

Introduction and Preparation for the Focus Area – My Favorite Things for Play and Learning

Introduction

During the first 18 months of life, children are usually referred to as young infants (birth to 8 months) and mobile infants (8 to 18 months). Children between the ages of 18 and 36 months are usually called toddlers.

In Focus Area #1, **About Me**, and in Focus Area #2, **My Family and Community**, many of the activities supported Learning Goals from the Social and Emotional Domains of Development and Learning.

In this Focus Area, **My Favorite Things for Play and Learning**, many of the activities will support Learning Goals from these three Domains of Development and Learning:

- Cognitive Development
- Physical Development and Health
- Creativity and Aesthetics

All of the topics have a strong emphasis on the Cognitive Development, Physical Development and Creativity and Aesthetics Domains of Development and Learning.

Consider reviewing the Cognitive Development and Physical Development and Health Domains in the *Arkansas Child Development and Early Learning Standards* for information that will help you be better prepared for the topics of study in the Focus Area, **My Favorite Things for Play and Learning**.

Toddlers and their toys are a natural. From infancy through the toddler years, the preschool years and beyond, there is a strong connection between children and their toys. There is also a strong connection between their toys and children's development and learning. Toddlers develop social, emotional, physical, language and cognitive understandings and skills when they play with appropriate toys. Caregivers who are involved with and who interact with toddlers as they play with their toys are essential to the development of the skills just noted. Toys also support children's creative development.

A review of the *Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS)* indicates that there is a strong connection between the quality of a program and the toys it has available for children. For example there is a reference to "softness" which includes easy-to-clean soft toys such as dolls and stuffed animals being accessible for children. Blocks, pretend play, sand and water play, music and movement, active physical play and toys that promote the development of eye-hand coordination are also part of ITERS. Therefore, this Focus Area, **My Favorite Things for Play and Learning**, connects to ITERS, to high quality programs, and to best practice in programs in which toddlers are enrolled.

The Creative Curriculum for Infants, Toddlers and Twos, Second Edition, page 293, suggests that you look for toys with these characteristics:

- simple
- colorful
- safe and washable
- open-ended (variety of uses)

On page 293, this same publication emphasizes safety and health as follows:

Keeping Children Safe and Healthy

In selecting toys for infants, toddlers, and twos, ask yourself the following questions:

- Is it solid and without breakable parts; sharp or jagged edges; or exposed nails, wires, pins or splinters?

- Is it made of washable, nontoxic materials?
- Is it too large to be swallowed (at least 1 ½ inches in diameter) and free of parts that might break off and become lodged in noses, ears, or windpipes?
- Are doll's heads and limbs secure? Are facial features molded rather than sewn on?
- Is it free of cords and strings that could become wound around a child's neck?
- Is it stable and free of parts that could pinch or pierce children or trap their hair or clothing?
- Are hinges and joints covered?
- If made of cloth, is it nonflammable or flame-retardant (not merely flame-resistant)?

During the Toddler Topic, My Senses and Play, there are several activities that focus on sand and water play. Again, from *The Creative Curriculum for Infants, Toddlers & Twos*, Second Edition, page 391, comes the following health and safety standards for sand and water play:

Keeping Children Safe and Healthy during Sand and Water Play

- Supervise children who are playing with sand and water closely. Be ready to step in to prevent injuries.
- Teach toddlers and twos a few simple rules such as "Keep the water in the basin."
- Use individual trays or tubs to reduce the spread of germs.
- Use only fresh water in water tubs and empty the tubs after each use. Standing water is a drowning hazard and an ideal environment for bacteria to grow.
- Sanitize water tubs and props after each use, using a mild bleach solution of 1 tablespoon of liquid chlorine bleach to 1 gallon of water or 1 teaspoon of liquid chlorine bleach to 1 quart of water.
- Cover outdoor sandboxes when they are not in use, to keep animals out of them.

The Creative Curriculum for Infants, Toddlers & Twos, Second Edition, by Diane Trister Dodge, Sherrie Rudick, and Kai-lee Berke, is published by Teaching Strategies, Inc., Washington, DC (2006)

Teacher Note: *The toys and materials and related activities that are included in this Focus Area should be an ongoing part of your curriculum for toddlers. Each and every day toddlers should be playing with soft toys, toys and materials that engage their senses, toys that encourage them to pretend, to explore, to build and to develop their large and small muscles, and toys that make lots of noise. Toys are children's vehicle for developing and learning.*

In this Focus Area and in the Focus Areas that follow, you will find activities that may not directly relate to the Focus Area. There will be many sensory activities involving things children can see, touch and manipulate. You will also find activities that are repeated from earlier Focus Areas. These sensory activities and repeated experiences are included because toddlers learn through their senses and through repetition.

Through both planned and spontaneous activities, caregivers can provide opportunities for toddlers to discover many things.

Teacher Notes

- In the Focus Area, **My Favorite Things for Play and Learning**, there are four Topics of Study:
 - **Toys for Hugging and Pretending**
 - **My Senses and Play**
 - **Motor Skills and Play**
 - **Music and Movement Play**
- Many of the experiences in the Topics of Study have a designation of either Younger Toddler (YT) or Older Toddler (OT). However, these two designations do not specify age in months.
- Use your knowledge of individual children to determine which activities are appropriate for which children in your care.

Arkansas Minimum Licensing Requirements (Rev. 1.1.15) requires the following:

400 PROGRAM – 401 Program Requirements for all ages

5.a The facility shall have an approved curriculum with weekly activity plans appropriate for the developmental needs of each group of children.

To assist your program in meeting this requirement, refer to Developing Weekly Activity Plans for Adventures for Toddlers for information on how to develop your plans. In addition, 2 different examples of blank Weekly Activity Plan sheets are included. Feel free to make copies of the plan sheet you select and use in each week. To help you in planning, there are also 4 samples of completed weekly plan sheets that you may use as guides when developing weekly activity plans for your group of children

Resources

- Children's books can be purchased online, from school supply catalogs or local book stores.
- Check with your local library for the availability of children's books.
- *Infant / Toddler Environment Rating Scale, Revised Edition* by Thelma Harms, Debby Cryer and Richard M. Clifford, published by Teachers College Press, NY (2006)
- Determine if funds are available to purchase The Infant/Toddler Photo Library published by Lakeshore Learning. See Lakeshore catalog or Lakeshore online site for ordering information.
- Rhythm instruments specifically designed for toddlers can be ordered from school supply catalogs.
- CDs which can be ordered online or from school supply catalogs:
 - Songs for I Love You Rituals 2 with songs by Dr. Becky Bailey and music by Mar Harmon
 - Sea Gulls Music for Rest and Relaxation by Hap Palmer
 - Quiet Time by Raffi
 - Baby Beluga by Raffi
 - Singable Songs for the Very Young – Great with a Peanut-Butter Sandwich by Raffi
 - Toddler Favorite Music – for Little People
 - Toddlers on Parade, KIMBO Educational

Picture File

- Collect pictures that relate to this Focus Area: **My Favorite Things for Play and Learning**.
- Examples of pictures to collect include:
 - toddler toys, especially those featured in the curriculum
 - children of all ages playing with toys
 - people playing games with balls
 - musical instruments
 - people playing musical instruments
 - children's family members participating in sports that involve playing with balls.

Include small (index card size) as well as larger pictures.

Consider mounting the small pictures on index cards. Laminate or cover all of the pictures with clear, self-adhesive paper for durability.

- Post some of the pictures on the wall at toddler's eye level. Observe to see if toddlers look at the pictures and point to and/or name the objects or people in the pictures. Join them and expand on what they say. For example, say to Megan who points to a picture of her mother and says "Mommy" say "Yes Megan, that's your mother. She's playing softball. She says you go with her and watch her play."
- Put some of the small pictures in a container and place it in the library area so that it is accessible to children. Observe a child as he takes the pictures out of the box. Should the child bring a picture to you, involve him in discussing what he sees in the picture. "That's a girl and a boy playing ball together."
- Keep some of the pictures in a basket or tote bag within easy reach. Use the pictures with an individual child or a small group of children. Invite them to name objects and to talk about what is happening in the pictures. Allow children to look at the pictures on their own. Model and talk with them about the proper way to handle the pictures.
- Determine if funds are available to purchase **The Infant /Toddler Photo Library** published by Lakeshore Learning

Teacher Note: Refer to **Curriculum Tips and Techniques – Picture File**, for additional information about how to organize a picture file.

Toddler Environment

The toddler environment should always provide equipment and materials for language experiences, manipulative exploration, gross motor and block play, sensory exploration, pretend play and outdoor exploration. The following additions to the environment are intended for the entire Focus Area: **My Favorite Things for Play and Learning**. Each **Weekly Activity Plan Sheet** will specify which materials to add for that week.

Language Area

- Add the following books:
 - ***Touch Teddy's Tummy***
 - ***Playing with Balls is Fun***
 - ***Playing with Toys is Fun***
- Add container of pictures that have been laminated or covered with clear self-adhesive paper. (See **Picture File**, page 4 for examples of types of pictures to collect.)

Manipulative Exploration

- ***Touch Teddy's Tummy***
- Picking up Cotton Balls
- Sound and "no sound" bottles

Gross Motor & Blocks

- Add cardboard brick blocks
- Add soft vinyl building blocks
- Add a set of small unit blocks for older toddlers
- Post pictures of different types of structures such as houses, apartment buildings and mobile homes.
- Make shoebox blocks as follows:
 1. Stuff shoeboxes with newspaper and tape the lid securely.
 2. Cover the boxes with self-adhesive paper for durability.
 3. Place blocks where they are accessible to children for building.
- Make grocery bag blocks as follows:
 1. Stuff large brown grocery bags with newspaper.
 2. Fold down the tops of the bags to create a flat top.
 3. Tape the tops securely.
 4. Place the bags in the block area so they are accessible to children.
- Make small paper sack blocks following the same procedures for grocery bag blocks.
- Make a train for hauling blocks as follows:
 1. Use boxes that are large enough to hold blocks.
 2. Hook the boxes together with tape or rope.
 3. Attach a piece of yarn or rope to the front of the box.
 4. Place the train in the block area.
- Add small people figures (wood, rubber, or vinyl) and small vehicles

Note: *Store people figures and vehicles in clear plastic tubs that are labeled with both pictures and words.*

Sensory Exploration

- Add ***Touch Teddy's Tummy*** book
- Add sound and "no sound" bottles
- Add egg shakers and bell bracelets
- Add purchased rhythm instruments
- Make 4 or 5 identical pairs of bunnies as follows:
 1. Make pairs of bunnies with round tummies cut from soft fabric such as fake fur, fleece, and velvet or velveteen.
 2. Attach magnetic or Velcro strip to the back of each bunny.
 3. Add the bunnies and a felt or magnetic board to the library area.

Pretend Play

- Have dress-up clothes in older children's sizes, for both males and females with large buttons and snaps. Demonstrate buttoning and snapping. Encourage children to button and snap, assisting as needed.
- Have soft baby dolls and washable stuffed animals
- Add scarves, doll blankets, doll clothes
- Add doll bed or cradle, or box lined with a soft pillow
- Add pots and pans and wooden spoons and spatulas
- Add a picnic basket
- Have unbreakable full-length mirror that is securely fastened to wall.
- Add unbreakable hand mirrors
- Add toy telephones (at least 2)

Note: *Wash dress-up clothes, stuffed animals, doll blankets and clothes at least weekly.*

Outdoor Exploration

- Involve children in outdoor bubble experiences.
- Mount clear plastic or acrylic tubes, 4 or 5 inches in diameter, to the fence on the playground at an angle and at height where children can reach them. Use rubber straps to attach the tubes. Provide a bucket of toys nearby, some small enough to go through the tubes and some too large.
- Take beach balls outdoors.

Safety Note: *It is the responsibility of the child care program and each employee to ensure the safety of toddlers in the program. This includes the materials and equipment provided for children's use. Should you have safety questions, the developers of this curriculum suggest that you consult with your Licensing Specialist for technical assistance.*

Curriculum books such as *The Creative Curriculum for Infants, Toddlers & 2s*, 2nd Edition, contain safety information. See **Curriculum Tips and Techniques**, **References** and **Resources**, for additional resources.

Family Connection and Engagement

Send home a note to families stating that for the next few weeks the children will be involved in the Focus Area: **My Favorite Things for Play and Learning**. They will participate in experiences that focus on the different things that children enjoy playing with and the many things they learn through their play. How families can be involved in this toddler topic will depend on the situation of each child and his or her family.

Consider some of the following ways to involve the families:

- Ask families to send their child's favorite stuffed animal, doll, or teddy bear to the center on a specific day for a picnic.
- Invite each family to send an empty shoe box with lid to the center for making blocks.
- Include the titles and authors of some of the child's books that relate to the Focus Area: **My Favorite Things for Play and Learning**. Suggest that they look for these books in the local library, check them out and read them with their toddler.
- Invite families to send pictures of family members participating in various sports that involve playing with a ball.
- Plan a time for children's family members to come and play. Consider a Family Play Night where families can have an opportunity to be involved in some of the children's activities and receive information about what children learn as they play with the different toys in their room. Take photos of the event and display them in the classroom or in a photo album.