

Tips for Making Materials Accessible for Children with Varying Abilities

All children vary in their abilities to move and manipulate toys. Children with special needs may depend on adult support if they are not mobile, need assistance with using toys, or help with engaging with other children. It is very important to consider each child's abilities in order to determine the type of support they need during play.

Materials should be accessible for *every child*. Materials should be accessible whenever children are content and interested in play. When children are upset, do they need emotional support or opportunities for stimulation and play? If a child is upset, remember to offer play activities as one possible solution.

Selecting appropriate materials

- Consider the various types of materials that should be accessible to all children (fine motor, language, math, science, art, dramatic play, sensory play, diverse materials, soft furniture and toys, etc.).
- Choose types of materials based on developmental level (physical and cognitive) and individual needs. Accessibility may look different for each child.
- Communicate with parents/guardians and consider IEP/IFSP information and goals.
- Include adaptive materials to meet considerations of special needs.
- Include materials that are easy to use as well as challenging items to help develop and improve skills.

Making materials accessible

- Make materials accessible to all children whenever they are content and interested in play.
- Consider mobility levels and the ability to move around within the room and play spaces.
- Move materials to children or children to materials so children can easily reach and use them.
- Help children use materials if they can't manipulate them independently such as reading a book while holding them, helping a child grasp a maraca, or hold a crayon.
- Offer children choices. The amount of choices will depend on the individual child. The choices should encourage play without overwhelming the child. Consider the child's skill and interest level.
- Remember that everything does not have to be accessible at one time.
- Adjust play schedules to work around therapy sessions.

Creating an environment that supports play

- Consider the abilities and number of children enrolled when selecting the types and amount of materials.
- Organize play spaces that are designed for inclusion of all children (large areas that are easy to move around in, adaptive equipment move to or placed in different areas, no barriers such as thick mats or narrow spaces that are difficult for wheel chairs, etc.).
- Arrange toys on low shelves in easy reach or in open containers that can be placed near children.
- Allow enough space for children to play together to support developing social skills while using materials together. Children can practice cooperation and sharing as they help make materials accessible.

Be intentional

- Talk to children about what they are doing, describe toys, engage in language activities such as singing songs or reading books, and encourage them to notice and engage with other children.
- Use varied materials within play spaces for easy access to different types of experiences (ex. in dramatic play include soft dolls with different skin tones and realistic soft animals (softness, diversity, science, drama), musical toy phones (music, fine motor, drama), books with diverse people about home life and work roles (diversity, literacy).
- Rotate materials frequently to encourage interests and provide more challenge as they grow and develop.