

# Child Care plus+

## + 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.

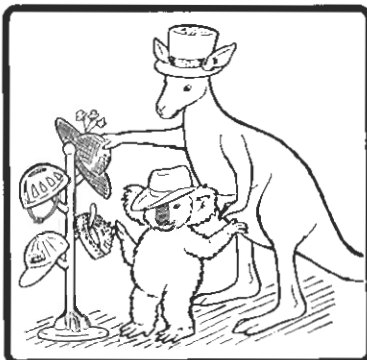
Provide multiples: It is easier for a group of young children to play together, and ultimately learn to share or take turns, when there are multiples of the same item in each play area. It is not developmentally appropriate to expect very young children to share toys and other favorite materials.

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. +

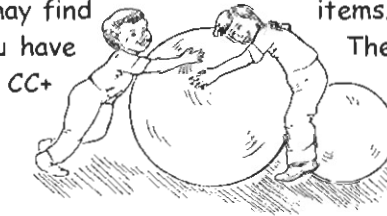
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## + IN FOCUS

Sometimes it can be a challenge to find the right toys and play equipment for the child who seems unable to become—and stay—engaged in play for very long. This is when parents, therapists, special education teachers, and other early intervention specialists can help. Here are some tips to help you use their expertise:

- ★ Ask about the child's *favorite* toys and play equipment. You may be able to improvise with similar kinds of toys or equipment to provide a play experience that is likely to be of interest to the child during longer play periods.
- ★ Look for adaptations that can be made to toys you already have. Large knobs or handles can be added to puzzles; a non-slip surface makes building towers easier; and other easy-to-do adaptations can be made with little or no expense. When the toy "works" for the child, the child stays engaged longer.
- ★ Let other team members know what is not working and schedule a time to brainstorm. You can use their skills and experience to identify new solutions.
- ★ When you come up with a good idea, share it. In a group care situation, you have the added advantage of input from other young children. You may find that, as you get to know the child you have countless ideas to offer as well. +



## + TRY IT OUT

You have probably seen how smoothly art activities go when each child has access to 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 its effectiveness. + SLM

## + CONNECTING WITH FAMILIES

Parents can help you discover their child's interests, experiences, current abilities, and temperament. When you take advantage of opportunities to receive parent input, you can learn a great deal about their child's favorite toys, play materials, foods, songs, stories, routines, daily activities, and more! This information can be extremely helpful as you acquire play materials, arrange a successful early childhood learning environment, and create a child-centered schedule.

Programs use a variety of effective methods for gathering information about children from parents, and many providers use more than one. Many programs request this type of information on the forms parents complete when they enroll their child in the program. Of course, as time passes, children change, so initial reports are not enough. Other effective methods include: a questionnaire that is periodically sent to parents; a survey listing typical age-appropriate toys/materials and frequent program activities asking parents to circle or check off their child's favorites; an interview/notes during regularly scheduled parent conferences; and home/school notebook in which you each relate the child's current interests.

Attentively listening for—and recording—ideas about children's current interests during regular interactions with their parents combined with listening to—and observing—each child from day to day will provide much significant information. You then have what you need to create an individualized and developmentally appropriate program. + SLM

## + PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Providing enough appropriate play materials and allowing enough time for play is easy to do when you put your mind to it. Here is a list of "do's and don'ts" to help you implement these concepts in your program or group.

### DO'S

\* Provide more of the same toys or play materials than there are children in a defined play area. It is important to include enough materials to successfully engage each child in play. Children are more likely to learn to share when they are given more than enough similar items, such as five or six shovels and buckets in the sandbox for the three or four children who typically play there.

\* Find out more about each child's individual interests by asking parents for input and suggestions so that your selection of play possibilities includes opportunities for a wide variety of experiences. Look for non-traditional play experiences that might spark a child's interest (typewriter, colorful scarves, broken appliances to take apart, a guitar or drum set, old row boat).

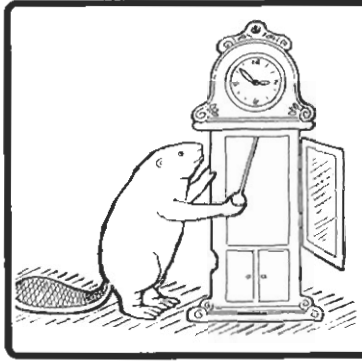
\* Recognize each child's pace and allow enough time for every child to finish at his or her own rate. Keep a new activity available until children begin to lose interest and let you know their need to play with these materials has been satisfied. When a child's pace is slower than others in the group, the child's sense of satisfaction may be disrupted if he or she is required to finish at a certain time. You also need design your program to support and prepare activities for children who finish quickly or want to come and go during other planned activities.

\* Find toys and play materials that are developmentally appropriate and at the same time encourage age-appropriate play. A child's parent or a specialist working with the child will be able to suggest toys and activities that use the child's abilities while at the same time resemble materials that the other children are interested in. A rattle, for example, is not a typical toy for a four-year-old and is not the best choice for a four-year-old with a disability who is a member of a preschool group. A musical instrument provides the same kind of sensory play, is a more age-appropriate toy, and is more likely to invite peer interaction.

\* Recognize that children measure time by their

interest level and not by the clock. When children are bored with an activity, they think it is time to be finished. When children are interested in an activity, such as reading a book or playing with a friend, they think it cannot possibly be time for nap. Knowing this about children's sense of time will help you be prepared and adjust your schedule to accommodate children's timing.

\* Offer ways that children can return to an activity. Regularly scheduled routines like mealtime, outdoor play, and even going home may make it impossible for a child to finish a play activity. Whenever possible, build in ways for children to return to an activity later. For example, designate a shelf or two in the program for "I'm still working on this" containers so a child can safely save a play dough sculpture in an airtight container until later in the day, or allow the paint and easels to stay up until morning.



### DON'TS

\* Don't chase children from one activity to the next with bells and timers for the sake of "giving everyone a turn." This practice is not only developmentally inappropriate but is ineffective and frustrating for both providers and children. Asking a child to play for only five or ten minutes with a toy so that someone else can have a turn is not an effective way of setting up a schedule. Young children are naturally focused on their own needs and may not be able to think about another child's desire to play.

It is developmentally appropriate to allow children to tell you when a particular project, structure, or dramatic play scheme is completed. Some children enjoy returning to a project later. If, for example, a child wants to make changes or add to a picture already hung up, be sure that he or she has the opportunity.

\* Don't make children wait to play with new materials. When you introduce something new—puzzle, book, costume, introduce three or four similar items. Even an exciting learning center, such as an old tree stump, hammers, nails, and goggles, can be "duplicated" in other centers by providing nails and old ceiling tiles or golf tees and styrofoam or cardboard slabs.

Providing enough time and materials directly results in children's meaningful engagement and active learning through play. And you make it happen. + CC+

## + 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 introducing new materials or play items, look for other materials with the same play value or theme. For example, instead of introducing one new puzzle to a group of 16

preschoolers, 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. + CC+

## + RESOURCE REVIEW

Observation is the foundation for decision-making about whether children have enough time and materials. *The Art of Awareness* by Deb Curtis and Marge Carter (2000) offers ideas, activities, and experiences, much more than just a set of checklists and facts to learn. Chapters cover seven different aspects of children's lives and how to observe them, as well as tips for gathering and preparing documentation. *The Art of Awareness* is an inspiring and practical look at how to see the children in your care—and how to see what they see. Available for \$30.95 from Redleaf Press at 800-423-8309 or [www.redleafpress.org](http://www.redleafpress.org).

*CHILD CARE plus\** is designed to support inclusion of children with disabilities in early childhood settings by supporting child care providers, parents, and community service providers including social workers, therapists, physicians, teachers, and administrators.

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