

MATERIALS - What & How

Another aspect of the learning environment are the materials available to children each day. Too often, we get busy and just have the same materials available all the time. Changing up the materials is very important for keeping the children engaged and promoting learning across multiple developmental areas. Gee Whiz is adding a component to our monthly program called, "Add & Enhance." This is a list of materials for the different center areas (including outside) that you can add to reinforce out monthly units. Our goal is to help you "mix things up" to enhance the learning environment even more! That said, here are some very basic ideas of materials you should have on hand in each of the most common learning areas. If you are on a limited budget (and who isn't?), thrift stores and/or yard sales can be great resources for toys and materials IF they are in good shape and can be washed/cleaned. Many of these materials can be stored in large plastic tubs to make bringing them out and putting them away easier for you.



ART

- Paint (all colors)
- Paintbrushes (different sizes for children with different levels of fine motor control)
- Construction paper
- Felt & craft foam
- Colored art tissue
- Coffee filters
- Paper plates (small and large)
- Crayons/markers (washable) - Again, provide both thin and thick markers/crayons.
- Child-safe scissors (loop scissors for children with limited fine motor control)
- Old newspapers/magazines/catalogs
- Watercolors
- Stickers
- Washable stamp pads & stamps

DRAMATIC PLAY/DRESS-UP

- Clothing - men's, women's, children's - be sure to reflective of different cultures
- Plastic play food (including ethnic foods)
- Empty food cartons stuffed with paper and taped shut
- Toy dishes, silverware, cooking pots/pans
- Play kitchen
- Child-sized cleaning tools (e.g., mop, broom, dustpan, vacuum)
- Dolls & plush animals
- Doll bed and high chair (if possible)
- Plastic hats (must be washable)
- Dress-up clothing for different careers + props associated with each
- Index cards, notepads, crayons/markers
- Toy cash register
- Paper shopping bags (or fabric shopping bags)
- Cardboard boxes - They can become ANYTHING!

MATERIALS - What & How (Con't)

BLOCKS

- Table blocks - assorted types based on the developmental levels of the children (e.g., Duplos®, bristle blocks, magnet blocks, etc.)
- Floor blocks (larger, wooden blocks and/or cardboard blocks)
- Toy vehicles (cars, trucks, buses, trains)
- People figures (all ages, male/female, different ethnicities)
- Cardboard boxes (all shapes & sizes)

MANIPULATIVES, MATH & SCIENCE

- Empty cardboard boxes with flaps taped shut (for building)
- Puzzles (wooden and jigsaw)
- Stringing beads - Just make sure they are safe for children under 3.
- Lacing cards
- Busy boxes
- Playsets
- Unbreakable magnifiers & child-safe binoculars
- Pegboards
- Calculators with large buttons
- Toy cash register with play paper money
- Counters (safe for children under 3)



LITERACY & WRITING

- Books, books, books! - Board books and paperbacks including poetry, nonfiction and fiction
- Notebooks
- Index cards
- White paper (lined and unlined)
- Writing tools (e.g., pencils, washable markers, crayons)
- Children's magazines
- Cookbooks (can go in DRAMATIC PLAY as well)
- Magnetic or foam letters

GROSS MOTOR PLAY & MUSIC/MOVEMENT (for indoors or out)

- Large blankets or bed sheets
- Pillows
- Parachute (if available)
- Balls (assorted types and sizes)
- Orange cones
- Hula hoops
- Riding toys (with and without pedals)
- Tricycles
- 4-wheeled scooters
- Large plastic trucks
- Climbing apparatus
- Bubble solution & wands
- Beach balls
- Sand box (if outdoors) including buckets, shovels, rakes, etc.
- Toy leaf rakes
- CD player and CD's OR digital music device the children can use
- Rhythm band instruments

MATERIALS - Arrangement

When you run a family child care program, space is a premium! For many of you, your home is also your “school.” This makes the arrangement of space and materials a challenge. You will know best how to arrange furniture and materials to meet the needs of both your family and your program. But here are a few ideas to help you get started!

Interest Areas

What is an Interest Area?

Some people call these “learning centers.” Others call them “interest areas.” Basically, these are areas in your learning space where there is a “focus.” The focus might be building/construction or art. It might be dramatic play or language. Because you are in your home, you more than likely will not have the type of space a teacher might have in a preschool setting. That is OK! Think about the interest areas that would benefit your group the most and then start there. A rug might be a great way to designate a “building/constructing” area. A child-sized table and chair set might work for an art area. Think creatively! Use the internet for ideas. Pinterest is a great place to start!



Storage Matters!

Again ... you are utilizing your home space as your program space (in many cases). This makes storage solutions more important than ever! Plastic bins with lids can be a great way to store things like dramatic play materials. When you need them, just bring out the bin. When the day is over, the children can help pack them up and put them away. This also teaches children responsibility! There are so many different storage options out there. Check your local discount department store or online retailer for options.

Baskets and/or bins with lids can be great tools for organizing materials for quick set-up and then putting away. Think about materials and toys that have many pieces. You can create baskets/bins for these and print out a picture to tape to the front of the basket/bin. This helps children put materials/toys back where they belong at the end of the day. Again, a great way to promote responsibility!



MATERIALS - Arrangement

A place for diapering. A spot for group experiences. Your outdoor place space. All of these areas are important and require thought and planning. At Gee Whiz, we totally understand how challenging this can be when your living space and your teaching space are one in the same. Here are few ideas on how you can maintain your living space while incorporating your “teaching” space at the same time.

A Place for You & Your Family

In the end, your home is your home. While it may double during the day as your “teaching space,” it is your home. Make sure to have a place you can sit during the day that is comfortable for you. That may not be the floor! If space is an issue, consider smaller upholstered chairs instead of large couches. Make sure any upholstery you choose can be easily cleaned because it will need to be!

Plan a place which can be your “office” space. You will need a place to do paperwork, send emails, attend webinar training, etc. This does not need to be an entire room! It could simply be a small table in the corner of your bedroom or a section of the kitchen counter. You might need to keep you paperwork in a portable file box with a handle so you can stash it in a closet and easily retrieve it. Again, think creatively!



Learning Everywhere!

When planning how you will use your space, make sure to remember that learning takes place everywhere! That includes indoors, outdoors and even in the bathroom (when potty training and learning to wash hands). While you might not have a lot of space to work with, you can have a rich learning environment nonetheless. For instance, perhaps you don't have a “permanent” water play area. No worries! A long plastic tub that you put on a picnic table and fill with water can work as a water table just as well as one you need to buy. A large cardboard box added to your outdoor play space can be transformed by the children into so many things. And... once the children are done playing with it, it can be recycled.

If you have a designated space indoors for your program, you can use rugs, bookcases, and storage devices to divide your space into interest areas (as mentioned before). You can also set up interest areas outdoors simply by adding materials. For instance, maybe you want to set up an exploration area where children can dig in your backyard. Just add child-safe trowels, hand rakes, garden gloves, buckets, etc.

Make sure you have plenty of materials and arrange your outdoor play space so that it is safe for children as they engage in free play. For instance, if you have a climbing apparatus, you do not want to put a sand play area near there. Riding toys should have an area where they must “stay” as well. This would be far from where children are running. Safety is the key!

