Stanislaus County
Office of
Education

Child/Family Services

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Resource & Referral Handout

Play Material for Young Infants, Mobile Infants, and Older Infants

Type of toy	How to provide	What the child learns
Young infants **Birth – 3 months** Things to look at and listen to, such as family activities, pets, housework, music, plants, pictures, mirrors and music boxes.	▪ Place hanging objects, such as lightweight scarves, within view but out of reach. ▪ Use stabiles and mobiles so that some things move and some don't. ▪ Create interest by making small changes periodically.	▪ Looking (tracking) and listening help infants learn to identify objects in space. ▪ Interesting objects both stimulate and satisfy infants' natural curiosity about the world. ▪ Repeated experience with familiar objects leads to understanding object permanence.
Young infants **2 – 6 months** Things to squeeze, pat, grasp, place in mouth, and touch, such as soft toys, teethes, rattles, empty spools, empty food cartons, scarves, plastic rings, rubber soap pads, big pop beads	▪ Place toys within reach of the infant. ▪ Allow infants to follow their own interests with the toy or use it in responsive play. ▪ Talk with the infant about what she or he may be experiencing.	▪ Different objects have different properties (soft or hard, smooth or rough, light or heavy) and can be explored in different ways (patting, placing in mouth, grasping). ▪ Infants begin to understand how things move in space and the difference between distance and nearness.
Mobile infants **3 – 8 months** Things to kick, swipe, bat, bang, rub and shake that cause something to happen, such as squeak toys, plastic keys on a ring, plastic balls with sound or	▪ Put out only a few toys at a time. ▪ Place objects near the edge of the child's ability to reach.	▪ From their actions on responsive toys, infants learn about cause and effect. ▪ Handling objects leads to an

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movement inside, beads on a sturdy string, small plastic wheel toys, stabiles for kicking or batting	▪ Rotate toys as the child loses interest. ▪ Hang stabiles with toys within reach of the child's feet or hands. ▪ Show interest in and approval of the infant's efforts to create movement and sound.	understanding of how things move. ▪ Manipulating objects teaches that the same object can look different from different angles. This promotes understanding of object permanence and perspective.
Object to combine with other objects—to pile, clap together, put in and take out, pull, push and scoop, such as baskets and buckets, stacking cups and boxes, balls, small blocks, pop beads, scoops, inflatable toys, stacking rings, cradle gyms, busy boxes, pegs and holes, beads and posts, shape sorters, lidded and take-apart toys, nesting bowls	▪ Place toys in the environment in interesting ways such as a basket of pop beads or a pike of blocks on the floor. Then allow infants to use the toys in their own way. ▪ Observe children's play and offer small amounts of help when necessary. ▪ Share play with infants one-on-one using the responsive process. Eye contact, smiles, and empathic words support the discovery process.	▪ Reaching for a toy or moving an obstacle to get desired object strengthens the infant's understanding of cause, space and the use of tools. ▪ The child is also learning about properties and functions such as weight and gravity, size and shape.
Things to explore through touch, such as natural objects (stones, feathers, twigs, shells, leaves pets, non-toxic plants, water, and sand); other objects such as mesh vegetable bags, sheer curtains, colored cellophane, foil, paper bags, plastic scouring pads, new sponges, sensory boxes	▪ Share tactile exploration of natural objects following child interest. ▪ Crunch, rub, smell, twist or other actions, encouraging infants to explore through their senses. Gently remove unsafe objects if infants want to put them in the mouth. ▪ Observe closely and put an object away until another time if infants do not show interest.	▪ These objects help infants pay attention to sensory differences, explore different ways of using things, and in combination with caregivers' comments, begin to understand and use language.
Things to explore through sight, such as photographs and drawings, cloth and cardboard picture books; plastic bottles or cans with colorful objects inside	▪ Sturdy books and pictures should be available at all times for infants to view on their own as well as with an adult.	▪ Visual toys promote interest in language and help children learn the relationship between pictures and real things.
Objects that encourage movement, such as risers, stairs, ramps, tunnels, rocking boats,	▪ Large, stable equipment such as sofas, window seats and built-in slides give children	▪ By propelling their bodies and objects through space, back and forth and up and

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small rocking horses and push toys, sofas, pillows, cushions, mattresses, window seats for cruising and climbing; small balls and large beach balls for rolling and kicking; small wheel toys	the choice of focused active play at any time. Other equipment can be brought out when needed to offer variety or stimulate interest. ▪ For safety, move things on which children could bump themselves out of the way. Keep paths clear for other children's movement around the room. ▪ Active play should be watched closely and redirected from danger when necessary, but not inhibited	down, children learn lessons about gravity and balance, distance and perspective. ▪ They also learn about cause and effect (e. g., kicking a ball makes it move away) and about tools (e. g., holding on to a window seat can help them walk). ▪ They learn how things function and are best used (e. g., the floor is hard when they fall, the pillow is soft).
Things that respond dramatically to manipulation such as bells, busy boards, balls, pop-up toys, a pot and wooden spoon, a pounding bench and hammer, scarves and cloths that float and wave	▪ Many toys can be set out for infants to touch and explore on their own. ▪ Some toys, such as windup toys, are not designed for independent play by infants and require close supervision. Such toys lend themselves to adult-child play, one or two children at a time. Adults can demonstrate how the toy works but should not manipulate a child's hand to make it happen.	▪ Responsive toys help infants learn about cause and effect and about the use of tools. ▪ Both manufactured and improvised toys provide for this, but improvised ones are more versatile and can be used by a variety of ages for may purposes.
Real and play things similar to those used by adults, such as plastic or wooden kitchen utensils, telephones, dishes, dolls, toy animals, lawn mowers, shopping carts, blankets, doll cribs, cupboards, and drawers on the child's level	▪ Mobile infants don't engage in elaborate fantasy play, but they like to play with things they see adults use. A few items, such as telephones or dolls, can be placed on shelves. A drawer or cupboard can be used for storage and as a play location for kitchen utensils or blankets and dolls.	▪ Imitation is an important source of both cognitive and social development. With these "props" infants refine their understanding of how things are used and expand their notions of how things work.
Older infants Objects for sorting and building, putting, together and taking apart, such as puzzles, large and small blocks, hook-together trains, threading toys, fitting toys, sorting cards, pegs and	▪ Store pieces that go together in bins on shelves children can reach. ▪ More challenging equipment (e.g., more difficult puzzles)	▪ This type of play helps children classify, order, identify function, and explore with gravity, space, shape, size and color.

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pegboards, and beads	can be brought out when an adult can give guidance and support. ▪ Help children begin construction out of the stream of traffic and apart form each other so their creations won't be accidentally knocked over. If a child is deeply involved in an activity or hasn't completed it, save it for later if possible. ▪ Puzzles with missing pieces are frustrating to children and should not be used. Look for the missing pieces at the end of each day.	
Objects that can be used in art, such as water colors, food coloring, construction paper, tissue paper, play dough, crayons, non-toxic marking pens, paste, easels, paper and paint	▪ Messy art activities work best with close small groups of three for four at a time, and clear limits. ▪ Let children make choices such as how to put paint on paper or what colors of paint or paper to use.	▪ Experiences with creative expression are essential to the child's cognitive growth. These activities promote an understanding of how materials function, the development of language, and an awareness of spatial relationships.
Musical instruments, such as drums, xylophones, tambourines, harmonicas	▪ Most musical instruments require close supervision. Encourage older infants to use them for making sounds, rather than other types of play.	▪ Experimenting with music fosters aural discrimination, language and motor skills.
Story activities, such as story books, magazines, felt boards, puppets	▪ Picture books should be available on a bookshelf for children to view on their own. ▪ Adults can read books and talk about them with small groups of children. ▪ Stories may also be made up by adults and children using	▪ These activities promote the development of language skills and creativity. When used in groups they support social development and help children identify and deal with their feelings.

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	puppets, photographs or drawings.	
Objects that expand dramatic play, such as telephones, dishes, dolls, lawn mowers, shopping carts, dress-up clothes, blankets, doll cribs, furniture, puppets, animal and people figures, magnetic and flannel board shapes, family and community play sets, hats, miniature words, non-breakable mirrors, funnels, pitchers, watering cans, picture files, water, soap and sand	▪ A cozy dress-up or housekeeping corner should be created and stocked with real or play household items and dress-up clothes. ▪ Each item should have an appropriate storage space (e. g., clothes on hooks, dishes in a small cupboard). ▪ Animals and people figures, puppets, and miniature worlds can be kept in bins accessible to children but out of the flow of traffic. ▪ Some activities, such as water, sand and flannel board play can be set up at specific times during the day, as they require close adult supervision.	▪ Dramatic play provides rich opportunities for may types of learning. Toddlers will imitate each other and use imitation to practice adult roles, expand concepts of space and matter, use tools, develop language skills, and in general, refine their ideas of how things function and are best used.
Objects that encourage large movements and physical play, such as empty cartons, bean bags, wheel toys, sliders and steps, rocking toys, climbing structures, mats, balls balance beams, push and pull toys	▪ Play with wheel toys and balls require plenty of space and is best outdoors or in large open indoor areas. ▪ For vigorous play indoors, balance beams, rocking toys, slides, and steps work well. ▪ Slides and climbing structures where children are more than 18 inches off the ground should be closely supervised	▪ From large muscle activity, children learn about space, gravity, balance, and leverage. ▪ They learn to gauge distance and to use complex schemes

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