

A room full of toys can feel daunting for any parent or caregiver: toys and materials can easily overrun a space, it can feel cluttered and untidy, and toys can get lost or broken. But setting up a productive and fun learning space can be done! Here are some tips as to how you can achieve this in your home:

Shelves, Labels, Toys and more!

Shelving: When setting up a learning space, shelves are a great alternative to the traditional toy box. A sturdy and safe structure to house toys and materials is an essential starting point. The structure should be mounted on a wall, or anchored to the ground with a heavy base or body as per the manufacturer's instructions.

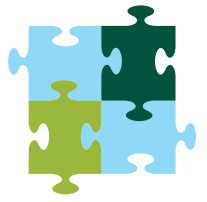
Neat spaces: Toys should be placed neatly on shelves to allow children to get them with ease, without the delay and disruption of digging and searching through an overflowing toy box. Shelves should be clutter free, with only a selection of items on display. Arranging materials in this organized fashion enables each item to have a "home" on the shelf – children know where they can retrieve items and where to place them after they are finished, promoting independence. This also allows you to rotate or swap out toys regularly – children love the surprise of having new toys on their shelves every few weeks. Finally, storing toys in this way reduces breakage compared to traditional toy boxes, great for parents' pockets!

Pictures or labels: Placing pictures, labels or icons by the item may help the child to remember where toys go. These pictures can also be used to create a visual activity schedule when your child is ready. Labeled pictures also expose children to common words, and you may find your child makes an association between the spoken word, the picture and the written text.

Arranging your shelves:

a. Low shelves should be filled with 'work' to expose children to activities they don't always like to do – even seeing Mr. Potato Head, snap beads or puzzles regularly makes children more familiar with these items, and more likely that they will select these learning toys. Work at this level should be at the 'just right' level for your child – they should be able to complete this work independently or with minimal help, in order to feel motivated to continue.

b. High shelves should be filled with preferred items you know your child is very likely to use; toys should be out of reach but within sight. Storing toys in this way creates an opportunity for the child to seek a communicative partner and request their special item, an opportunity to practice speech and social interaction. This can also be achieved with low shelves by putting favourite toys in clear Ziploc bags or clear boxes with a tight lid that the child cannot open independently – they must



approach the partner and ask for “Help” or “Open.” For early learners these are often musical toys, toys with lights, toys that move, bubbles or soft animals.

What toys: A complete learning space should have at least one of each of the following:

- a. Toys that promote ordering (nesting cups, ring stackers,)
- b. Toys for pretend play (pretend food, doctor’s kit, baby and crib, doll house)
- c. Fine motor activities (puzzles, shape sorters, peg boards, clothespins, tweezers)
- d. Building toys (wooden blocks, Lego blocks, Mega blocks, K’nex)
- e. Sets of small counters (e.g. counting bears, pegs, buttons, apples)
- f. Age appropriate books
- g. Writing materials (chalk, pencils, crayons, chalkboard, whiteboard, whiteboard markers etc.)
- h. Sensory toys (toys with lights or moving pieces, playdough, rice, bubbles, soft animals)



Strategic placing of items in an organized space will encourage your child’s enjoyment of learning activities, create more opportunities for social interaction and language use, and promote more independent play. Hopefully this has been a helpful guide to get you started – good luck!

About Us

Established in 2013, CDC provides a network of internationally qualified and licensed professionals who offer child-centered and evidence-based early detection and intervention for children with developmental delays.