as large buttons and beads, sea shells, a collection of small cars and trucks, etc.
- ◆ Sequence and before-and-after cards
- ◆ Pattern-making materials including pegs, colored shapes, and stringing beads
- ◆ Books about the world, people, animals, different cultures, and numbers (non-fiction and fiction)
- ◆ Measuring cups and spoons, balance scale and various sizes of containers for filling and pouring
- ◆ Math games to reinforce concepts such as counting, number recognition, more/less, the same, smallest to largest, etc.
- ◆ Language games: vocabulary games, concept games, matching cards, rhyming games, sorting objects or pictures by sound, or memory games, recognizing letters and their sounds
- ◆ Science materials including scales, balances, magnets, magnifying glasses, sea shells, and
- ◆ Simple games such as lotto, dominos, picture bingo, pickup sticks, and sound identification.

Large and Small Motor Development

Possible materials include:

- ◆ Balls and sporting equipment of all types
- ◆ Jump ropes and hula hoops
- ◆ Wheeled vehicles with pedals, scooters, wagons, and wheelbarrows
- ◆ Climbing structures such as ladders, cargo nets, poles, slides, and swings
- ◆ Large block sets
- ◆ Large set of small, interlocking blocks
- ◆ Scooping, tweezing, pouring, stirring, opening and closing, and polishing activities
- ◆ Materials to encourage cutting, pasting, painting, drawing, copying, tracing, writing letters and words
- ◆ Simple sewing activities
- ◆ Carpentry bench with real, child-sized tools (hammer, vise, screwdriver, saw)
- ◆ Materials for cooking projects
- ◆ Materials for gardening projects, and
- ◆ Musical instruments from different cultures.

School-age children (5 to 12 year-olds) Social, Emotional, and Creative Development

Possible materials include:

- ◆ Dress-up clothes with a variety of multi-cultural, real props
- ◆ Puppets, including shadow puppets and marionettes (children can act out their own scripts)
- ◆ Cooperative games, and
- ◆ Dolls that accurately reflect different cultural groups and gender.

Intellectual, Language, and Sensory Development

Possible materials include:

- ◆ Board games of all types, especially those requiring strategy and problem solving
- ◆ Puzzles (50-1,000 pieces), three dimensional puzzles
- ◆ Audio-visual equipment such as blank tapes and CDs for own recordings, tape player, CD player and earphones, records and tapes and CDs of different types of music

- ◆ Science kits and tools including magnets, balances, microscopes, telescopes, prisms, weather kits, and simple materials to do chemistry experiments
- ◆ Typewriter
- ◆ Computers with educational games
- ◆ Books of common interests including fairy tales, myths, animals, contemporary stories about other children, poetry, nature, science, space, magic, math (non-fiction and fiction)
- ◆ Materials for making collections, and
- ◆ Equipment for setting up aquariums and terrariums.

Large and Small Motor Development

Possible materials include:

- ◆ Outdoor and gym equipment of all types, especially organized group games
- ◆ Wide variety of art materials that are readily available
- ◆ Model building materials
- ◆ Large sets of small, interlocking blocks
- ◆ More specialized tools for working on projects or skill development in carpentry, sewing, cooking, music, etc., and
- ◆ Games requiring speed, coordination, strategy, and extended concentration.

Note: 'People color' art supplies are available from local school supply companies or catalogues. Paint, crayons, markers, and construction paper come in 'people colors', which provide more accurate skin tone colors when children are doing art projects such as self-portraits.

Safety and Materials

The materials in a child's environment should be safe. The younger the child, the more careful you must be. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) lists the following potential dangers to keep in mind when selecting materials:

- ◆ Sharp edges and points
- ◆ Small toys or parts
- ◆ Loud noises

- ◆ Cords or strings that can wrap around a child's neck
- ◆ Toys used to shoot or throw objects
- ◆ Equipment inappropriate for a particular age group (pay attention to the manufacturer's age level recommendations), and
- ◆ Electric or battery-operated toys must be "UL Approved" and in good repair (do not allow children to play with wires or batteries).

Keeping the environment safe involves using and choosing appropriate material in good condition. For example:

- ◆ Allow children to use only equipment designed for their size, age, and ability level
- ◆ Read and follow all warning labels that come with equipment
- ◆ Use equipment in safe places
- ◆ Teach children how to use equipment safely and supervise children's play carefully
- ◆ Check equipment frequently for damage
- ◆ Remove damaged equipment immediately and throw out un-repairable equipment, and
- ◆ Make sure children use safety equipment such as helmets, knee pads, and goggles when appropriate.



You will need to provide a variety of activities and accessible materials.

Note: Balloons are one of the leading causes of accidental death in young children. Un-inflated balloons or pieces of balloons can easily get stuck in a child's throat, suffocating the child. Balloons are inappropriate and dangerous for all young children.

Television, Computers, Videos

For older children, watching high-quality TV programs (at home) can have some benefits. However, for younger children caution is advised. The first two years of life are especially important in the growth and development of a child's brain. During this time, children need good, positive interaction with other children and adults to develop language and social skills. Learning to talk and play with others is far more important than watching television.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP, 2003) does not recommend any television for children younger than two years of age. For older children, the AAP recommends no more than one to two hours per day of high quality non-violent television time.

Best Practice limits the use of TV and videos in centers to educational material related to curriculum. TV and videos are never appropriate for infant and toddlers in early childhood programs.

Quantity of Materials

You will need to provide a variety of activities and accessible materials. Having enough materials means:

- ◆ All children are able to select their own activities
- ◆ All children are busy with something interesting, and
- ◆ Children have a variety of fine motor, art, music, blocks, books, science, dramatic play, and math materials available.

It is not developmentally appropriate to expect toddlers to share or know how to take turns. It is a good idea to have multiple sets of everything for the younger children in your care. However, for pre-school children or older, learning how to take turns and how to wait for one's turn are valuable social lessons.

Multiple Purposes Served by a Single Material or Activity

A single material with many uses can meet different developmental needs and interests. Look for materials that are open-ended, meaning there is more than one way to use them. Blocks, playdough, and cardboard boxes are examples of open-ended materials. Their uses vary with a child's age and ability.

A good activity is one that can meet a variety of needs at the same time. For example, you might ask children to make food collages with pictures from magazines after a discussion about what foods help their bodies grow. A collage will extend the nutritional awareness lesson. It also will allow children the fine motor skills of cutting and gluing and the thinking skills of choosing appropriate foods and sorting them into categories.

Planning for Activities That Allow For Differences, Preferences and Abilities

Each child is a unique person with an individual pattern of timing and growth. Children also have individual personalities, temperaments, learning styles, experiences, and family and cultural backgrounds. A developmentally appropriate program adapts for inevitable individual variation among children. This is done by providing a variety of materials and activities that support children's individuality and meet their developmental levels.

When planning activities for your center, please keep in mind that:

- ◆ The developmental range in a same-age group may be two years or more
- ◆ You may have individual children with other in-

terests or skills outside the age range of the group, and

- ◆ You may have children with special needs who require modifications to the activities in order to do certain activities.

In addition, children differ in how comfortable they are with different activities. You will need to be sensitive to cultural and individual differences in your children's preferences and learning styles.

- ◆ Some children learn well by listening. Others need to do something before they understand fully.
- ◆ Some children can sit still for long periods of time. Others need to be free to move about.
- ◆ Some children want to be able to do an activity perfectly before sharing their accomplishment. Others are more comfortable with the trial and error approach.
- ◆ Some children are very outgoing and outspoken with adults. Others are uncomfortable when an adult is speaking to them or watching them.
- ◆ Some children do not like being told what to do. Others need to hear exactly what is expected of them.
- ◆ Some children play comfortably in a group. Others prefer to play alone.
- ◆ Some children cannot wait to crawl into your lap. Others are uncomfortable with being touched.

Children need opportunities to repeat activities. With repetition, children gain increased confidence, skill and feelings of achievement. However, repeating an activity should be the child's decision, not the caregiver's.

Children learn best when they choose activities they find meaningful. As a caregiver, you should:

- ◆ Prepare the environment with a variety of interesting and culturally relevant activities that cover a range of skill levels
- ◆ Help children choose activities they are likely to find challenging and satisfying
- ◆ Listen and observe as children play with materials
- ◆ Rotate materials to maintain interest

- ◆ Help children's further exploration and learning by
 - Asking meaningful questions
 - Talking about logical relationships
 - Making suggestions
 - Adding more complex materials or information to extend children's thinking, and
- ◆ Avoid taking control of the play by letting children take the lead.

Young children do best working and playing in small groups. Total group instruction is not an effective way of teaching children or solving problems. Most conversations should be with individual children or small groups. Make sure that:

- ◆ Caregivers have many opportunities throughout the day to speak and relate with each child individually, and
- ◆ Children have many opportunities to express their own thoughts and opinions to caregivers and to each other in a variety of ways.

In order for lead caregivers for each group of children to prepare activities that are interesting and age appropriate, they need time to:

- ◆ Plan activities ahead of time, consulting with the program supervisor as necessary
- ◆ Coordinate with other staff members about their contributions to the curriculum
- ◆ Make sure all materials and equipment are prepared in advance and are in good working order, and
- ◆ Practice the activity, so the presentation to the group will be smooth and engaging.

Note: *There are disadvantages in making your own sample to show children. They may feel the purpose of the activity is to make something that looks like yours. Children can be disappointed in their own product compared to yours.*

Storing and Displaying Materials

Having an organized method of storing and displaying materials will increase the quality of the program you offer. It will:

- ◆ Set an example of care and respect for the materials
- ◆ Result in fewer pieces being lost or broken
- ◆ Cut down on the time staff spend helping children find an activity or its missing pieces
- ◆ Allow staff to group materials into areas, such as language, manipulatives, building, housekeeping, etc., and
- ◆ Allow children to feel more independent and competent.

Note: *You may want to choose some container other than the original one to put out on the shelf. Open bins, baskets, or trays are often sturdier and allow children to see the pieces they want rather than dumping the entire contents on the floor or table.*

Containers and accessible storage shelves should have labels to encourage self-help. Ideas for labeling include:

- ◆ Putting a colored dot on a basket and the same colored dot on the shelf where it belongs, and
- ◆ Drawing the outline of an object such as a hammer on the pegboard showing where the hammer should hang. As a language experience, write the name of the toy where it should be placed.

You need to have different levels of storage if multiple age groups share an area at different times of the day. Store materials with sharp, small, or otherwise dangerous parts out of reach of younger children and ensure older children pick up all small toys and put them away.

Materials should be rotated to maintain interest and meet specific individual children's needs.