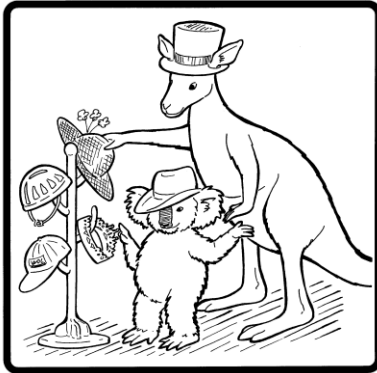


# The Amazing Impact of Providing Enough



Child care providers can help young children be successful in both learning and social interactions by providing *enough appropriate play materials* and by *scheduling enough time* for children to play. Planning and energy focused on providing "enough" can have a profound effect on children's behavior and the overall tone or climate of an early childhood program.

## + PROVIDE ENOUGH PLAY MATERIALS

Children are more likely to get involved in play when there are fun, challenging, and fascinating play materials available. When the choice of materials closely matches their interests and abilities, they are more likely to become—and stay—engaged in constructive activities. Children who are fully engaged require less adult intervention, learn more, and are less likely to display inappropriate behavior.

Provide multiples: It is easier for a group of young children to play together, and ultimately learn to share or take turns, when there are multiples of the same item in each play area. It is not developmentally appropriate to expect very young children to share toys and other favorite materials.

Address children's interests and developmental stages: It makes sense to consider children's interests and preferences when selecting toys and play materials for an early childhood program. It makes even more sense to satisfy their interests with a variety of activities and toys so children with different abilities can participate. Thoughtfully selecting play materials to match both individual interests and developmental needs ensures that there are enough play materials to keep children engaged.

## + SCHEDULE ENOUGH TIME

In addition to having enough materials, young children need extended periods of play uninterrupted by demands to hurry up, clean up, or give someone else a turn. *When children are seldom given the opportunity to play with the blocks or swing until they are satisfied, they are likely to become uncooperative.* They focus their energy on holding onto toys, being first in line, and staying on the swing! Time is a tool that can be used to ensure that children feel satisfied.

Plan with flexibility: While you may, out of necessity, have to schedule some activities at specific times (it is your group's turn on the playground), most of the day should be planned to allow a flexible ebb and flow. Children should feel secure about either having enough time to fully play out an imaginative play scheme or assured about being able to return to an activity at a later time.

Allow for children's interests and individual pace: Plan your schedule by recognizing that, although there may be a few activities scheduled by the clock, time in an early childhood program should be arranged around children. When you create a program that matches children's interests and sense of timing, you eliminate stress and the negative behavior that often results. (This includes supporting children who have difficulty staying with a task over time.) Help your program fit individual children's needs, rather than trying to make children fit your program.

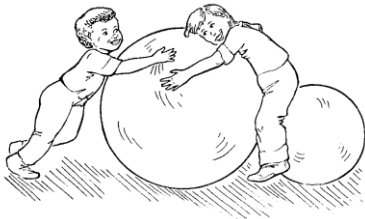
Value process over product: Children's sense of satisfaction comes from being engaged with a set of materials and working through an imaginative play scheme. To them, the process is often more important than the finished product. Rather than looking for an "end" to the activity or a particular product, give children plenty of time to explore materials and savor the process.

## Try It Out

You have probably seen how smoothly art activities go when each child has access to the materials—scissors, markers, paper, glue sticks—whenever he or she is ready to use them. Or you may have seen the opposite, when only three scissors or one glue stick were supplied for a group of six children!

Here are suggestions to ensure that you have enough other important play materials:

- Balls - provide different kinds, sizes and colors of balls, and offer enough to allow one for every child.
- Trucks/cars - have many items, but also have a number of duplicate trucks/cars.
- Blocks - better to purchase a lot of pieces of the same set than to have a few pieces of different sets.
- Dramatic play items - provide duplicates of popular items, such as firemen hats, tutus, and tea pots.
- Riding toys - when four or five children can each ride their own, each child is learning and growing.



Keep in mind that it is better to have *less* variety and *more* of the same or similar toys or materials than to have more variety and *less* of the same or similar popular items. If this concept is new to you, just try it out. The children will quickly demonstrate the effectiveness of this simple strategy.

## A Child Care Provider's Question

**QUESTION:** *Sharing is an important social skill that I believe all children need to learn. How do I teach the children in my program to share?*

**ANSWER:** True sharing means *to equally apportion; to use or to enjoy together with others*. This definition does not include the expectation that a child will give up anything! In fact, the majority of young children are not developmentally ready to give up a toy or play opportunity so that another child can play instead.

Obviously, you will not be able to have enough tricycles, wagons, and swings for every child. Children in group programs sometimes must wait their turn. But there needs to be a balance between this necessity and what is known about supporting young children's social and emotional development.

Children under five do share, trade, and take turns when each child has one of the same toy or kind of play material. You help by providing an environment with plenty of materials for each child to play with, and maybe even an extra one or two to encourage children to trade. As a general rule, younger children appreciate enough identical toys (they all want the same red ball), whereas older children are contented when there are enough similar toys

available (one ball for each child, perhaps of different sizes and colors).

When you understand and anticipate the fact that a child's being asked to give up what he or she is doing is not sharing, you can apply this knowledge to the introduction of new materials and play activities, too. When you introduce new materials or play items, look for similar materials with the same play value or theme. For example, instead of introducing one new puzzle to a group of 16 preschool children, plan to rotate four or five new puzzles into the classroom. This strategy spreads the interest and helps children meet their need to be satisfied.

By balancing what is known about child development and how you operate your program on a daily basis, you create an environment where children can naturally learn to share whenever they are ready. And you are helping make sure they can be ready.

