

Take Home Tips

Early Learning

Eight Rules for Working with Multi-Age Groups

- 1. Arrange your play areas to provide a wide range of choices.** Young children need a variety of things to do, and they learn from each activity.
- 2. Provide some play areas that are specifically for an age group.** For example, you may want to have a room or special corner that is used only by school-agers for craft projects, to do homework, or play board games.
- 3. Consider ages of children when you store materials.** Store materials where children can reach them. Storing toys at a child's eye level or within easy reach fosters independence and helps children get them and return them easily during cleanup.
- 4. Provide materials that can be used in different ways.** Blocks, play-dough, or scarves are "open ended" play materials because there is no right or wrong way to play with them. Children of different ages use them in different ways to explore, build, create, and learn.
- 5. Become comfortable with the fact that very young children, like infants and toddlers, do not always have to "do" an activity.** Many providers worry about what to do with an infant or young toddler when they are helping preschoolers with a special project. Infants and toddlers learn by observing, touching, smelling, hearing, and tasting. Providers have several options:
 - They can choose to do some activities with preschoolers when the younger children are taking their morning nap.
 - They can place a low barrier around the activity area so that younger children can watch and learn but not disrupt the activity.
 - They can find a way for the younger children to join the activity.
 - They can let young observers touch, hear, or taste the end result after the older children are finished.



- 6. Limit the length of large group activities.** Infants and toddlers are generally disruptive to group time because they are easily distracted and can't sit still for very long. Keep it short and simple. For example: gathering song, go over daily schedule, and conclude with a music and movement activity.

- 7. Focus on experience-related activities rather than product-related activities.** Avoid craft activities that children complete by following a set of steps, however simple they may be. Focus instead of doing something that is more individualistic as children can interpret it according to their skills and interests. For instance, try providing a paper sack to decorate with an assortment of crayons, stickers, markers, fabric scraps and magazine pictures.

- 8. Teach children self-help skills and encourage children to help each other.** Children love to help. Washing dishes is real-life water play. Setting the table or putting away silverware is valuable sorting experience. Children can also help out by helping a little one wash his hands, clean up a spill, or "read" to someone else.

Source: Oesterreich, M.S. Caring for Multi-age Groups.
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