

# EARLY HEAD START TIP SHEET

No. 32

EHS Home Visiting Play Materials, March 2009

## **What types of play materials can be used from the home to create purposeful learning experiences for infants or toddlers during a home visit?**

### **Response:**

One of the main purposes of home visits is to assist parents in using the home as the child's primary learning environment. It is important for home visitors to support each parent in his or her role as primary teacher for the child. Together, home-visitors and parents can identify potential play materials that are easily accessed by the child and family.

Observing home visitors using household materials such as pots and pans, empty containers, or measuring cups encourages families to use potential play and learning materials that may be available in the house. The home visitor supports the parents by pointing out the many ways everyday items can be used with their child to support his or her development and learning. For example, while folding laundry, parents can encourage their young child to hand a few of the items to them. Parents can describe the various colors, sizes and textures of the clothing. They can also ask the child to help find all of the red socks or help place folded clothes into a pile for mommy. This simple interaction supports the parent-child relationship and provides an opportunity for the baby to explore the concept of sorting and one-to-one correspondence.

Using everyday objects can save money. Often these items become favorite toys because they relate the item to life experiences, making them meaningful and culturally relevant to the child. The attached addendum: **Using Ordinary Materials to Promote Discovery & Learning with Infants and Toddlers** gives more examples of using household materials.

### *Considerations for materials that support discovery and learning*

- **Healthy & safe.** Materials must be safe, durable, and easy to clean. Since babies and toddlers often mouth items, the items need to be toxic-free and large enough in size that they are not a choking hazard. Use a choke tube or standardized toilet paper spool to measure questionable items. If items fit into the tube, they are too small to use with babies and toddlers.
- **Meet the child's developmental needs.** Materials that match the child's developmental exploration needs (such as wanting to mouth toys, dump and fill containers, or carry items) are both challenging and interesting to the child.
- **Open-ended.** Materials that can be many things and serve many uses (such as an empty box) promote the child's curiosity, exploration, discovery, and imagination.

### *Supporting development through commercial materials*

Home visitors often bring commercial toys or materials to a home visit. It is important that the child and family have the opportunity to use these materials (or similar ones) in an ongoing manner. Many EHS programs have a toy lending library where families are able to 'borrow' commercial toys or packaged activities for several weeks at a time. This option can provide families access to toys that match their child's immediate interest or need (such as a pop-up box for a 15-month-old working on eye-hand coordination). It is important for home visitors to introduce a variety of toys that promote sensory-motor stimulation and exploration.

### *Connecting socialization experiences to home visits*

Socialization experiences are to be linked to home visits. Home-based staff should consider including materials that are found within the participants' homes as well as any toys used during home visits within the socialization environment. Home-based staff can reduce the child's fear and stress of group play by including familiar play items from the home (or similar to those found in the home) in the socialization environment. Home-based staff can promote social emotional development by providing experiences that encourage developmentally appropriate play experiences within a group of adults and peers.

### **Questions to Consideration for Planning and Programming:**

- How are home visitors and parents working together in planning and deciding upon appropriate materials for home visits and socialization experiences?
- How does the program and the home visitor support families in identifying safe and appropriate learning materials for infants and toddlers?
- How does the program educate and support parents in selecting safe and non-toxic materials and to regularly sanitize play materials within the home?
- How does the program support home visitors in assessing the child's home as the primary learning environment?
- How does the program support home visitors and parents in understanding infant and toddler child development?
- How are materials used during home visits included in socialization experiences?
- How does the program ensure that materials used with infants and toddlers in group socialization experiences are non-toxic and that these items are sanitized regularly?
- How are programs supporting cultural diversity and home language acquisition using materials and supplies from the home setting?

### **Performance Standards, Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations:**

- 1306.33(b)(1) The purpose of the home visit is to help parents improve their parenting skills and to assist them in the use of the home as the child's primary learning environment. The home visitor must work with parents to help them provide learning opportunities that enhance their child's growth and development.
- 1304.53(b)(1)(i)-(vii) Grantee and delegate agencies must provide and arrange sufficient equipment, toys, materials, and furniture to meet the needs and facilitate the participation of children and adults. Equipment, toys, materials, and furniture owned or operated by the grantee or delegate agency must be:
  - (i) Supportive to the specific educational objectives of the local program;
  - (ii) Supportive of the cultural and ethnical backgrounds of the children;
  - (iii) Age appropriate, safe, and supportive of the abilities and developmental level of each child served, with adaptations, if necessary, for children with disabilities;
  - (iv) Accessible, attractive, and inviting to children;
  - (v) Designed to provide a variety of learning experiences and to encourage each child to experiment and explore;
  - (vi) Safe, durable, and kept in good condition; and
  - (vii) Stored in a safe and orderly fashion when not in use.
- 1304.53(b)(2) Infant and toddler toys must be made of non-toxic materials and must be sanitized regularly.

- 1304.21(b)(1)(iii) Grantee and delegate agencies' program of services for infants and toddlers must encourage opportunities for each child to explore a variety of sensory and motor experiences with support and stimulation from teachers and family members.
- 1304.21(b)(2)(i)-(ii) Grantee and delegate agencies must support the social and emotional development of infants and toddlers by promoting an environment that:
  - (i) Encourages the development of self-awareness, autonomy, and self-expression; and
  - (ii) Supports emerging communication skills of infants and toddlers by providing daily opportunities for each child to interact with others and to express himself or herself freely.
- 1304.21(b)(3)(i)-(ii) Grantee and delegate agencies must support the physical development of infants and toddlers by:
  - (i) Supporting the development of the physical skills of infants and toddlers including gross motor skills, such as grasping, pulling, pushing, crawling, walking, and climbing; and
  - (ii) Creating opportunities for fine motor development that encourage the control and coordination of small specialized motions, using eyes, mouth, hands and feet.

### **Resources:**

Curtis, Debbie and Margie Carter. **Designs for Living and Learning: Transforming Early Childhood Environments.** St. Paul, MN: Redleaf Press. 2003.

Curtis, Debbie and Margie Carter. **Visionary Infant and Toddler Program Environments: A Study Guide for Early Childhood Educators [CD Rom].** Harvest Resource. 2006.

Early Head Start National Resource Center (EHS NRC). **Early Head Start Tip Sheets.** *The Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center.* DHHS/ACF/OHS.

- **26: How Do You Create an Effective Environment for Infant/Toddler Socializations in an Early Head Start Home-Based Program?** May 2006.
- **29: Does Early Head Start Support Math and Science Development with Infants and Toddlers?** July 2008.
- **32 (Addendum): Using Ordinary Materials to Promote Discovery and Learning with Infants and Toddlers.** March 2009.

EHS NRC. **Home-Based Program Option Materials.** DHHS/ACF/ACYF/HSB. 2004.

- **Home-Based Supervisor's Manual.**
- **Home Visitor's Handbook for the Head Start Home-Based Program Option.**
- **Program Administrator's Checklist for the Head Start Home-Based Program Option.**

**Information Memorandum, ACYF-IM-HS-OO-22: Child Development Services During Home Visits and Socializations in Early Head Start Home-Based Program Options.** DHHS/ACF/HSB. 2000.

Isbell, Rebecca and Betty Exelby. **Early Learning Environments that Work.** Beltsville, MD: Gryphon House, Inc. 2001.

Johnson, Jeff and Tasha Johnson. **Do-It-Yourself Early Learning: Easy and Fun Activities and Toys from Everyday Home Center Materials Stores.** St. Paul, MN: Redleaf Press. 2006.

Miller, Linda G. and Mary Jo Gibbs. **Making Toys for Infants and Toddlers: Using Ordinary Stuff for Extraordinary Play.** Beltsville, MD: Gryphon House, Inc. 2002.

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*This Tip Sheet is not a regulatory document. Its intent is to provide a basis for dialogue, clarification, and problem solving among Office of Head Start, Regional Offices, TA consultants, and grantees. If you need further clarification on Head Start Policies and regulations, please contact your Regional Program Specialist.*

**Using Ordinary Materials to Promote Discovery and Learning with Infants and Toddlers**  
**Addendum to Early Head Start Tip Sheet No. 32**

**Infants and toddlers learn best:**

- In the context of relationships with their parents and caregivers
- Through play and active exploration of their environment

**Items should be:**

- Safe to handle
- Non-toxic
- Easily sanitized between uses
- Used under close adult supervision

**Below are examples of household items that can support discovery and learning opportunities with infants and toddlers:**

Material		Developmental Task of Infant or Toddler
<p><b>You, the parent and caregiver!</b></p>	 <p>Photo: ©istock.com/Yvonne Chamberlain</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore the world by showing and playing with baby and materials</li> <li>• Snuggle, hold, sway, and rock</li> <li>• Coo, talk, sing, tell stories, and read</li> <li>• Mirror baby's facial expressions</li> <li>• Delight in baby's wonder and successes; comfort when upset</li> </ul>
<p><b>Mirrors</b></p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Track</li> <li>• Bat at and hold</li> <li>• Explore sense of identity (seeing self and facial expressions)</li> <li>• Concept of body parts (identify eyes, nose, etc.)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Tops to liquid laundry detergents, fabric softeners, and mouthwashes</b></p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mouth</li> <li>• Bang two together</li> <li>• Nest</li> <li>• Stack</li> <li>• Use to fill a large bowl or empty containers</li> <li>• Explore concepts of size, shape, color, texture</li> <li>• Sort and classify by size, shape, color, texture</li> <li>• Dramatic play prop (pretend to drink)</li> <li>• Bath-time or sandbox prop (fill, pour, scoop)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Bandanas, soft scarves, or fabric swatches</b></p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mouth</li> <li>• Dangle above baby to track, bat at, and grab</li> <li>• Feel and snuggle; explore textures</li> <li>• Play peek-a-boo</li> <li>• Dramatic play prop (use as hat, scarf, or baby blanket)</li> <li>• Use to fill and empty tissue boxes</li> </ul>
<p><b>Muffin tin with toys that fit into holes (Empty egg carton works well too)</b></p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sounds or 'music' by banging tin with a spoon</li> <li>• Explore shape (rectangular 'holes' versus circular 'holes')</li> <li>• Explore one-to-one correspondence (1 car for each 'hole')</li> <li>• Prop for pretend play (cooking or shopping)</li> </ul>

<p>Empty containers such as powdered drinks, parmesan cheese, mouthwash (Note: mouthwash container has a safety cap making it a great shaker toy)</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dump and fill (using smaller items such as shower curtain rings)</li> <li>• Place lids on and off</li> <li>• Cause and effect (shake and make noise)</li> <li>• Explore concepts of size, shape, color, texture</li> <li>• Dramatic play prop (pretend to cook)</li> <li>• Bath-time or sandbox prop (fill, pour, scoop)</li> <li>• Roll round containers</li> </ul>
<p>Laundry Baskets</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use for dump and fill</li> <li>• Explore spatial relationships by climbing in and out</li> <li>• Explore balance by trying to pull up on, push, or carry</li> <li>• Cause and effect by pushing or pulling basket</li> <li>• Practice small motor skills by placing smaller items through holes</li> <li>• ‘Help’ with chores by collecting laundry</li> </ul>
<p>Tissue box blocks (Fill with “junk mail” to add weight, seal opening with construction paper and clear, non-toxic packing tape)</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stack</li> <li>• Bang on boxes</li> <li>• Dump and fill</li> <li>• Cause and effect (build and knock down)</li> <li>• Explore concepts of shape, size, color, weight</li> <li>• Explore balance by trying to carry when walking</li> </ul>
<p>Throw-able items such as shower puffs, pot scrubbers, wiffle balls, sock balls, or fabric shapes</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mouth</li> <li>• Bang items together</li> <li>• Dump and fill</li> <li>• Throw or roll</li> <li>• Props for water or painting activities (shower puffs, scrubbers, wiffle balls)</li> <li>• Explore concepts of size, shape, color, texture</li> <li>• Sort and classify by size, shape, color, texture</li> </ul>
<p>Photos cards placed on shapes cut from milk jugs, diaper wipe box tops, yogurt tops. (Be sure photos and any writing are covered with clear, non-toxic packing tape)</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mouth</li> <li>• Explore sense of identity (seeing self and loved ones)</li> <li>• Explore emotions (‘I’m sad to see my brother leave for school.’ or ‘I can hug and kiss his picture when I miss him.’)</li> <li>• Concept of body parts (identify eyes, nose, etc.)</li> <li>• Cause and effect (pulling apart 2 lids attached by Velcro tabs)</li> <li>• Use smaller sizes for dump and fill activities</li> </ul>