



Environment Kit Idea Guide 12-24 months

This Idea Guide will provide a short list of activities your program can try doing, using materials from the 12-24 month Environment Kit. This is not a complete list of all possible activities or materials that could be required for formal rating, accreditation, etc. Use this guide to inspire new ideas unique to your program goals.

CONNECTING QUALITY ENVIRONMENTS TO QUALITY PRACTICE

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YoungStar Environment Kit - Idea Guide 12-24 months

by DCF – Division of Early Care and Education

Pretending with a Purpose



Toddlers spend much of their time watching and imitating the actions of others, making connections through the experiences that are part of their daily lives. Caregivers can be intentional when planning dramatic play experiences to strengthen these connections.

Toys that help children recreate real life scenarios not only help them make sense of their world, but allow them to process their thoughts and experiment with roles in a safe environment. Most toddlers have been to the doctor and have seen the doctor use tools to check their blood pressure, listen to their heart and lungs, and look inside their ears and eyes. Toddlers can use the *Soft Doctor Kit* (18 months and up) to reenact a recent doctor visit. Talk about the different tools and how they are used in simple terms the child can understand. This can be especially helpful for children with special health care needs who may have frequent doctor visits.

The *Toolbox Fill and Spill* (18 months and up) combines the opportunity to use soft tools for pretending with the fine motor activity of filling and dumping. Use simple language to name the tools and model what they do, “The screwdriver turns like this. The saw goes back and forth like this.” As toddlers copy your actions, they are developing the foundation for more complex pretend play. Encourage practice of filling and dumping the toolbox.



Dramatic Play in Action

During the warmer months, a toddler may show interest in seeing construction vehicles working in their neighborhood. Use the *Little Tuffies* (18 months and up) construction vehicles to enhance dramatic play in your block area or other designated space where toddlers have room to crawl and push the vehicles, experimenting with the sounds and actions they make. Keep in mind, active play such as this can sometimes “spill over” outside of a designated area. Consider how you will support this play while maintaining safety and supervision.

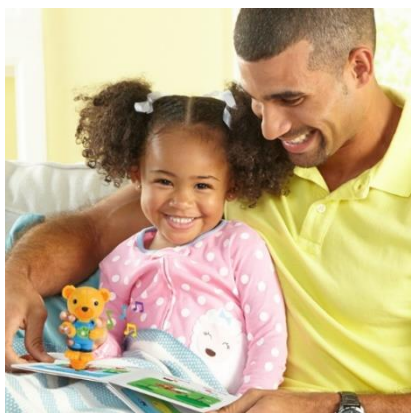
Music, Movement and Art

The arts can offer a variety of learning experiences. Toddlers learn how their body moves in coordination with music, to follow simple directions, and to express their creativity through different art forms. Play the *Toddler First Band Set* cd (12 months and up) and allow the children to experiment using the instruments. If appropriate for your group’s abilities, ask them to play the instruments fast, slow, hard and soft as the music changes or as you sing their favorite songs. Read the book “*Clap Your Hands*” in a singsong voice and model the movements for children to follow.

It can be challenging to find art materials specific to the unique needs and abilities of toddlers. The *Easy-Grip Paint Brushes* and *Palm Grip Crayons* (1 year and up) will allow toddlers to use their whole hand to move the tools until more advanced skills for pinching and grasping are developed.



CONSIDER HOW ACTIVITIES ALIGN
WITH WMELS AND YOUR PROGRAM'S
CHOSEN ASSESSEMENT SYSTEM



Create a Love for Reading

Toddlers enjoy reading and listening to stories that have a rhythmic, repetitive nature. "*Polar Bear, Polar Bear What Do You Hear?*" offers toddlers an opportunity to predict the words coming on the next page by becoming familiar with its repetitive text. Pause after turning the page and encourage toddlers to chant along with you as you read. Involve them in recreating sounds the animals make. Toddlers with limited verbal skills can experiment with these sounds allowing a range of abilities to be included in the fun. For older toddlers, you can try swapping "polar bear" for the child's name to ask what they hear. Caregivers should encourage and celebrate all attempts to join in, taking time to laugh and enjoy this fun experience.

Offering a soft comfortable space for family members to read to their child may be a helpful tool to ease drop-off transitions. Parents can create a consistent routine of reading a child's favorite short story such as "*Baby Faces Peek-a-Boo*" or "*Baby Faces: Splash*" before saying goodbye for the day.

Meaningful Math Moments

Quality environments that support math learning for toddlers include a variety of self-correcting (puzzles, shape sorters) and open ended (sorting, measuring) learning opportunities. As a child uses the *Multi-Sensory Shape Sorter* (9 months and up) or *Geometric Puzzle Board* (18 months and up), say the names of the shapes, "You have the square." Encourage persistence if the child becomes frustrated, "Try one more time; you can do it!" Watch carefully for signs that the child is ready for you to offer support and respond promptly.

The *Giraffe Nest and Stack* (12 months and up) allows children to begin learning about volume and capacity. These concepts may sound advanced, but when a toddler learns that one object fits into another, these are the skills they are building. Caregivers can assist this learning by using math language (smaller than, inside of) to describe the size of the nesting cup and encouraging the toddler to experiment placing cups inside others to see if they fit. Flip the cups upside down to make a tower. Count the cups as you stack them.

It is important that caregivers look for opportunities to include math language throughout the day. During mealtimes, talk about the color or shape of the foods the children are eating. Draw attention to the pattern you might see in a tile floor, a brick wall or even on their clothes that day. Take off their sock and compare what toes are short or tall, little or big.



CONSIDERATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICE (DAP)

Developmental appropriateness is based on the interests and individual abilities of each child. Evidence is gathered through interactions with and observations of the child and from information shared by the child's family. Taking this information in to consideration, caregivers can determine if an activity or material needs to be added or adapted to meet individual needs and unique learning styles.

In order for children to take advantage of a developmentally appropriate environment, materials must be accessible, meaning children can reach and use furnishings, equipment, and materials independently. DAP environments support successful child-initiated play. When balanced with intentionally planned, teacher-initiated activities, a foundation for well-rounded learning is created.

This foundation is strengthened with positive interactions and trusting relationships. Caregivers cultivate these relationships by being involved in a child's play, having frequent positive interactions and connecting with family members to ensure their care expectations are being met.

Reflecting on your practice:

- Are materials and activities accessible and varied enough to meet each child's developmental needs?
- Do you speak to the adults and toddlers in your program using a positive tone of voice?
- Do you include yourself and other children in a toddler's play?
- Are families encouraged to share information regarding their child's development and do they feel part of the program's community?

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact your **YoungStar Consultant** or locate your local **Child Care Resource and Referral Agency** at: <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar/program/localoffice>

YoungStar Evaluation Criteria

<https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar/providers/rating-criteria>