Age-Appropriate Activities for Children
Young children learn through playing. Hence, it is important that we choose the right child games so that children develop the right values that you hope they will learn. As children play with toys, with one another, and with adults, they acquire and improve the skills necessary for formal learning in later stages of their lives. Select games or toys based on children's interests and developmental needs. Any child games selected should be designed for interaction keeping children engaged in the ways they learn best - through seeing and hearing, touching and trying.

**Below 12-months** - At this stage, you would consider providing games that develop eye-hand coordination, motor skills and recognition of animals, objects, colors, shapes and numbers.

**12- to 24-months** - Start introducing activities that are done in sequence and those that will increase attention span. Your toddler can now play games that require him/her to follow simple directions. Let your children learn to match things that go together as he/she starts to recognize letters, numbers, colors and shapes. This is also a good time for the children to learn to make music.

**2-Years and Up** - As your children grow, provide them with activities that develop self-confidence, encourage thinking skills and those that strengthen social skills. Continue to fine tune their motor skills and expand their vocabulary. You can also play games that help strengthen their memory skills.

The following are examples of child games for different aspects of your children's development:

- **Develop Eye-Hand Coordination and Motor Skills** - stacking toys, shape sorter, activity links gym, pounding toys, lacing toys and pull toys
- **Thinking and Creative Skills** - Legos, building blocks, art materials, play dough, gears, puppets and dress ups or props
- **Mathematical Thinking Skills** - Monopoly, construction toys, pretend & play calculator cash register
- **Logical Deductive Skills** - Clue, checkers
- **Imagination** - pretend play, dollhouses
- **Problem-Solving Skills** - puzzles, brainteasers
- **Develop Self-Confidence** - roller skates, scooter
- **Strengthens Social Skills** - pretend play with other children, sports
- **Physical Fitness** - sports, hula-hoop, Gymnic Hop Ball
One- to Three-Months-Old
During the first three months of life, a baby will enjoy colorful toys and pictures. Watching the movement of toys and listening to soothing music will be most pleasing at this age. There are literally thousands of different toys available for infants. Cheerful toys such as stuffed animals and pillows can be a wonderful way to brighten your baby’s day. Just remember, never place these items in the crib—they can cause suffocation.

- Rattles and musical toys
- Soft squeeze toys and balls (balls should be at least one and three-quarter inches or 44mm in diameter)
- Unbreakable mirrors
- Teethers
- Bright pictures
- Talking and singing to your infant
- Pleasant facial expressions

Four- to Seven-Months-Old
From four- to seven-months of age, a baby will show an increasing interest in shaking, holding, touching and mouthing objects. Manipulating objects to produce movement and noise will also begin.

- Rattles and musical toys
- Soft squeeze toys and balls (balls should be at least one and three-quarter inches or 44 mm in diameter)
- Unbreakable mirrors
- Teethers
- Bright pictures
- Toys which have holes for easy gripping
- Soft baby books made of vinyl or cloth
- Interlocking plastic rings
- Floor gyms
- A jumper to bounce in

Eight- to Twelve-Months-Old
By eight-months, an infant will begin to take an interest in exploring the surrounding environment. Motor skills are developing rapidly, and soon she will learn to sit up, crawl about, stand and eventually walk. Playing with objects, using
them to shake, throw, poke, push, pull and drop will also occur. Operating simple mechanisms such as pop-up boxes, musical toys and push-pull toys will provide endless amusement and entertainment.

- Musical toys
- Soft squeeze toys and balls (balls should be at least one and three-quarter inches or 44 mm in diameter)
- Unbreakable mirrors
- Teethers
- Baby books made of cardboard
- Key rings
- Sturdy cloth toys
- Pop-up boxes
- Containers to empty and fill such as cups and small pails
- Stackable toys in large sizes
- Bath toys
- Large stuffed animals
- Push-pull toys

One- to Two-Year-Old
At one year, a toddler will engage in more active play that includes running, jumping, climbing and exploring. Toys that can be used in these activities will be preferred. Also, toys for building basic structures will be enjoyed.

- Big balls for throwing and kicking
- Drawing and coloring books
- Large picture books
- Push-pull toys
- Building blocks
- Bath toys
- Play clothing
- Dolls
- Make believe toys (i.e. dinner sets and tools)
- "Peek-a-boo" games
- Wagons
- Miniature lawn mowers, shopping carts and baby strollers
Three- to Five-Year-Old

From three- to five-years of age, a child will begin to enjoy more imaginative and creative play. Building recognizable structures and using smaller and more complex pieces will be preferred. Group play will become more important, too. As interactive and communication skills develop, she will begin to show more interest in toys that can be shared with other children.

- Picture books
- Basic musical instruments
- Dolls and stuffed toys
- Story books
- Simple puzzles
- Non-toxic arts and crafts
- Construction toys
- Sand and water toys
- Toy telephones
- Three and four-wheel riding toys (with a helmet)
- Roller skates (with a helmet)
- Playground

Six- to Eight-Year-Old

During the early elementary school days, a child will be developing stronger muscles with improved coordination and dexterity. Social interaction will become more complex. At this age, she will develop some degree of competitiveness. Activities that involve these skills include sports, music, art and outside play. Home activities such as reading, writing, and collecting also interest some children. Early school-aged children can safely enjoy arts and crafts at home as well. Watercolors are safe to use, as are blunt scissors and non-toxic white glue or paste.

- Musical instruments and dancing
- Books
- Board games
- Jigsaw puzzles
- Riding toys, to include properly sized bicycles (with a helmet)
- Sporting activities, to include gymnastics, swimming, baseball, softball, basketball, soccer and football
As you will see, the activities and toys that children enjoy become more diverse, varied and complex, as they grow older. An ever-increasing gray zone develops between what is safe and unsafe, so rely on your intuition and experience when deciding which toys can be given to an older child.

**Age Appropriate Curriculum:** where children have the time to enjoy the process of learning, where children come first, where everything centers around the children and evolves through them, where they are the focus of all that happens.

In a developmentally appropriate environment:

- The teacher is engaged in the learning process, she is on the child's level, using the child's name, asking questions, seeking to understand the child's thinking.
- The teacher is with the child - as the idea develops, the project takes shape, as discovery unfolds.
- Children have blocks of time in learning centers, time to experiment, to make mistakes and readjustments, to finish a project to their satisfaction, to return to a task to evaluate their work.

Planning a developmentally appropriate curriculum starts with the daily schedule. Below are characteristics of items that should be included in the classrooms every day:

- Balance with activities considering the child's total experience
- Posted daily schedule, both written and pictorial
- Time set aside each day to discuss what happens before, during, and after the activities
- Outdoor play when weather permits
- Both quiet and active play daily
- Balance of large and small muscle activities daily
- More than one option for grouping, such as individual, small group, or large group (infants and toddlers are not expected to participate in a large group)
- Balance of child-initiated and adult-initiated activities (time spent in large-group, teacher-initiated activity is limited)
The materials and equipment in the classroom should also be considered when planning age appropriate curriculum. Materials should reflect the lives of the children and families served, including:

- Books
- Dolls
- Toys
- Dress-up props
- Photos
- Pictures
- Music

Materials should also reflect the diversity found in some society, and in general, equipment projects diverse:

- Racial attributes
- Gender attributes
- Age attributes

**Age-Appropriate Materials**

Developmentally appropriate materials and equipment for infants:

- Simple, lightweight, open-ended, easily washable toys such as containers, balls, pop-beads, and nesting cups
- Rattles, squeak toys, action/reaction toys
- Cuddle toys
- Toys-to-mouth such as teethers, rings
- Pictures of real objects
- Crawling area with sturdy, stable furniture to pull self up

Developmentally appropriate materials and equipment are available for toddlers:

- Push and pull toys
- Sturdy picture books
- Toys for pretending, such as a phone and doll
- Large paper and crayons
- Sturdy furniture
- Sand and water toys
Manipulatives
Stacking toys
Large wooden spools
Beads/cubes
Pounding bench
Simple puzzles

Developmentally appropriate materials and equipment is available for preschoolers:
- Play equipment for climbing and balancing
- Puzzles and manipulatives
- Art materials, such as finger and tempera paints, crayons, safe scissors, and paste
- Sand and water toys
- Unit blocks and accessories
- Picture books, audio recordings/tapes, musical instruments
- Dramatic play materials such as dolls, dress up clothes and props, child-size furniture, and puppets

Developmentally appropriate materials and equipment are available for Pre-K:
- Equipment for climbing and balancing
- Construction materials
- Picture books for early readers
- Musical instruments and recordings
- Writing and complex art projects
- Unit blocks and accessories, such as figures, signs, cars, trees
- Complex puzzles and manipulative toys for counting and sorting
- Appropriate computer software
- Dramatic play materials and props
- Board and card games

Developmentally appropriate materials are available for School-Age children:
- Materials for organized games
- Woodworking material, unit blocks and accessories
- Musical instruments
- Computer software
- Board and card games
- Jigsaw puzzles
- Materials for hobby and art projects
- Science project materials
- Dramatic play materials
- Cooking project materials
- Complex manipulatives (connecting or interlocking)

Use of Passive Media

Use of television is not recommended in a program follow developmentally appropriate practices. If a classroom does decide to use passive media, the following items should be considered:
- Limited to developmentally appropriate programming
- Programs are viewed by an adult first
- Another option for activity is always available
- No child is required to view a program
- Teachers discuss what is viewed with the children
- Passive media is only used in during special occasions
Developing Emotional Skills

Listed below are items used in the classroom to help develop emotional skills for each age group.

**Infants and Toddlers**
- Hold and touch; make eye contact
- Talk and sing
- Initiate rolling and sitting
- Develop self-help skills
- Support toddlers pulling up self, walking, and climbing
- Listen and respond to children

**Preschool Children**
- Allow time for children to talk about what they see, do, and like
- Use children’s name
- Display art work and photos
- Encourage children to draw pictures and tell stories about self, family, and culture
- Encourage children to control their bodies and self-help skills

**Pre-Kindergarten Children**
- Provide learning experiences that respond to individual learning and differences
- Display unique projects
- Encourage children to do things such as send a card to a sick classmate
- Do projects that children can succeed most of the time but still be challenged

**School-Age Children**
- Allow children to have choices/initiate own activities
- Allow time to work or play alone
- Cooperative vs. competitive activities
- Recognize self-selected peer groups
- Encourage children to draw pictures and tell stories about themselves
- Display children’s work and photos
- Provide opportunities to explore cultures
Developing Social Skills

Listed below are items used in the classroom to help develop social skills for each age group:

**Infants and Toddlers**
- Hold, pat, and touch babies
- Talk to, sing to, and play with each baby one-on-one
- Interpret infants actions to other children
- Assist toddlers in social interactions

**Preschoolers**
- Allow children to play in small groups
- Coach children who have a difficult time entering a group
- Provide opportunities for sharing, caring, and helping
- Explore ways to explore bias comments and behaviors

**Pre-Kindergarten Children**
- Variety of ways to group children
- Allow collaboration and cooperation
- Coach children to problem solve
- Allow children to set classroom rules
- Support the beginning of friendships

**School-Age Children**
- Have planned and spontaneous activities in team sports, group games, and clubs
- Allow time to sit and talk with individual children
- Focus on activities rather than outcome
Encourage Children to Think, Reason, Question and Experiment

**Infant and Toddlers**
- Infants and toddlers are allowed to explore in safe area
- Light colorful objects for infants to reach at and grasp
- Play naming and hiding games, such as peek-a-boo
- Toys that initiate cause and effect
- Toddlers are allowed to dump and fill containers
- Avoid interruptions of children's activities

**Preschool**
- Plan sorting activities
- Discuss routines
- Extend children's thinking
- Observe natural events, such as seeds growing
- Use numbering and counting activities
- Take and talk about walks around program
- Encourage sand and water play

**Pre-Kindergarten**
- Learn basic science and math skills through sand and water, constructing with blocks, using levers, pulleys, scales, and other simple machines
- Observe natural events, encourage to draw and discuss what they see
- Have children work with tools
- Use lots of drawings, writing, and speaking to tell stories

**School-Age**
- Provide activities such as cooking, money-making projects, gardening, science experiments, etc.
- Provide time to complete homework
Encourage Language and Literacy

Infant and Toddlers
- One-to-one and face-to-face interactions
- Look at simple books and pictures
- Talk in a pleasant, calm voice
- Verbally label objects and events
- Respond to sounds infants make, imitate often
- Respond to toddlers attempt at language in supportive ways

Preschool
- Read books and poems, tell stories about experiences, talk about pictures
- Provide time for conversations
- Answer children’s questions
- Add more information than what the child says
- Label things in the room with words
- Use flannel boards, puppets, songs, finger plays
- Encourage children's interest in writing

Pre-Kindergarten
- Actively work to increase children’s vocabulary
- Read books and poems, tell stories about experiences, talk about pictures
- Help children develop book-handling skills
- Help children develop a full range of strategies for reading
- Provide opportunities for children to write or draw about what is important to them
- Give children practice in composing and editing stories
- Continue oral language development

School-Age
- Provide opportunities to read
- Share experiences with adults and friends
- Use audio-visual equipment
- Make own films an recordings
Enhance Physical Development and Skills

**Infants and Toddlers**
- Allow children to learn to roll, sit, and walk at their own pace
- Encourage children to crawl
- Have equipment for children to pull up on
- Take infants outside when weather permits
- Provide objects for infants to reach and grasp
- Plan activities for non-mobile infants
- Provide simple puzzles, nesting toys, stacking toys, and pop beads for toddlers
- Provide objects for toddlers to carry

**Preschool**
- Provide time and space for jumping, running, balancing, climbing, and riding bikes
- Creative movement activities
- Fine-motor activities
- Art, modeling, and writing

**Pre-Kindergarten**
- Group games
- Creative movement and recordings

**School-Age**
- Physical exercise
- Group games and team sports
- Time for hobbies
Encourage and Demonstrate Sound Health, Safety and Nutrition

- Cook and serve a variety of foods
- Discuss good nutrition
- Develop safety awareness
- Encourage hand washing, brushing teeth, exercise, rest
- Talk about doctors and dentist
- Describe health routines as they are implemented
- Study topics on the human body nutrition, and life skills

Allow Time for Children to Select Their Own Activities

- Infants and toddlers have materials for free choice
- Several activities available at a time
- Teachers respect children's selection
- Teachers pick up on activities children select and show interest
- Pre-K and School-Age kids help prepare materials

Teachers Plan and Conduct Smooth Transitions Between Activities

- Children are given advance notice
- Children are not always required to move as a group
- New activities are prepared and ready before the transition
- School-Age children help plan and participate in the change in activities
- School-Age children have time to adjust from public school to program
- Teachers are flexible enough to change planned activities as needed
Sample Daily Schedule

6:30-9:15  Individual and small group; child-initiated and some teacher directed activities that include art, music, manipulatives, dramatic play and sand/water play. Snack is incorporated. Diaper changing, restroom and hand-washing are ongoing. Planned transitional activities leading to...

9:15-10:00  Outside play and curriculum. Planned transitional activities leading to...

10:00-11:30  Individual and small group; child initiated and some teacher initiated activities that include art, music, manipulatives, dramatic play and sand/water play. Diaper changing, restroom, and hand-washing are on-going. Planned transitional activities leading to...

11:30-12:15  Lunch and planned transitional activities leading to...

12:15-2:30  Nap and quiet time. Planned transitional activities leading to...

2:30-3:15  Individual and small group; child-initiated and some teacher directed activities that include art, music, manipulatives and dramatic play. Snack is incorporated. Diaper changing, restroom and hand-washing are ongoing. Planned transitional activities leading to...

3:15-4:00  Outside play and curriculum. Planned transitional activities leading to...

4:00-6:30  Individual and small group; child-initiated and some teacher directed activities that include art, music, manipulatives and dramatic play. Snack is incorporated. Diaper changing, restroom and hand-washing are ongoing. Planned transitional activities leading to...
Learning Through Play

Children learn through play. Listed below are samples of learning activities and centers found in preschool programs and what children learn while playing with each.

When I string beads, I am learning...
- Eye-hand coordination
- Concept of color, shape, and location
- Number and proportion concepts, such as more, less, longer, and shorter
- To create and reproduce patterns and sequences - a math skill
- Pride in accomplishment

When I play with blocks, cars, and trucks, I am learning...
- Concept of shapes, sizes, length, and locations - all relative to learning to read and to do math
- To create and repeat patterns - a math skill
- To exercise imagination
- To express my ideas
- To cooperate with others
- To solve problems
- About the properties of wood
- To see myself from a different perspective - that of a giant!

When I play with puzzles, I am learning...
- About relationships of parts to the whole - a basic math concept
- Eye-hand coordination
- Concepts of shape, size, color and location
- Vocabulary related to the subject of the puzzle
- Problem solving based on clues of the puzzle
- About negative and positive space; seeing something against its background - math and reading concepts
- Self-confidence as I solve more and more difficult puzzles
- Independence as I use the puzzle without help
- Sorting, as I group "sets" of puzzle pieces belonging to different puzzles or "like" pieces together
When I do cooking projects, I am learning...
- About nutrition, tastes, and food groups
- How heat and cold changes things
- Concepts of volume and measurement
- Vocabulary
- The relationship between the part and whole relationships - basic math concepts
- An awareness of my own and other cultures

When I play in water, I am learning...
- That some things sink and some things float
- To observe changes as water takes different forms in different containers
- About different temperatures
- About wet, dry and evaporation
- What happens when you add soap
- Eye-hand coordination as I learn to pour
- Concept of empty and full, volume and weight

When I paint at the easel, I am learning...
- To develop my imagination and creativity
- Eye-hand coordination - helpful when I learn to write
- The names of colors and how to make new colors
- To distinguish shapes and purposely create new shapes
- To notice patterns from background - necessary for learning to read
- To express my feelings and ideas
- That my ideas have value
- Relationships of space and size
- Concepts of symmetry, balance and design

When I finger-paint, I am learning...
- To exercise my imagination and creativity
- About how colors mix to form new colors
- Concepts of shape, size and location
- Eye-hand coordination
- An acceptable way to make a mess
- A way to have fun sharing ideas with others who are near
When I play with paste, glue and collage materials, I am learning...
  ✓ To exercise my imagination and creativity
  ✓ Concepts of shape, size, location and design (reading skills)
  ✓ About things that are sticky
  ✓ About things that have different textures
  ✓ How to create patterns and designs
  ✓ To distinguish patterns from a background

When I play Rhythm instruments, I am learning...
  ✓ To be conscious of rhythms in music
  ✓ Concept of fast, slow, loud and soft
  ✓ To express myself in a new way
  ✓ Listening and "auditory discrimination" skills necessary to learn to read
  ✓ To interpret signals and cues

When I play with scissors, I am learning...
  ✓ To control the small muscles in my hand
  ✓ Concept of shape, size, color and location
  ✓ To exercise my imagination and creativity

When I dance, I am learning...
  ✓ To express myself physically
  ✓ To be conscious of the moods and rhythms of music
  ✓ Balance and coordination

When I play on climbing equipment, I am learning...
  ✓ To cooperate with others when involved in dramatic play
  ✓ Self-confidence as I develop new skills
  ✓ Physical strength, coordination and balance
  ✓ To use my imagination
  ✓ To solve problems
When I play in the home center, I am learning...

✓ To be flexible in my thinking
✓ To express myself in sentences
✓ To try on different adult roles
✓ To solve problems, especially socially, through negotiations with friends
✓ To sort and organize play things
✓ To make decisions
✓ To improvise and use things in a symbolic way to represent something else
  - a form of abstract thinking
✓ To carry out my ideas, with the cooperation of others
✓ To exercise my imagination and creativity

When I play with puppets, I am learning...

✓ To express ideas with words
✓ To take on the role of someone else
✓ To communicate with voice tones as well as words
✓ To use my imagination

When I play with sand, I am learning...

✓ To exercise my imagination
✓ Concept of size, shape and volume
✓ To distinguish between empty and full
✓ How to use tools
✓ To solve problems
✓ Concept of warm and cool; wet, damp, and dry; heavy and light
✓ How to play socially with others
✓ To create systems for classifying, ordering and arranging
✓ To create my own patterns and symbols (reading and writing skills)
✓ To observe change (science skill)

When I play in science center, I am learning...

✓ New vocabulary
✓ Concepts of texture, color, weight and size
✓ To group objects into categories and observe likenesses and differences
✓ To appreciate nature and develop a sense of wonder
When I play with play dough or clay, I am learning...

- To see the shape against the background of the table (reading skill)
- Concept of shapes and relative sizes - big, small, length, height
- To see negative space when cookie cutter shapes are taken away
- To express feelings, squeezing and pounding
- To exercise my imagination and creativity
- That the amount of substance remains the same, even when the shape changes

When I play on riding toys, I am learning...

- Strength, balance and coordination of large muscles
- To use my energy in a constructive way
- Concepts of speed, direction and location
- To use my imagination as I pretend to be a different character and make noises
- To negotiate and take turns
- To solve problems
- Self-confidence as I master new skills

When I look at books and listen to stories, I am learning...

- That learning to read is enjoyable and relevant to my world
- That letters on a page represent words - talk written down!!!
- The meaning of more and more words
- To express my own thoughts, feelings and ideas better
- To exercise my own imagination
- To interpret pictures that represent new ideas
- To actively listen to spoken language
- To make up my own stories
- To handle books with care
- The value of a well done illustration
- To recognize certain words when I see them in print
- To use more complex language patterns in speech
- To follow a plot
When I participate in circle time activities, I am learning...
✓ To listen, sit still and understand spoken language
✓ To add my ideas to the discussion
✓ That my ideas have value
✓ To wait when others are talking
✓ New vocabulary connected with the topics of discussion
✓ To remember words to songs and poems
✓ The names of others in the group
✓ To cooperate and be considerate of the needs of others
✓ To help plan what we will do and what we need to do it

When I sort things, I am learning...
✓ To notice details, the likenesses and differences in objects
✓ To form categories
✓ Concepts of color, size and shape
✓ The numerical concept of more and less
✓ Logical reasoning

When I sing songs learned at school, I am learning...
✓ Principles of music and rhythm
✓ Vocabulary
✓ Memory skills and sequencing
✓ To be conscious of others
✓ Auditory discrimination skills (recognizing the differences in sound)
✓ Various concepts emphasized in songs
✓ Awareness and identification with my culture and the cultural heritage of others