

CHILD CARE

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Supporting Inclusion in Early Childhood Settings

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ADAPTING TOYS AND PLAY MATERIALS

Although adaptation is most commonly associated with children with disabilities, toys can and should be adapted whenever any child--or group of children--needs extra assistance. The following ideas illustrate different ways that early childhood toys and play materials can be adapted.

Make toys easier to grasp. You can make toys easier to grasp either by altering the toy or by substituting a different shaped toy that serves the same purpose.

✕ Add a knob. A round ball or large bead can be glued over the small peg handle on a puzzle or wind up toy. If a puzzle piece has no handle, a spool, bead, or drawer pull works.

✕ Attach a ring. If a stuffed animal is large and does not have arms or legs that make it easy to grasp, you can attach a bangle bracelet or metal ring securely to the animal.

Make the toy more intriguing. Children may not know how to play with a toy or the toy may have, over time, lost its appeal. Minor adaptations can make toys more intriguing and encourage children to explore them more fully.

✕ Group toys together. Combining toys can suggest a play theme. Surrounding a stuffed animal with feeding equipment or arranging a puzzle about airplanes next to toy airplanes help children make play connections and increase the chances that one of the toys will spark a child's imagination.

✕ Add a surprise element. Many familiar toys can be rejuvenated by adding a sensory experience or using the toy in an unpredictable way. Freezing pretend food before putting it in the housekeeping area, arranging puzzle pieces in a play scheme, and putting scent on a stuffed animal or baby lotion on a doll add a surprise element to ordinary play.

Increase the interaction value. Adaptations can create new opportunities for children to interact.

✕ Provide duplicates of the same toy. It is even preferable to have more than one for each child. Picture 3 or 4 children in a sand box with six shovels, six buckets, and six sand sieves. Children are happy to offer each other a bucket or give up a shovel because there is always another one to play with.

✕ Add props. When it is impossible to provide duplicate toys,

arrange toys with props. Having more than one 48" ball may not be practical, but arranging the ball with large plastic hoops, construction cones, and perhaps a smaller ball or two, increases the chances that a group of children could happily play a game together.

Add extra sensory input. Some children have disabilities that limit their ability to process information with one or more of their senses. Adaptations that add extra sensory input take advantage of all possible learning channels.

✕ Add food extracts. Adding familiar smells may encourage children to use toys differently or explore them more fully. Vanilla extract, when added to a rattle, may encourage a child to grasp the toy and bring it to her mouth.

✕ Add new texture. Attach Velcro dots to blocks or a material with an unusual texture to a play activity, such as sponges to water play or sand to finger paint. Be aware that some children may have adverse reactions to certain textures.

✕ Vary temperature. A stuffed animal that is warm may encourage more cuddling. Water play is always a surprise when the temperature changes from one day to the next.

✕ Increase visual contrast. If a child has difficulty seeing the hole for a puzzle piece or cannot distinguish between two parts of a snap, use paint or a marker to make the hole where puzzle pieces fit darker or paint one part of the snap a different color. When coloring or painting, it is helpful if the color of paper is different from the color of the table.

Promote independent play. Many play experiences require children to be fairly independent; adaptations can give children information about what is expected.

✕ Store toys where children can get them without help. Store toys on low shelves, in open containers, and in the general area in which they are used. If animals or people are popular in the block area, consider storing them in the block area.

✕ Give children information about how to play. Starting a structure or arranging toys as if someone has been playing with them gives children information about how to begin, such as a doll sitting in a high chair with a bib and feeding equipment on the tray.

✕ Secure toys near the child. Wrist rattles, a ball hung from the ceiling, and toys attached to a stroller or wheelchair with plastic links are good examples. Toys should not be secured near a child any longer than she is interested in playing with them, however. Once a child becomes tired of a toy attached to the wrist, it is an annoyance, not a play thing! + smg

In This Issue

From the Source	Getting Answers
Making It Work	Six Ways To Adapt A Paint Brush
Notes from Home	We learned to share in child care.
Spotlight	South Dakota ECISP Toy Lending Library
What Do I Do When	I have to adapt my program?
Resource Review	Toys: Tools for Learning

+ FROM THE SOURCE

Getting Answers

JJ wants to swing, but he is too big for the infant swings and too unstable to swing safely by himself. His preschool teacher holds him and swings quite often, but the other four and 5-year-olds swing independently.

Children at Doodles Day Care sit on the floor during story time. Charley is comfortably positioned in his wheel chair. His child care provider wants to know how to position him on the floor with the other children.

Shallalla's near blindness is a concern to her family day care provider; she seems to be missing the opportunity to participate in so many fun activities. Her lack of interest in toys and activities is becoming a worry.

Sydney has been hitting other children again. Her teacher is getting calls from parents and is quite upset herself over what appear to be uncontrollable outbursts.

Jerome came to nursery school after spring break using new signs to tell his chums about his vacation. His caregiver was disappointed that she had been unable to learn the same signs so she could understand him.

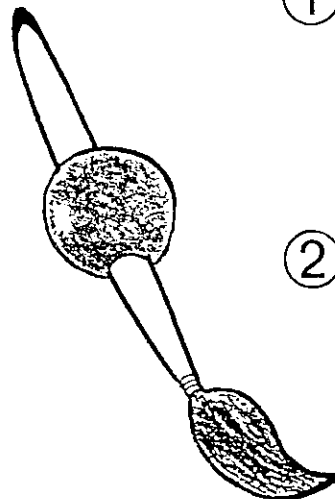
Therapists and specialists are experts in their particular fields--motor, communication, audiology, early intervention, psychology--and can help you meet the social and play needs of young children in your program. To get the best answers from them, you need to:

1. Describe existing routines/activities in your program (invite therapists/specialists to see your program).
2. Ask about the child's ability to participate in these routines/activities.
3. Express your desire that the therapist or specialist assist you in finding a way to make it possible for the child to participate to the fullest extent possible.
4. Ask for help to adapt toys or routines/activities or for a demonstration of positioning that would allow the child to participate to the fullest extent possible.
5. Try out the suggestions and report the results. +

+ MAKING IT WORK

Six Ways To Adapt A Paint Brush

Paint brushes are typically difficult for young children to grasp because the handles are so thin and they quickly become slippery with paint. Fortunately, there are some very easy ways to make a paint brush easier to hold onto.



- 1 Take a soft rubber ball or ping-pong ball; drill a small hole through the center. Insert the brush handle in the hole; it should fit snugly. The child grasps the handle by holding the ball.
- 2 Find a bicycle (or tricycle) handle bar grip. (Found at most bike repair shops or discount stores wherever bikes are sold.) Place the handle of the paint brush in the grip, being sure that it fits snugly. You may need to put clay inside the grip to keep the paint brush securely attached.
- 3 Use firm clay and mold it around the handle of the paint brush to make it thicker. Allow the clay to dry thoroughly. It may not stay permanently but can easily be replaced.
- 4 Cut a small strip of thick cloth; wrap it around the paint brush handle, and tape securely. The cloth will get soggy with paint and needs to be replaced after each use.
- 5 Old-fashioned foam hair curlers work well. Simply insert the paint brush handle into the hole in the foam.
- 6 Take a small strip of pipe insulation foam (found in hardware stores) and wrap around the handle of the paintbrush. Use electrical tape and secure the foam firmly around the handle. +

+ NOTES FROM HOME

We learned to share in child care.

My wife, Mari, and I have learned so much about our son's needs that it is sometimes hard to remember that not everyone has had our "on-the-job training." Erick is a very active 5-year-old and always wants to be in the middle of activities at Marigold Montessori Preschool. We chose the program because of the Montessori emphasis on individual pace and needs, and Erick has thrived there. They seem to be able to "forget" Erick is blind and give him opportunities to try everything the program offers.

Imagine our surprise when we had a conference with Erick's teacher and found that she had been struggling to find ways to allow Erick to be more involved with the creative art activities she offers. We have always found our son to be very creative, but this dilemma made us realize that part of Erick's creativity is able to be realized because we discovered small adaptations that make it possible for him to show us this wonderful talent. We needed to learn to "share" with our son's teacher, rather than make her go through the same trial and error that we did.

Now, Erick is creating right along with the rest of the kids, using textures (sandpaper, pipe cleaners, glitter) to "draw," manipulatives (clay, wood, wire) to "sculpt," and scent (vanilla, chocolate, perfume) to direct his play in the Living Skills area. What once time seemed to be a daily hurdle for both Erick and the teacher now has become a wonderful way to expand the options for all of the children in the program. All because we shared. . . . +

+ SPOTLIGHT

South Dakota Early Childhood Inclusion Support Project Toy Lending Library

Can you picture what it would be like if two early childhood specialists had an opportunity to put their heads together to develop a statewide system to support child care providers and other early childhood professionals working toward the inclusion of young children with disabilities in community-based settings? Gera Jacobs and Joanne Wounded Head of the South Dakota University Affiliated Program had the opportunity to make this vision a reality when they received grant funding from the South Dakota Office of Special Education to develop the South Dakota Early Childhood Inclusion Support Project.

Their vision resulted in a multifaceted support program designed to provide assistance for individuals involved in inclusion at many levels. Project personnel provide inclusion training workshops across the state of South Dakota. Information on inclusion is easily accessed through the projects statewide lending library and toll-free line. On a more personal level, they have established a network of early childhood professionals and parents in South Dakota who share information, problem-solve, and support one another on issues related to inclusion. And, on a very practical level, the project has established and maintains the **Toy Lending Library**.

The **Toy Lending Library** evolved as a result of one of the initial project activities--a statewide survey of the needs of individuals working in inclusive settings. An issue that surfaced over time was the basic need programs had for awareness of and access to adaptive toys and feeding equipment as well as typical toys and materials that could be playable for a wide range of developmental levels.

Based on this information, the team began an extensive review of the literature to help determine the current "best practices" in the field. The goal was to develop a list of durable, quality equipment that would help children with disabilities experience success in community-based early childhood programs and schools--and help early childhood professionals feel supported in their efforts to provide quality programs for all children.

As a result, a wide range of materials is now available

through the **Toy Lending Library** to help public school teachers and child care professionals meet the individual needs of children with disabilities in their classrooms and programs. Staying consistent with the spirit of inclusion is important to the project--the toys available for loan are quality materials that are exciting and appropriate for all children but may have important features for children with a range of disabilities.

Toys are cataloged according to use. For children working toward independence at meal time, the lending library offers

a variety of feeding equipment like dycem placemats to keep dishes in place and eating utensils with special grips to make handling easier. Fine motor materials include "hand-squeeze" scissors which do not require pulling apart to open and a magnetic fishing game with four poles that might engage a small group of children in a fun motor development activity. A favorite gross motor toy is the therapy ball--a 29" yellow rubber ball that is used and enjoyed by all members of the group. Toys for language development range from magnetic story boards to a doll house to exciting water toys--again selected to encourage small groups of children to play together, learn from one another, and to provide natural opportunities for children to develop and practice new skills.

The South Dakota Early Childhood Inclusion Support Project has accomplished a great deal since its inception. Early

childhood professionals have found support, information, and toys and materials that have helped them and the children they work with experience success in early childhood programs. +

South Dakota Early Childhood Inclusion Support Project



If you would like to learn more about this model, contact:

South Dakota University Affiliated program
Department of Pediatrics
USD School of Medicine
414 E. Clark
Vermillion, SD 57069-2390
1-800-658-3080 (V/TTY)



+ WHAT DO I DO WHEN

QUESTION: *I have to say it . . . I really like my child care program! I have been very careful in what I choose for the program and feel that it is "just right." I also just attended a session at a conference about adapting for children who have disabilities. My questions are: Do I have to adapt? When do I have to adapt? And how will I know what needs adapting?*

ANSWER: It is crucial for you to understand that including young children with disabilities should not change your program into something that it isn't. Adaptions do not necessarily mean large changes in the routines, play materials, or environment. Adaptions are made for individual children based on what each one needs in order to fully participate in the program.

You should also understand that child care providers make "adaptations" all the time! Giving a toddler a sippy-cup instead of his bottle is an adaptation; taking extra time with a group of children who all have "that nasty cold" is an adaptation; and providing a number of different sizes and kinds of paint brushes means that each child can find one which is specially adapted to his or her needs.

So . . . **when** do you adapt? When it is clear that the child will not be successful with what is currently available. For example, when a child with a visual impairment who likes to play with particular puzzles has difficulty finding the ones she likes in the stack of puzzles, you could put a small Velcro dot on the edge of the puzzle to make it easier to find by feel.

And **how** do you know **what** adaptations to make? Parents and specialists working with the child can give you some hints that have been helpful for them. And use your own knowledge of what children like to play with and how they play to guide your observations of whether or not a child is successful in his or her play. The child who may *never, ever* put her finger into

finger paint can be offered a number of adaptations that can still make finger-painting successful for her: rubber gloves, a spoon, paint brushes, sponges, etc.

The important thing is to recognize that the adaptations you make help ensure that children in your program are able to get all the benefits from a program that is "just right." + kmg

(If you have a question about children with disabilities in child care settings, please send your question to CHILD CARE plus+.)

+ RESOURCE REVIEW

Toys: Tools for Learning is an easy-to-understand, illustrated brochure published by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Includes tips to help you make wise toy choices for young children, a toy shopping checklist, and a large, detailed chart of "some good toys and activities for young children" by age. Single copies are 50 cents each; 100 copies are \$10. NAEYC order #570. To order, call (202) 232-8777 or 1-800-424-2460, or write NAEYC, 1509 16th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036-1426.+

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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