

Tips for Making Materials Accessible for Toddlers

Materials should be accessible whenever toddlers are content and interested in play. When toddlers are upset, staff should ask themselves, are they hungry, do they require a diaper change, do they need physical comfort or do they want to play? Although toddlers are more independent than infants, they still need their routine care needs met, emotional support and opportunities for stimulation and play time. When a child is upset, it may be necessary to try several different options to determine if the child needs routine care or is ready for engaging in play.

Toddlers vary in their level of movement and ability to manipulate toys. Younger toddlers may not be able to walk on their own. 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 toddlers include

- Soft rugs, furnishing and toys to encourage relaxation and provide comfort.
- Busy boxes, bead mazes, snap beads, and puzzles to encourage fine motor skills.
- Blocks (wood, plastic, foam) and props to support block play (people, animals, vehicles).
- Realistic dramatic play toys such as diverse dolls and food, dishes, play clothing, and play sets.
- Sturdy board and paper books that include diverse people, animals, and familiar experiences.
- Small balls and riding toys to encourage gross motor skills.
- Musical toys such as rattles, maracas and shakers.
- Nature/science items such as realistic books, posters, plastic animals, and living things such as plants or fish.
- Math items such as shape sorters, telephones, nesting cups, ring stackers, and electronic toys with numbers.
- Safe art materials such as paper, crayons, finger paints, and chalk.

Making materials accessible

- Offer *every* child unrestricted play time and access to appropriate materials throughout the day.
- Make materials accessible whenever the child is content and interested in play.
- Organize materials on low shelves or in containers that make access easy for children.

Creating an environment that supports play

- Consider the abilities and number of children enrolled when selecting the types and amount of materials.
- Organize safe play spaces that are designed for toddlers to move around without being disrupted.
- Include duplicates of popular toys to prevent peer issues.
- Gather and sort scattered materials periodically so that children can easily identify and use them.
- Include containers for sorting, carrying and dumping as those are popular toddler activities.

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 talk to you.
- Pretend with children during play activities (such as caring for a doll or talking on the phone) and encourage them to notice and engage in play with peers.
- 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.