Do’s and Don’ts

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

1. Child-proof the environment: monitor for safety issues and attend to things that pose a hazard.
   
   **DO**
   
   ☑ Remove all electrical cords from reach and cover all outlets.
   
   ☑ Store all poisonous substances in a locked cabinet, out of the reach of toddlers.
   
   ☑ Bolt all shelves to the wall and remove all unsteady pieces of furniture that toddlers could climb on or pull over.
   
   ☑ Using locking gates to prevent toddlers from reaching dangerous areas.
   
   ☑ Supervise toddlers at all times.
   
   **DON’T** Assume toddlers have a sense of safety or danger.

2. Provide an area free of dangerous obstacles so children can practice walking.
   
   **DO**
   
   ☑ Provide clear paths for toddlers to maneuver through on their way to activity areas.
   
   ☑ Provide open areas for gross motor practice.
   
   **DON’T** Keep toddlers in confined areas such as playpens.
3. Set up the environment with a variety of interesting areas for individual/small group (two to three children) exploration.

**DO**

- Create a number of areas (four or five, depending on the size of the group) with interesting materials and activities such as blocks, small vehicles, sensory play, book area, a housekeeping and/or baby doll area.
- Have duplicates, triplicates, maybe even quadruplicates of favorite play materials to encourage parallel play while respecting the fact that toddlers are not ready to share.
- Limit the number and duration of whole group activities.

**DON'T** Expect toddlers to engage in large group activities.

4. Provide opportunities for child to explore effects of actions.

**DO**

- Provide an array of materials that react to a toddler's actions such as busy boxes, musical toys, waterwheels, squeak toys.
- Allow children opportunities to turn doorknobs, screw and unscrew lids from plastic containers, use a pegboard, work with clay, and finger paint.
- Talk to toddlers about what happens when they play with materials, for example, “Look, the lights came on when you pushed that button.”
- Make exaggerated reactions to toddler actions on materials. “Oh my, did you make that big noise happen?”

**DON'T** Limit toddlers’ opportunities for “hands-on” exploration.
5. Encourage the use of fingers and hands through activities such as block building.

**DO**

- Provide varied opportunities for children to use hands and fingers such as dials on busy boxes, crank on jack-in-the-box, shovel and pail in sandbox, large nuts and bolts (plastic), switches and knobs, containers with lids, and finger paint.
- Provide items of differing size, shape, and textures that toddlers are encouraged to touch and manipulate.
- Talk with toddlers about the objects they are touching, giving them information about the shape, texture, and features of the object.
- Provide a variety of objects for children to stack (nesting objects, stacking rings, large and small blocks).

**DON’T** Have items available within reach that toddlers are expected not to touch.
6. Provide opportunities and materials that enable children to participate in imaginary play.

**DO**
- ✓ Have large, empty boxes available for toddlers to turn into caves, cars, trains, and other imaginative play spaces.
- ✓ Have hats, scarves, shoes, and large clothing available for dress-up and role-playing.
- ✓ Have an array of objects available that can be used for pretend such as tubes, boxes (of all sizes), egg cartons, pans.

**DON'T** Provide only realistic props in the dramatic play area.

7. Encourage children to find objects that require searching.

**DO**
- ✓ Play “I Spy” games, encouraging children to find objects around the environment.
- ✓ Have children help locate materials needed for daily activities.

**DON'T** Limit opportunities to visually explore the environment.

8. Play music with strong, predictable rhythms.

**DO**
- ✓ Play music with repetitive rhythms.
- ✓ Stop music during listening and have children continue the rhythm.

**DON'T** Limit the types of and times music is available in the environment. For example, do not play music only at naptime.
9. Provide an interesting and varied environment that challenges emerging motor abilities.

**DO**

- ✓ Provide stimulating environment at child’s level for creeping and crawling.
- ✓ Provide objects to crawl under and around.
- ✓ Provide tunnels and opened boxes.
- ✓ Provide interesting toys to crawl to.
- ✓ Provide different surfaces to crawl on.
- ✓ Hold child’s arms to provide support.
- ✓ Have an interesting toy on a table or chair that the child can see only by standing.
- ✓ Have interesting sights available to standing child (fish tank, windows, pictures).

**DON’T** Expect toddlers to remain in confined areas for long periods of time.

10. Provide objects to push and pull as walking skills develop.

**DO**

- ✓ Provide objects such as large cars and buses to push.
- ✓ Provide toys that make noise when pushed and pulled.
- ✓ Provide objects that are secure to hold while pushing and pulling (carts, wagons).

**DON’T** Have push and pull toys located in an area that is congested or near doors.
11. Provide a variety of materials that encourage children to scribble.

**DO**

☑ Provide a variety of writing implements (large markers, crayons, pencils).
☑ Provide a variety of papers for toddlers to write on.
☑ Sit with toddlers and ask them about their writing.
☑ Display children’s work.
☑ Sit down and scribble right alongside the toddlers.
☑ Talk to toddlers about the colors they are using and the types of marks they are making: “Look at that blue, curly line you just drew. It goes round and round.”

**DON’T** Expect toddlers to use crayons and other markers in controlled ways.

12. Provide a safe obstacle course for children to negotiate to encourage the development of more refined movements, spatial awareness, coordination, and balance.

**DO**

☑ Provide safe obstacles such as incline planes, ladder on ground, tunnel, large cardboard box (ends removed), and chairs.
☑ Design obstacles in both the indoor and outdoor environments.
☑ Vary the types of movements needed to negotiate the obstacle course.
☑ Place cushions or mats around the course to soften a fall.

**DON’T** Place a child on or in any piece of equipment that he or she is unable to negotiate on independently.
13. Play games that include physical activity.

**DO**

- Play games and sing songs that encourage action such as “Ring around the Rosy,” “Duck, Duck, Goose,” “Mother (Captain) May I?” and “Musical Chairs.”
- Make obstacle courses both inside and outside.
- Use exercises as games, such as “Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes.”
- Take nature walks.
- Dramatize stories.

**DON’T** Expect toddlers to sit still.

14. Provide materials that allow children to create through art.

**DO**

- Have crayons, markers, paste, paint, and chalk available.
- Provide large sheets of paper, cardboard, sandpaper, and construction paper.
Have play dough or clay available along with an array of tools for sculpting, cutting, rolling, and shaping.

Have a variety of interesting objects available for toddlers to incorporate into their artistic creations such as ribbons, sparkles, materials, and shells.

**DON'T** Expect children to copy adult art projects.

15. **Provide opportunities for sand and water play.**

**DO**

- ✔ Allow children to “paint” outdoors with large brushes and clean water.
- ✔ Provide various-size containers with and without spouts for water exploration.
- ✔ Have designated area for water play.
- ✔ Have box of water toys available (use domestic utensils, such as an egg beater, spatula, measuring cups, and whisk, and add soap suds or coloring).
- ✔ Have trucks, buckets, sifters, funnels, measuring spoons, and cups available for play.

**DON'T** Expect toddlers to keep sand and water in the table at all times, sensory play can be messy.
16. Use clear, developmentally appropriate language around children.

**DO**
- Describe what is happening in short sentences.
- Add descriptors such as words identifying size, color, sounds, and texture to toddler phrases.
- Use correct sentence structure and pronunciation when speaking with toddlers.

**DON’T** Use “baby talk” with toddlers.

17. Read to children.

**DO**
- Keep a variety of books that interest children.
- Allow children to pick stories or books.
- Read with enthusiasm, exaggeration, inflection, and emotion.
- Read to children every day.
- Point to identify objects in books.
- Acknowledge child’s request to reread books.

**DON’T** Limit reading times to specific times of the day such as just prior to naptime.

18. Pair language with daily routines and caregiving activities.

**DO**
- Verbalize to children what is happening or about to happen.
- Relate events in a sequential order.
- Emphasize “key” words when verbalizing daily routines.
- Pair words with actions (“We’re going around the table.” “I’m brushing the doll’s hair.”).
- Keep explanations short and specific.

**DON’T** Exclude toddlers from discussions about the events that are going on around them.
19. Respond to child’s language by imitating, commenting, or expanding on what he or she has said.

**DO**

- ✓ Imitate and encourage utterances.
- ✓ Reinforce close approximations.
- ✓ Provide a correct model of sounds and words.

**DON’T** Expect perfect language from toddlers.

20. Show enthusiasm in voice and actions during reading, rhyming, and singing.

**DO**

- ✓ Exaggerate your actions during games.
- ✓ Model “enjoyment” for whatever activity children are participating in.
- ✓ Have fun with language and language games.

**DON’T** Overwhelm toddlers with too much adult talk.


**DO**

- ✓ Individually walk with or hold a child as you walk around the environment and name and give short explanations of objects (“This is a light switch, it turns lights off and on. Look: off, now on.”).
- ✓ Use consistent language during explanations.
- ✓ Ask the child what he or she would like to explore next.

**DON’T** Make touring the environment a lesson that places performance demands on the child.
22. Use question words, such as “who,” “what,” and “where,” during play situations.

**DO**
- Use very simple question sentences at first.
- Initially model correct responses after asking a question.

**DON’T** Turn question words into a test.

23. Play turn-taking games with the children.

**DO**
- Provide necessary wait time for turn taking.
- Be sensitive to child cues.
- Promote balance in child–caregiver interactions.
- Initially prompt a child’s response if necessary.

**DON’T** Forget that toddlers are still egocentric or that turn taking is a new and challenging idea.

24. Pay attention to child’s gestures and sounds by looking and speaking to him or her.

**DO**
- Look at children when you speak.
- Be aware of a child’s communication for basic needs and wants (diaper change, water).
- Reinforce child utterances by responding.

**DON’T** Expect all a child’s communications to be clear and understandable.

25. Demonstrate a sense of humor, act silly.

**DO**
- Dress up in different costumes (or wear clothes backward).
- Make silly faces.
- Use objects for unintended (but safe) purposes (i.e., balance a ball on your head).

**DON’T** Take yourself too seriously (too often).
26. Use words playfully or humorously that encourage child to imitate you.

**DO**

- Add exaggerated inflections to voice: high pitch, low pitch.
- Play vocal imitation games such as saying a silly phrase and then telling the child, “Now it’s your turn.”
- Repeat a child’s sounds and words as if in a game.

**DON’T** Demand that a child speak or participate in word games.

27. Use puppets, flannel boards, and other objects to tell children stories.

**DO**

- Retell favorite stories using puppets or flannel boards.
- Ask children if they would like to participate and retell parts of favorite stories, provide props to help them remember characters and/or story events.

**DON’T** Turn story time into a test that requires children to remember story details.
28. Reinforce appropriate behavior.

**DO**
- Model and teach child to be polite.
- Model “Hi,” “Good-bye,” “Thank you,” and “Please” in natural situations.
- Prompt child responses such as “What do we say?” and “What’s the magic word?”

**DON’T** Expect that children will learn manners without support and reinforcement.

29. Encourage each child to talk about what he or she is doing.

**DO**
- Model verbalizing child’s action: “You’re walking up the steps.”
- Ask children specific questions about their actions.
- Keep questions short and specific.
- Be an active listener: keep your attention directed to the child during verbalizations.
- Encourage the child to recall recent events.

**DON’T** Forget to reinforce children’s attempts to describe what they are doing.

30. Provide opportunities for children to follow two-step directions.

**DO**
- Keep requests simple and in the same context: “Wash your hands and sit down at the table for snack.” “Get your jacket and bring it to me.”
- Guide or prompt child if necessary.

**DON’T** Overwhelm toddlers with too many directions.
31. Take part in children’s pretend play.

**DO**

- Provide a supportive environment (toys, props).
- Help children identify salient props (a shoe for a telephone).
- Comment on children’s pretend play.
- Model symbolic use of objects for children.
- Provide support for toddlers who want to join the play but may not yet know how to enter.

**DON’T** Dominate toddlers’ play or change their play agenda.

32. Repeat rhythmic, action-oriented poems.

**DO**

- Teach “Itsy, Bitsy Spider” and “Where Is Thumpkin?”
- Introduce a variety of finger plays and songs with physical movements.
- Sing along and act out the songs with toddlers.

**DON’T** Discourage toddlers if they want to sing the same songs and finger plays over and over again.
33. Comment on children’s work, play, interests, or products.

**DO**

☑ Provide specific, positive comments directed to the effort and specific work of the child: “You worked very hard on your drawing,” or “Look at all those colors you used.”

☑ Ask toddlers to tell you about their work. “Is there a story about this picture?”

☑ Display children’s work around the room, making sure it is at the children’s level.

**DON’T** Name a child’s picture before checking with the child.

34. Encourage children to ask questions and answer the questions they ask.

**DO**

☑ Encourage children to be inquisitive about the world around them by modeling the behavior. For example, on a walk outdoors speculate with the children about ideas such as, “I wonder which will make a bigger splash, this rock or this leaf?”

☑ Read children’s facial expressions, “Jake, you look as if you have a question about this.”

☑ Ask children if they have any questions or ideas they are wondering about.

**DON’T** Ignore children’s questions or wonderings.
35. Encourage children to recall and share events.

**DO**
- Talk with children about recent events such as a trip to Grandma’s house, a birthday, or going to the grocery store.
- Ask children open-ended questions about what they did or enjoyed about a recent event.
- Help children find the words to talk about the event.

**DON’T** Tell children about something they have done without incorporating them and their perspective into the telling.

36. Explain actions when demonstrating something to a child.

**DO**
- When teaching new skills, verbalize what you are doing.
- Pair words with actions.

**DON’T** Overwhelm toddlers with long descriptions.

37. Name items used in caregiving routines.

**DO**
- Talk to children by naming everyday objects used in daily activities.
- When naming objects, group them into categories (spoon and fork, cup and plate, car and road).

**DON’T** Test the child by asking him or her to name objects.
38. Expand children's single-word utterances by using them in simple sentences.

**DO**

☑ Verify a child's intent in using a single-word utterance by using the word in a sentence for the child (Child: “Water.” Teacher: “Let’s go get some water.”)

☑ Enthusiastically reinforce the child's usage of words.

☑ Closely attend to the child's pattern of speech and say the word correctly in a short sentence.

**DON'T** Correct everything a child says.

39. Talk about a child's actions (“You’re crawling under the chair.”).

**DO**

☑ Pair your language with the child’s actions

☑ Have the child repeat “action” words while doing the action (for an older toddler).

☑ Use enthusiasm in speech-emphasizing “action” words.

**DON'T** Ignore what children are doing.

40. Encourage children to participate in singing games.

**DO**

☑ Use singing throughout daily activities.

☑ Make up songs for daily activities (i.e., “Today we’re going to paint a picture, paint a picture, paint a picture.”).

☑ Present a variety of children’s songs to youngsters.

**DON'T** Demand that children engage in singing games (many toddlers will enjoy participating simply by listening and watching).
41. Have children help with daily routines.

**DO**

☑ Provide a sense of responsibility by having children retrieve items, set up for activities, and clean up.

☑ Reinforce child participation.

**DON'T** Expect toddlers to do things perfectly.

42. Provide opportunities for children to develop functional and self-help skills.

**DO**

☑ Create play settings where children can demonstrate use of objects in their settings (feeding doll, bathing doll).

☑ Model object functions (use of soap, cup, spoon).

☑ Encourage brushing and combing of hair and brushing of teeth.

☑ Encourage washing of face and hands, self-feeding, and taking off coat or jacket.

☑ Encourage children to complete simple tasks independently.

**DON'T** Forget to reinforce toddlers’ attempts at independence and taking care of themselves.
43. Place toys and materials in the same places every day so toddlers can easily find favorite objects.

**DO**

☑ Have designated areas for materials so that items such as blocks, sand and water, and manipulatives are always found in the same place.

☑ Label shelves with pictures and words so that toddlers have clues for where things can be found and where they belong during cleanup.

**DON'T** Constantly rearrange the environment. (This makes life challenging for toddlers, who are just beginning to understand how to appropriately take control of themselves and the world around them.)

44. 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.

45. Provide each child with a space that is his or hers alone.

**DO**

☑ Provide each child with a cubby that is his or her own space.

☑ Label each child’s private space with his or her picture and name.

**DON'T** Change a child’s space.
46. Assure that each child has appropriate opportunities for rest.

**DO**

- Provide a time and place for each child to have an undisturbed nap.
- Provide quiet areas of the room where children can cuddle with a book or small toys and rest (rather than sleep).
- Provide a balance of active and quiet activities throughout the day.

**DON'T** Have naptime be the only opportunity for rest.

47. Have a reliable sequence to the day’s activities.

**DO**

- Have a daily schedule that is predictable so that toddlers are able to develop an expectation of what will happen next.
- Make a picture schedule and post it at toddler level so that children can check on the events of the day.
- Provide warnings for transitions.

**DON'T** Be rigid about the time of activities; take your cue from the children. (Some days playtime may go on for 40 minutes, while other days it may go on for 20 minutes. Just be consistent with the sequence of activities.)

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