



# Infant/Toddler Learning Environments

Research tells us that children from birth to age three learn best in environments where they feel safe, have secure relationships with adults, and are free to explore. Designing the physical environment is vitally important in setting the stage for early learning experiences. It is a large part of instruction in the early care and learning field. Although infant and toddler classrooms may not be specifically divided into interest areas, opportunities to experience a variety of materials are essential for learning. Spaces should be designed with the infant and toddler in mind with low shelving, spaces for movement, spaces for privacy, and spaces for interacting with adults and peers. This document can help with classroom environment staging and maintenance. Please feel free to reference it often and add to it where appropriate.

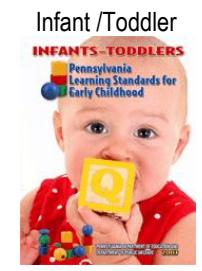
Sensory and Creative Experiences	Language and Literacy Experiences	General considerations	How to choose materials? Keep in mind:
<p><b>NOTES:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create an environment filled with a variety of sensory experiences including exposure to different scents, sounds, sights, and textures.</li> <li>• Include materials that entice all of the senses including things that make noise such as wind chimes, things to look at such as black and white patterns, simple pictures, and more complex artwork, things to feel such as floor coverings with a variety of textures, things to smell which can be provided through use of various fragrant sprays, flame-free candles, scented dough (be conscientious of allergies).</li> <li>• Provide space, time, and materials for infants and toddlers to explore art and sensory items.</li> <li>• Materials will be mouthed. Be sure they are safe, age appropriate and non-toxic. Use materials that can be washed frequently. Constant supervision is a MUST!</li> <li>• Infant and toddler art experiences are sensory experiences and should focus on process not product. Be very conscientious not to offer a model for replication.</li> <li>• Sensory bottles and bags filled with various materials are a safe way to expose infants and toddlers to a variety of items. Just be sure lids are secured tightly and can not be removed by the</li> </ul>	<p><b>NOTES:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporate story telling, reading stories, lap games, finger plays, and singing into daily practice.</li> <li>• Talk to children about their immediate environment and experiences.</li> <li>• Acknowledge children's attempts to communicate by repeating their vocalizations, and by adding words to their attempts to communicate.</li> <li>• Allow children access to books and rotate books frequently. Young children interact with books in multiple ways including mouthing them. Have durable books available for infants and toddlers to physically manipulate.</li> <li>• Strive to incorporate books that positively reflect diversity in culture, ages, gender, races and abilities.</li> <li>• Include books with pictures of real objects from the child's everyday experiences.</li> <li>• Read to individual and small groups of children (no more than three children at a time) many times throughout the day.</li> <li>• Incorporate softness to make an inviting, cozy reading area.</li> <li>• Incorporate sign language in daily practice to enhance children's ability to communicate through non-verbal means.</li> </ul>	<p><b>NOTES:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Infants and toddlers naturally gather around caregivers, have separate areas in your room where adults locate themselves so that there are small "clumps" of children rather than one large group.</li> <li>• Adapt the environment to the changing needs of the children.</li> <li>• Think about appropriate size and scale. A rug that is four feet by four feet can be large enough for an effective learning center for infants and toddlers.</li> <li>• Consider how you will provide boundaries that will allow for supervision as well as privacy.</li> <li>• Use mirrors. They are not only interesting for the children, but can help you to see around corners throughout the room.</li> <li>• Think about color and lighting, and adding interesting tone and textures.</li> <li>• Avoid overstimulation.</li> <li>• Develop a system to rotate toys and materials.</li> <li>• Materials should be durable and washable.</li> <li>• Be aware of how space may effect behavior: large open spaces encourage active movement, small enclosed spaces promote intimate groupings and social interactions.</li> <li>• Include spaces for personal storage of both the children's items and the adult's</li> </ul>	<p>How to choose materials? Keep in mind:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>SAFETY</b> – Non-toxic Smooth edges No choking hazards Age-appropriate</li> <li>2. <b>DURABILITY</b> – Warranty Age-appropriate</li> <li>3. <b>ADAPTABILITY</b> – Multiple uses</li> <li>4. <b>INSTRUCTION</b> – Developmentally appropriate Age appropriate</li> <li>5. <b>ECO-FRIENDLY</b> – Many programs are looking for ways to incorporate environmentally friendly materials into the classroom ~ using them as on-going teaching tools.</li> </ol>

<p>children.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Place a bit of water on a high chair tray to let infants experience water play. Older children can use smaller water bins. Water play should be closely supervised as children can drown in as little as two inches of water.</li> <li>Children will mouth sensory items.</li> <li>Infants and toddlers are naturally messy. Plan, prepare, and provide for what comes naturally.</li> </ul>		<p>items. Adult items should be stored in an area that is inaccessible to the children.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Include adult places in the overall room arrangement where families and teachers can communicate about details of their child's day, where families can feel welcome, and where teachers can feel comfortable.</li> <li>Decorate the room with the child's perspective in mind...hang objects over the diaper changing area or over cribs, place photos and children's artwork at their eyelevel, for infants and toddlers this may mean securing items to the floor where children lay and crawl.</li> <li>Move non-mobile infants from one area to another periodically to give them access to different experiences.</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>MATERIALS:</u></b></p> <p><b>Sensory Materials:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flameless candles (to provide experiences with different scents, be attuned to allergies)</li> <li>Sensory bottles filled with potporri (poke small holes in plastic to let scent through)</li> <li>Mobiles</li> <li>Small bins for water play</li> <li>Items made from various textures</li> <li>Wind chimes</li> </ul> <p><b>Art Materials:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Large, non-toxic crayons</li> <li>Large paper taped to a surface</li> <li>Non-toxic finger paints</li> <li>Large non-toxic chalk with chalkboard</li> <li>Tempera paints</li> <li>Painting tools</li> <li>Easy-to-use blunt scissors (for older toddlers)</li> <li>Home-made dough</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>MATERIALS:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cardboard books</li> <li>Fabric books</li> <li>Big books</li> <li>Puppets</li> <li>Class-made books</li> <li>Rocking chair</li> <li>Area rug to add softness</li> <li>Book rack or baskets to neatly organize books</li> <li>Child-sized furniture</li> <li>Pillows</li> <li>Puppets</li> <li>Larger sized adult seating where child and adult can cuddle</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>MATERIALS:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adult sized furniture</li> <li>Unbreakable mirrors</li> <li>Low, open shelving</li> <li>Area rugs</li> <li>Cubbies or bins for personal storage</li> </ul>

The PA Learning Standards for Early Childhood are research based standards that identify key learning areas of development for children. The Standards guide practitioners to intentionally integrate developmental knowledge with the attitudes, skills, and concepts children need to make progress in all learning areas.

It is important and best practice to document the Learning Standards in lesson planning, children's artwork and display such as experience charts, graphing etc.

For more information:



<http://websites.pdesas.org/ocdel/2010/4/30/47302/page.aspx>

**Play gives children a chance to practice what they are learning....They have to play with what they know to be true in order to find out more, and then they can use what they learn in new forms of play**

--Fred Rogers of Mister Rogers' Neighborhood

**USEFUL TOOLS**

**ITERS-R**  
 Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale  
*Designed to assess group programs for children from birth to 2 ½ years of age*

**ECERS—R**  
 Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale  
*Designed to assess group programs for preschool-kindergarten aged children, from 2 through 5 years of age*

**FCCRS**  
 Family Child Care Rating Scale  
*Designed to assess family child care programs conducted in a provider's home*

**SACERS**  
 School Age Care Environment Rating Scale  
*Designed to assess before and after school group care programs for school-age children, 5 to 12 years of age*

<http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~ecers/>

<b>Motor Experiences</b>	<b>Routines and Rituals</b>	<b>Cognitive Experiences</b>
<p><b>NOTES:</b></p> <p><b>Gross motor Considerations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gross motor equipment should be provided both indoors and outdoors.</li> <li>• Gross motor equipment follows safety guidelines and has required fall zones and surfacing.</li> <li>• Provides for development of a variety of skills including extending arms and legs, raising and lifting head, rolling over, balancing, crawling, standing, cruising, throwing, kicking, sliding, pushing and pulling, jumping, hopping, climbing, riding a tricycle, etc.</li> <li>• Young infants need safe spaces, protected from mobile children, where they can move freely.</li> <li>• Older babies need places to practice new skills and to climb about the environment freely.</li> <li>• Toddlers need space to run and jump and do risky things where they can be protected from injury.</li> <li>• Music is a great way to get children moving. Offer a diverse selection of music for the children to listen and move to.</li> <li>• Be intentional about the amount of time you play music for the children. It should be a meaningful experience rather than background noise.</li> </ul>	<p><b>NOTES:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessible and convenient routine care furniture, including furniture for meeting feeding, diapering/toileting, nap/rest needs, as well as storage of personal items.</li> <li>• Organize things so that each child's belongings are kept together, where parents or providers can locate them.</li> <li>• Furniture should be child-sized.</li> <li>• Include adult seating for daily routines</li> <li>• Diapering/toileting areas are located near a sink and near appropriate storage.</li> <li>• Diapering area should offer some sense of privacy while allowing visual accessibility to the rest of the group.</li> <li>• Locate diaper changing and food preparation in separate areas, protected from one another.</li> <li>• Cribs/cots are 36 inches apart.</li> <li>• If space permits, sleep and play areas should be separate.</li> <li>• If space permits, provide a private area for breastfeeding mothers.</li> </ul>	<p><b>NOTES:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cognitive experiences happen in every area of the classroom when children interact with materials in the environment.</li> <li>• Materials that enhance cognitive experiences include dramatic play and construction materials.</li> <li>• Cause and Effect toys are particularly effective for babies</li> <li>• Incorporate dramatic play materials through-out the environment and outdoors for spontaneous, child-initiated discovery and play.</li> <li>• Provide materials that can be stacked.</li> <li>• Position block play in a location that is protected from traffic where building structures can not easily be toppled.</li> <li>• Include shapes and patterns throughout the environment.</li> <li>• A live plant or animal is a great enhancement to any environment. Be creative when displaying these live items so that they can be visible to children while remaining safe. One idea is to place an aquarium behind a plexiglass partition in an area the children can not access.</li> <li>• Use visits outdoors to enhance scientific discovery and to extend experiences beyond the classroom.</li> </ul>

It is becoming increasingly clear through research on the brain as well as in other areas of study that, childhood needs play. Play acts as a forward feed mechanism into courageous, creative, rigorous thinking in adulthood.

--Tina Bruce, Professor, London Metropolitan University

<p><b><i>Fine Motor Considerations:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fine motor materials should be accessible to children daily.</li> <li>• Rotate materials frequently so children can practice different skills, find new materials, and use toys that they have used before.</li> <li>• Offer toys with varied levels of difficulty.</li> <li>• Organize toys on open shelves.</li> </ul>		
<p><b><u>MATERIALS:</u></b></p> <p><b><i>Gross Motor:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Climbing equipment</li> <li>• Natural items such as logs, stumps</li> <li>• Slide</li> <li>• Tricycles</li> <li>• Balls</li> <li>• Large foam blocks</li> <li>• Push and pull toys</li> <li>• Tunnels</li> <li>• Rocking boat</li> <li>• Various types of music</li> <li>• Scarves</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Fine Motor:</i></b></p> <p><b><i>For infants:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rattles to shake and grasp</li> <li>• Small soft grasping toys such as animals, rings, or dolls</li> <li>• Safe hanging items to bat at or to grasp</li> <li>• Clean teething toys</li> <li>• Large pop beads</li> <li>• Cause-and-effect toys</li> </ul> <p><b><i>For toddlers:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Containers to drop objects into</li> <li>• Busy boxes</li> <li>• Larger manipulatives such as links or interlocking blocks</li> <li>• Large beads to string</li> <li>• Simple lacing toys</li> <li>• Puzzles with knobs and larger pieces</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>MATERIALS:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child-sized chairs and tables</li> <li>• Individual cribs/cots</li> <li>• High chairs</li> <li>• Diapering table with storage close by</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>MATERIALS:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Class pet</li> <li>• Lightweight, hollow brick blocks made of cardboard</li> <li>• Fabric covered blocks</li> <li>• Wooden blocks larger than 2 inches</li> <li>• Hard and soft plastic blocks of different sizes</li> <li>• Shapes sorters with geometric blocks</li> <li>• Blocks with bells inside</li> <li>• Homemade blocks</li> <li>• Hard foam unit blocks</li> <li>• Nesting blocks</li> <li>• Peek-a-blocks</li> <li>• Vehicles that do not present a choking hazard</li> <li>• People representing diversity in ages, races, cultures, abilities and gender</li> <li>• Animlas of varying types</li> <li>• Dolls</li> <li>• Soft animals</li> <li>• Pots and pans</li> <li>• Toy telephones</li> <li>• Hats</li> <li>• Scarves</li> </ul>