

Tips for Making Materials Accessible for Infants

Materials should be accessible whenever infants are content and interested in play. When infants are upset, do they need routine care such as a bottle, a diaper change, physical comfort or do they want to play? Infants need care and emotional support as well as opportunities for stimulation and play time. If a child is content or if you have tried several options and he or she is still upset, offer appropriate play activities.

Infants vary in their level of movement and ability to manipulate toys. Non-mobile infants are not able to scoot or crawl on their own and depend on adult support to engage in play. As they develop, infants begin to sit, roll, creep, crawl and walk. Tracking toys visually develops into reaching, grasping and then being able to manipulate toys. It is very important to consider each child's abilities in order to determine the type of support they need during play.

Appropriate materials for infants include

- Soft rugs, furnishing and toys to encourage relaxation and provide comfort.
- Rattles, busy boxes and grasping toys to encourage fine motor skills.
- Realistic dramatic play toys such as diverse dolls and food, pots and pans, phones and soft animals.
- Board books that include diverse people, animals, and familiar experiences.
- Small balls, play gyms and floor mats to support unrestricted active play on the floor.
- Musical toys such as rattles, maracas and shakers.
- Nature/science items such as realistic animal books and toys, living things such as plants or a pet fish.

Making materials accessible

- Give every child unrestricted play time on the floor and access to appropriate materials throughout the day.
- Make materials accessible for children whenever they are content and interested in play.
- Move materials to children or children to the materials so children can easily reach and use them.
- Help younger infants with materials until they can manipulate materials independently such as reading a book with them or shaking a rattle to encourage visual tracking, reaching or listening to sounds they make.
- Vary materials for older infants to support their developing interests and ability to make choices.
- Follow the infant's interest level and remember that everything does not have to be accessible at one time.
- Remember that too many options accessible at one time could overwhelm young infants.

Creating an environment that supports play

- Consider the abilities and number of children enrolled when selecting the types and amount of materials.
- Organize different types of safe play spaces that are designed for infants to easily move around and place infants in different area (include rugs or blankets, appropriate infant support pillows, comfortable floor space, etc.)
- Arrange toys on low shelves allowing nearby infants to reach materials or in open containers that can be placed near children.
- Allow enough space for children to play together to support developing social skills

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 infants.
- 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), nested pots and pans and/or nesting cups (drama, fine motor), books with diverse people about care routines and home life (diversity, literacy).
- Rotate materials frequently to encourage interest and provide more challenge as they grow and develop.