

# Conducting An Inventory of Play Materials

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In our busy schedules, we often overlook the fact that materials get worn out, books torn, and puzzle pieces lost. It is important to maintain a stimulating, functional, and attractive environment for children and adults in order to have a high quality program.

Conducting an inventory of play materials is a good way to start to refresh and refurbish materials. You can then move on to round out your collection.

## 1. Look over the books you have on the book rack accessible to the children, and those in storage.

### A. Remove to repair or discard:

- Books with torn or scribbled pages
- Books without covers

### B. Discard:

- Books that show graphic violence or inspire fear, whether they are fantasy or factual (this may include Disney and fairytale books for preschool and young children)
- Books that show stereotypes of social, racial, or gender differences.
- Books that are completely unsuitable, such as old school texts.

### C. Give to another group:

- Appropriate books too young for your group
- Appropriate books too old for your group

### D. Look through your books to see if you have a balanced, comprehensive collection:

- Do you have many books that engage and delight children, and are appropriate for your group?
- Do you have factual books as well as fantasy? (e.g. science, nature, picture dictionaries)
- Do you have books about different races or cultures?
- Do you have books about people with differing abilities? (e.g. physically disabled, wearing glasses)
- Do you have books showing people of all ages from infancy through old age?
- Do you have books that show men and women, boys and girls in non-stereotypic roles? (e.g. men caring for babies or cooking, women doctors or mail carriers)

## 2. Get the puzzles in order:

### A. Put aside to complete (or discard) puzzles with missing pieces.

### B. Look over the subject matter in your puzzles for variety:

- Do you have nature/science puzzles?
- Do you have puzzles about community service people?
- Do you have easy, medium, and hard puzzles to suit all of the children?

### C. Look at where the puzzles are kept:

- Is the puzzle rack easy for children to use?
- If the puzzle is in a box, is the box sturdy and well labeled?
- Are the puzzle racks or boxes put on open shelves for "easy access" by children, really easy to access?
- Are the stored puzzles complete and organized?

## 3. Look over the small building toys and manipulatives.

### A. Are the legos, duplos, and other small building toys stored in separate, labeled containers?

### B. Are the manipulatives such as pegs and pegboards, beads of different sizes for stringing, and other fine muscle toys complete and stored in sturdy labeled containers?

### C. Are small building toys and manipulatives well spaced (not crowded) on open labeled storage shelves?

**4. Look through your dramatic play area(s).**

- A. Do you have dress-up clothes for boys as well as girls?
- B. Do you have dress-up clothes and props for several themes? (e.g. housekeeping, work, fantasy, leisure)
- C. Do you have props representing different cultures? (e.g. dolls of different races, foods, eating utensils)
- D. Is the dramatic play area well organized?
  - Clothes hung up, clean and repaired
  - Dolls and doll accessories in good repair
  - Dishes, food, stove, sink, refrigerator, tables and chairs, and other house play props in good repair and well maintained.

**5. Evaluate your block area.**

- A. Are the blocks organized on labeled shelves, with the heavier ones on the lower shelves?
- B. Do you have enough space, blocks, and accessories for at least 3 children to play in the block area?
- C. Do you have at least two different types of blocks? (e.g. unit blocks, large hollow blocks, cardboard blocks)
- D. Do you have a variety of accessories of appropriate size stored with the blocks so it is clear that they can be used together?
- E. Do you have “play people” of different races, ages, gender?

**6. Look at the soft, cozy things you offer.**

- A. Do the children have a soft, relaxing place to do reading or quiet play?
- B. Do they have many soft toys of appropriate interest level? (e.g. puppets, animals, dolls, “beanie babies”)
- C. Are the soft things clean? Are they easy to keep clean? (e.g. pillow cases that come off, washable toys)

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