

Tip Sheets

Creating a Rich Play Environment



One of the roles of an early care and education professional is that of the architect of the environment in which children play and learn. The following are some strategies to create an enriched environment for play:

Ensure that children have enough time each day to become immersed in their play.

Reserve a long, uninterrupted block of time for child-directed play. Children need time to plan their play, create and negotiate roles, gather or create props and then engage in their play.

Children generally require:

- 30–60 minutes to develop and complete a play scenario.
- Large blocks of time for imagination to develop and social interactions to occur.

Provide a variety of props for children to use that stimulate and enrich dramatic play and role-playing.

- Include a combination of props that are realistic, related to a theme—such as menus for a restaurant—and some props that can be used in multiple themes (phones, keys, etc.).
- Following a field trip or visit from a community professional, collect items/props related to that individual's profession or business to make available to children. For example, after a visit to a local florist include, pots, dirt, trowels, artificial flowers, etc. to enable children to enhance their learning and play.

Include toys and props to stimulate dramatic play and role-playing in other areas of the environment.

- Include hard hats and tool belts in the block area and woodworking center.
- Include paint palettes/smocks in the easel area.
- Include cameras, butterfly nets, safari hats, etc. in the science center.

Display pictures and books throughout the play environment of different people doing different types of jobs and activities to remind children of the many roles they can take on in their play.

- Include examples of various genders doing a variety of jobs such as a female super hero, male nurse, a female police officer, etc.
- Provide examples of a variety of cultures and different ways of living such as a cabin in the woods, camping in a tent, a nomadic family living in a movable structure, etc.
- Provide pictures and stories that illustrate many different professions, sports activities, means of transportation, etc. that stimulate play ideas.

“Children need the freedom and time to play. Play is not a luxury. Play is a necessity.”

~ Kay Redfield Jamison

Encourage children to extend their play beyond the play center.

Create opportunities for children to engage in dramatic play in other areas of the environment.

- Children playing with playdough in the art area can create baked goods for the bakery.

- Children at the water table can wash dishes for the restaurant, etc.
- Transform the literacy center into a school, post office or library.
- The dress-up area can become a shoe or clothing store, etc.

Use role-playing and pretending in other activities and routines such as transitions and story time.

- Have children pretend to be animals as they transition to outside play.
- Give children opportunities to act out or retell stories read during story time.

Additional Resources for Information on Play

National Association for the Education of Young Children

<http://www.naeyc.org>

Zero to Three

<https://www.zerotothree.org>

For more information, visit www.inclusivechildcare.org.

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