

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)

Revised 5/14



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