Do’s and Don’ts

To provide quality experiences for young children, you can do the following:

1. Encourage self-directed problem solving and experimentation.
   **DO**
   - Help children to talk through and think of creative solutions to problems (e.g., “It is raining, so we can’t have our picnic outside. What can we do?”).
   - Involve children in simple experiments like seeing whether objects will sink or float in water.
   - Ask children to make predictions. “What will happen if _____?”
   **DON’T** Do everything for children when making their own decisions would provide a learning experience.

2. Provide opportunities for children to explore the physical properties of a wide variety of objects.
   **DO**
   - Provide collections of objects including objects that are similar and different on a variety of dimensions, such as size, shape, texture, and function.
   - Encourage children to organize objects by characteristics. Objects can be organized in baskets, boxes, or on shelves, so that the object remains in sight and the child can examine his or her work.
   **DON’T** Discourage children from manipulating objects by various properties.
3. Provide opportunities for children to formulate ideas (hypotheses) about how things work and how different objects and events may be related to each other.

**DO**

☑ Take pictures of children’s explorations and discoveries. Write down their descriptions of what is happening and what they have learned.

☑ Ask children questions about what they are exploring to prompt them to make mental connections between what they already know and what they are learning.

**DON’T** Tell children what is happening and why. Don’t correct immature understandings of events.

4. Ask questions that challenge children to think about what they are doing in new ways.

**DO**

☑ Ask questions that prompt children to consider alternatives, such as, “How do you think that would work if you used paper instead of clay?”

☑ Ask questions that challenge children to think about what they are doing such as, “Why did you use that piece?”

☑ Ask questions that prompt children to reflect on what is happening such as, “Why do you think the play dough is now purple?”

**DON’T** Limit your use of questions to quizzing children about concepts such as color, amount, or labels.
5. Encourage experimentation and creativity rather than imitation.

**DO**

- Provide materials that are open ended, have no right or wrong answer, and can be used in a variety of ways.

- Talk to children about how they used the materials and what they were thinking rather than asking them to name their product.

**DON'T** Expect all children to make the same product or copy an adult model.
6. Encourage children to make plans and initiate their own activities.

**DO**

☑ Observe children’s play to gather information about the types of materials they enjoy, types of activities they prefer, and ideas they are interested in.

☑ Set out materials that you know the children are interested in.

☑ Ask children about their plans. “What are you planning to do?” “What materials will you need?” “How will you begin your plan?”

**DON’T** Get so caught up in teacher plans and activities that it becomes difficult to adapt in response to children’s plans.

7. Encourage children to dress themselves.

**DO**

☑ Allow children to put on and take off their own coats, boots, and other outerwear when leaving or entering the building, providing the least amount of help needed.

☑ Provide dolls and doll clothing or dress-up clothing with zippers, snaps, buttons, and buckles.

**DON’T** Dress children who can dress themselves (even if time is an issue.)

8. Plan for transitions between activities and prepare children by telling or signaling about upcoming transitions.

**DO**

☑ Warn children of activity changes several minutes before they will occur (e.g., “You have five more minutes to play and then it will be time to clean up.”).

☑ Teach children a signal for changing to a different activity (e.g., turning off the lights, playing a tune on the piano, ringing a small bell, clapping your hands, singing a familiar song).

**DON’T** Abruptly change activities without providing prior warning to children.
9. Establish several daily routines for children.

**DO**
- ✔ Have a specific time for routines like snack, outside play, nap or rest time, and other classroom routines.
- ✔ Keep your schedule consistent from day to day.

**DON'T** Allow random decision making to drive the day’s activities.

10. Encourage children to clean up after themselves and put things back where they belong.

**DO**
- ✔ Have a classroom rule about cleanup (e.g., everyone helps clean up, cleanup occurs at a certain time or after each activity).
- ✔ Assign cleanup helpers for different tasks and give each child a turn at helping.
- ✔ Praise all attempts to help with the cleanup process.

**DON'T** Make it difficult for children to help with cleanup.
11. Encourage children to make choices and requests during snack time.

**DO**
- Prompt children to request items during snack (e.g., “What do you want?” “You want more juice. Say more juice.”).
- Give children the items they request promptly after they have requested them.
- Allow children to use a variety of requesting behaviors such as a head nod, pointing, smiling.
- Praise children who ask for items.

**DON'T** Deny snack to children who are unable or unwilling to request a snack.

12. Encourage children to follow social rules in work and play situations.

**DO**
- Have children participate in establishing classroom rules.
- Remind children regularly about the class rules and the consequences.
- When a child breaks a rule, tell him or her which rule has been broken and the consequence, then enforce the consequence.

**DON'T** Have a large number of rules for children to remember and follow.

13. Provide opportunities to practice and understand good safety procedures such as when boarding, riding, or leaving a bus.

**DO**
- Talk about, and practice, following safety procedures for the bus.
- Tell children simply why the procedures are important (e.g., “We stay in our seat so we won’t get hurt.”).
- Practice and have parents practice procedures with children.

**DON'T** Expect children to master skills without modeling by adults and time to practice.
14. Encourage the expression of preferences for activities and materials.

**DO**

☑ Allow time in the day for free-play choices, allowing children to choose where they want to play.
☑ Allow children to decide how they will use the materials that are available.
☑ Allow children to choose between two or more activities (e.g., sand or water table).

**DON’T** Don’t limit children’s opportunities for making choices throughout the day and in different types of situations.

15. Encourage children to participate in simple group problem-solving activities.

**DO**

☑ Provide children with a variety of open-ended materials.
☑ Expect children to use their existing skills to solve new problems.
☑ Encourage children to “try out” their ideas.
☑ Encourage children to talk with each other about their ideas for completing different tasks or using different materials.

**DON’T** Provide quick answers to “problems” that children encounter.
16. Encourage the children to use body language to add expression and/or clarify their meaning.

**DO**

☑ Use your own arms, feet, hands, shoulders, and facial expressions, along with your speech.

☑ Look at pictures of people or watch people on TV with the sound turned off. Talk about the way people move when they talk and what they might be feeling or saying.

☑ Say poems or sing songs that have motions and exaggerated facial expressions.

**DON’T** Discourage children from demonstrating the use of nonverbal signals.

17. Help children to learn and use new words.

**DO**

☑ Help each child make a personal dictionary that includes words he or she knows and examples (pictures of the words).

☑ Define new words as they appear in context (e.g., “Then they husked the corn. Husking is taking the parts that are like leaves off the corncob.”).

☑ Expand on what the child says: add new words, repeat the child’s statement using correct grammar, and add descriptive words.

**DON’T** Make language and literacy a didactic activity.

18. Use size-related words to describe objects and encourage children to do the same.

**DO**

☑ Use size words to describe common objects (“What a huge tree!” “That’s a tiny dog.”).

☑ Give children opportunities to categorize objects by size. Provide various size words to label categories (e.g., humorous, huge, tiny, teensy-weensy, big, large, small).

**DON’T** Inhibit children’s opportunities to experiment with properties of size.
19. Use language for children to imitate.
   
   **DO**
   - Talk about the child’s daily activities.
   - Use proper grammar
   - Speak clearly and in a normal tone of voice.
   
   **DON’T** Use baby talk.

20. Provide activities to develop language and literacy through meaningful experience.
   
   **DO**
   - Read to, and have children read, stories, poems, and words to songs.
   - Encourage children to dictate and read their own group or individual stories.
   - Take field trips. Before going, talk about what you might see, and after returning, write and read about the experience. Write a group (or individual) thank-you letter to the field trip host.
   
   **DON’T** Expect children to develop skills without an array of rich experience.
21. Create learning centers that encourage children to explore and discuss ideas and concepts in small groups.

**DO**

☑ Set up learning centers that reflect children’s interests (e.g., water, plants, horses, fairies).

☑ Provide a variety of materials at the center that encourage conversation, such as books, pictures, manipulatives.

☑ Talk with the children about what they are exploring and thinking about; encourage them to share their ideas with each other.

☑ Create opportunities for children to tell each other about things that are happening in the learning center.

**DON’T** Use this as an opportunity to do direct teaching on a topic.

22. Participate in discussions with children about their discoveries, explorations, and interests.

**DO**

☑ Ask children what they are learning and thinking about.

☑ Document what children are exploring by taking photos, hanging up their work (e.g., pictures, writing), and preparing posters that show the story of their explorations and discoveries.

☑ Place documentation of children’s work and thinking in learning centers so that children and parents can reflect on what is going on in different areas of the room.

**DON’T** Ignore children’s work.
23. Encourage children to contribute to group discussions.

**DO**

- Allow children to contribute during circle time and other discussion times. Remind them of the appropriate classroom rule (e.g., raise your hand or wait till the other person is done talking).
- Ask individual children to contribute to discussions. Especially for hesitant and shy children, start with questions that have no right or wrong answer (“What did you think about the story?”).

**DON'T** Force children to participate.

24. Encourage conversation between children.

**DO**

- With several children, bring up subjects of common interest like the activity they are doing, common likes, other commonalities (e.g., “Both Suzy and Johnny have a dog.”).
- Start a conversation then allow and encourage children to continue it.

**DON'T** Dominate children’s conversations, but prompt and support children to respond to one another.

25. Encourage children to use their language for expressing feelings, ideas, and needs.

**DO**

- Ask children what they are feeling or thinking about.
- Support children to tell each other how different events make them feel, such as, “I’m angry when you take my toy car.”
- Encourage children to tell each other and adults what they want, such as, “I want you to give me a turn.”
- Accept children’s descriptions of how they are feeling.

**DON'T** Tell a child how to feel or how not to feel.
26. Read to children.

**DO**
- Introduce children to all types of books, including storybooks, concept books, wordless books, and dictionaries.
- Read favorite stories over and over again.
- Provide opportunities and materials for children to reenact stories with flannel boards, props, puppets.
- Read stories that reflect the cultural traditions of the children.
- Read to children throughout the day individually, in pairs, and as a group.

**DON'T** Limit reading to large group time.
27. Participate in discussions with children about books.

**DO**
- Ask children to predict what a story will be about from the title or pictures or guess what will happen next.
- Ask children what they liked or disliked about a story.
- Ask questions that relate stories to daily experiences (e.g., “In the story, Alex went swimming. Do you go swimming?”).
- Ask factual questions about stories and questions about the pictures (e.g., “Was it summer or winter in the story? How could you tell?”).

**DON’T** Discourage a child’s excitement about reading by constantly demanding that he or she answer questions.

28. Encourage children to read.

**DO**
- Encourage children to help read story titles and other easy phrases.
- Encourage children to read their own and others’ names, labels of common objects in the room, and labels of activity areas.
- Place advertisements, food boxes, and can labels in a play kitchen for children to read.
- Label art supplies and things in the science area.
- Encourage children to write and read their own stories.

**DON’T** Limit the availability of books, pictures, and magazines.
29. Set up a writing center.

**DO**
- Identify an area of the room as a writing center.
- Include materials such as paper, pencils, markers, chalk, chalkboards, notebooks, typewriters, computers, and staplers.
- Prepare a journal for each child and encourage him or her to put entries in the journal (e.g., words, marks, pictures).
- Have children share the work they are doing in the writing center with each other.

**DON'T** Make work in the writing center mandatory or adult directed.

30. Provide opportunities for children to copy names, letters, and other meaningful words.

**DO**
- Write children’s names slowly on their papers, saying each individual letter as it is written.
- Write children’s names on a separate piece of paper for them to copy the name to their own paper.
- Provide opportunities for children to write their names on art projects, class charts, and so on.

**DON'T** Expect children to learn to form letters without good models.
31. Provide a variety of “play spaces” so that children can select from a number of different play options.

**DO**

- Set up a variety of play areas such as writing center, book area, art, dramatic play, blocks, sensory play (e.g., sand and water), and manipulatives.
- Include a variety of different objects and materials in each play area to support a variety of different types of play.

**DON’T** Expect all children to engage in the same types of play.

32. Play games that include physical activities with children.

**DO**

- Play games and sing songs that encourage action, such as “Ring around the Rosy,” “Duck, Duck, Goose,” “Mother (Captain) May I?” “Musical Chairs,” and “Simon Says.”
- Play in appropriate areas, outside or inside, in a space large enough for the game.

**DON’T** Control children’s physical activities.
33. Provide social opportunities to meet and play with other children and adults.

**DO**

- Allow time in the day for free play.
- Include parents and other family members on field trips.
- Have parties or special days (e.g., day at the park) with other classes.
- Invite community members to share their interests and skills with the children, for example, invite a builder to come and share some blueprints with a group of children who have created structures in the block area.

**DON'T** Discourage parents from taking an active role in program activities.

34. Show interest and enjoyment in children by listening to music, playing games, or dancing with them.

**DO**

- Interact with children as they play. Show interest in their actions by asking open-ended questions or reflecting their comments (e.g., “That cake looks good. What’s in it?” “You’re making that elephant walk up the hill. What will the elephant do now?”).
- Move through all the different play areas, commenting on the different activities in which children are engaged.
- Help children share their play activities with each other during a circle or meeting time.
- During gross motor and music times, sing, dance, and run (when appropriate) with children. Play ball or other games with children, not directing the activity but only participating.

**DON'T** Ignore what children are doing.
35. Include a variety of materials in each play area so that children with differing abilities and interests can play together.

**DO**
- Examine the materials included in each play area from the perspective of each child in the room.
- Adapt any materials to assure that a child with a disability or challenge can participate in the play area.
- Talk to children about the play areas and the materials they would like to find there.

**DON'T** Expect children to conform to adult expectations of how a particular play area should be used.

36. Observe and record what children are doing during play.

**DO**
- Spend time in each play area.
- Record what children are doing and saying during their play.
- Display artifacts and pictures of what children accomplished during their play.
- Share with parents how children are playing and what it means about their development.
- Use the information gathered by watching children’s play to develop new play areas or enrich existing areas.

**DON'T** Interrupt children’s play.
37. Provide children with at least 35 to 40 minutes of uninterrupted, child-directed, free choice time daily.

**DO**

- ✔ Set up a rich play environment so that children can engage in play for at least 35 to 40 minutes without reaching the limits of the materials or play options.
- ✔ Observe what is happening as children play so that you can expand and enrich the play by adding materials, suggesting an additional story line, or asking a thought-provoking question.
- ✔ Protect children’s play from interruption.

**DON’T** Dominate children’s play.

38. Encourage children to participate in simple group problem-solving situations.

**DO**

- ✔ Allow children to vote for group activities.
- ✔ Allow children to suggest activities and use their suggestions.

**DON’T** Make all decisions for children.

39. Encourage expression of feelings that are of a more abstract nature.

**DO**

- ✔ Help children identify their feelings (e.g., “You feel sad” or “You miss your mom.”).
- ✔ Talk about the feelings of characters in books.
- ✔ Ask and encourage children to tell how they feel.
- ✔ Allow verbal expression of all feelings.

**DON’T** Disregard or minimize children’s feelings.
40. Use guidance techniques such as modeling and encouraging expected behavior to help development of self-control in children.

**DO**

☑ Tell children what to do instead of what not to do.

☑ When a child has a problem, talk through possible solutions. Ask what can be done or make suggestions and help the child decide whether the suggestion will work.

☑ Demonstrate appropriate behavior.

☑ Encourage children to use words instead of physical action to respond to problems. Model talking the way you expect children to speak.

**DON’T** Expect children to anticipate necessary behaviors without providing cues or prompts.

41. Provide affection and support, comforting children if they cry and reassuring them if they are fearful.

**DO**

☑ Talk matter-of-factly to children (e.g., “You fell down and hurt your knee, but we’re going to get an ice pack and that will help you.”).

☑ Reflect children’s feelings (e.g., “You’re sad right now.”).

☑ Allow the child to indicate whether he or she wishes to be held, hugged, or picked up, or ask, “Would you like to sit on my lap for a while?”

☑ Help the child to move on to a different activity (e.g., “Would you like to go to the sandbox? I will go with you.”)

**DON’T** Minimize feelings that children express.
42. Offer experiences to alleviate children’s fears.

**DO**
- Read stories about common fears and talk about them.
- Allow and encourage children to talk openly about their fears. Reflect their feelings (e.g., “You don’t like the dark.”).

**DON’T** Belittle or demean children’s fears.

43. Structure activities that require sharing.

**DO**
- Provide enough toys or supplies (e.g., blocks) for several children to play at once.
- Provide a variety of toys (e.g., large and small blocks of various shapes).
- Choose supplies so that there are enough for each child to have something but so that each child has different things. For example, when making cookies with five children, have two spoons, one bowl, and several measuring cups. Encourage sharing and turn taking with materials.
- Help children to pass food to one another during snack, rather than the teacher serving everyone.
- Play games that require sharing materials, like passing a ball.

**DON’T** Restrict activities that would provide opportunities for children to engage in turn taking, requesting objects, and waiting.

44. Encourage children to participate in simple group problem-solving situations.

**DO**
- Allow children to vote for group activities.
- Allow children to suggest activities and use their suggestions

**DON’T** Make all decisions for children.
45. Spend one-on-one time with each child each day.

**DO**

☑ Ask a question about some unique aspect of the child’s life, such as a recent trip to Grandma’s house.

☑ Comment on a specific activity you observed the child doing.

☑ Share a book or object in which this child will be uniquely interested.

**DON’T** Ask all children the same questions.

For additional information on appraising quality child care, visit our Web site at http://www.earlychilded.delmar.com