



Environment Kit Idea Guide 0-12 months

This Idea Guide will provide a short list of activities your program can try doing, using materials from the 0-12 month Environment Kits. 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

by DCF – Division of Early Care and Education

Motor Development

Infants explore objects with all of their available senses. Materials with interesting textures and vibrant colors stimulate these senses and promote learning. Through intentional planning, caregivers can extend play experiences by placing an object such as the *Oball™* (birth and up) or *Winkle™* (birth and up) at close visual range and allowing the infant to reach for and grasp the object, following with their eyes as you move it.



After learning to grasp objects, infants develop the ability to purposefully release these objects and can be encouraged to do so in a game of "My Turn, Your Turn." Encourage the child to grasp items such as the *Textured Multi Balls* (6 months and up) or a rattle from the *Tolo Baby Activity Set* (6 months and up). Alert the infant that it is their turn by saying, "Your turn", handing them the object. Hold out your hands out while saying, "My turn", encouraging the child to release the object into your hands.

To encourage more refined motor development, have infants practice filling and dumping sea creatures from the *Fishbowl Fill and Spill* (6 months and up).

Older infants may be encouraged to crawl toward an object of interest. The *Mini Wiggly Giggly Ball* (6 months and up) shakes and makes sounds, which can entice a child with emerging mobility to practice these important skills.

Enhancing Your Block Area

Adding items such as the *Pull Back Vehicles* (9 months and up) to your block area allows infants and their caregivers to expand on typical block play. Use the *Squeak'n Stack Blocks* (6 months and up) to create a tower or tunnel and encourage the infant to knock down the tower or go through the tunnel with their vehicle. Deconstruction plays an important role in the development of more complex block play. Allow infants to knock down a tower of blocks and then encourage them to hand you blocks or assist you in building the tower and knocking it down again and again.



Introducing Math

Musical Instruments can offer infants an introduction to beginning math concepts such as rhythm and pattern. Tap the keys on the *Baby Piano* (6-36 months) or shake a tambourine from the *Infant Musical Instrument Set* (birth – 2yrs) to the beat as you sing simple songs the child can recognize. Sitting the child in your lap, gently guide their hands to the instrument to help them keep time while you sing "Itsy Bitsy Spider" or other familiar songs.

The *Eco-Friendly Shape Sorter* (6 months and up) and the *Owl Family Stacking Buckets* (9 months and up) can help children explore shapes and spatial relationships. Caregivers can support play and learning by using language to identify the shape and color of the objects and by using positional words such as "on top" or "under" as you manipulate toys.

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

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Reading and Talking

When you read to an infant, they build receptive language skills, listening to the words you speak and creating connections to the things in their world. There are other opportunities to be aware of that a caregiver can intentionally offer. Reading to an infant can provide an opportunity for conversation. Pause as you read familiar books such as *"Head to Toe"* and *"Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star"*, allowing the infant to coo or babble. When you pause, the infant has an opportunity to respond. This practice promotes an understanding that there is a natural and predictable order to back and forth conversation.

Books with real pictures the infant can identify, such as *"Baby Faces: Smile"* and *"Baby Faces: Eat"*, offer an opportunity to connect their daily experiences to the text and photographs. As you read, talk about the pictures in your own words. "The baby is having breakfast just like you had breakfast this morning."

Inviting family members to come read to their child is an easy way to involve parents and support positive, cooperative relationships. Think about how you can provide this opportunity in your program and what considerations are necessary such as parent schedules, daily routines, and physical space.

Purposeful Pretend Play

Infants observe what parents and other caregivers do and the roles they play during the time they are together. As infants develop the ability to experiment with dramatic play toys and props, use this opportunity to expand the infants understanding of the world around them. Pretend to talk on the *Peek-A-Boo Phone* (3 months and up). Use the child's name or familiar words "Mommy" or "Daddy". Hand the phone to the child or assist them in holding the phone up to their ear. Use facial expressions and inflection in your voice while pretending to have a conversation.

Hold the *Heart of Mine Dolls* (3 months and up) close to you. Pretend to feed, burp, and rock the baby as you would a real infant. Pass the baby back and forth suggesting that the infant "hug the baby" and "rock the baby" like you.



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>

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 infants in your program using a positive tone of voice?
- Do you include yourself and other children in an infant's play?
- Are families encouraged to share information regarding their child's development and do they feel part of the program's community?