

# Spaces for Exploring... Learning...Growing



The Ministry of Education has developed the *Play and Exploration: Early Learning Program Guide* to support your preschool-aged child's early learning. Child care centres and homes, Prekindergarten programs and preschools are encouraged to use the guide to enhance children's learning.

## The Room and Materials

The Ministry of Education's *Early Learning Program Guide* offers early childhood educators suggestions for creating a learning environment. The arrangement of space, quality of furniture and selection of materials all enhance the learning experience.

When materials spark children's curiosity, children are more likely to talk and listen to other children and adults. As well, providing a variety of learning areas enriches play, builds on children's interests and provides children with opportunities for different learning experiences.

Well planned learning areas invite your child to:

- explore new ideas,
- use new words,
- make decisions,
- use imagination and creativity,
- solve problems; and,
- get along with other children.



### What will you see in your child's learning program?

- separate learning areas such as the reading and quiet area, the house area, the light and shadow area and the building area
- comfortable and welcoming areas for family that encourage children to share their learning experiences
- child-sized furniture that provides spaces for children to play alone and with others, fostering emotional growth and social skills
- materials and tools that encourage children to explore ideas about reading, writing, math and science such as:
  - a note pad for writing a grocery list in the house area
  - measuring cups in the water area
  - a chart of children's favorite vegetables
  - labels, books and other literacy materials in each learning area



## Real Objects and Tools

Real-life objects capture children's interest because they are things that "grown-ups" use. Educators use labels, charts, magazines, books and other reading materials to help children understand the real-life purposes for letters, words, messages and books.

Using real-life objects encourages make-believe play and creativity, which are important for language growth, as well as social-emotional and intellectual learning.

When varied and unique materials are available for exploration, children become scientists who question, think about and test their ideas.

Materials from nature help children learn about science and the natural environment.

## What will you see in your child's learning program?

- three, four and five-year-olds playing and exploring safely using real-life objects and tools such as:
  - hammers, nails, measuring tapes and tool belts in the construction area
  - telephones, phone books, calculators and store flyers in the house area
- treasures from home such as beads and buttons
- collections of materials from nature such as pebbles, pinecones, feathers and seeds
- toys and materials that stimulate imagination and creativity, and can be used in many different ways like sets of blocks, empty milk cartons or shoeboxes

Generally, you will not see materials that can be used only one way. For example, a toy that always does the same thing when a button is pushed does not extend a child's learning.



## Calm and Uncluttered

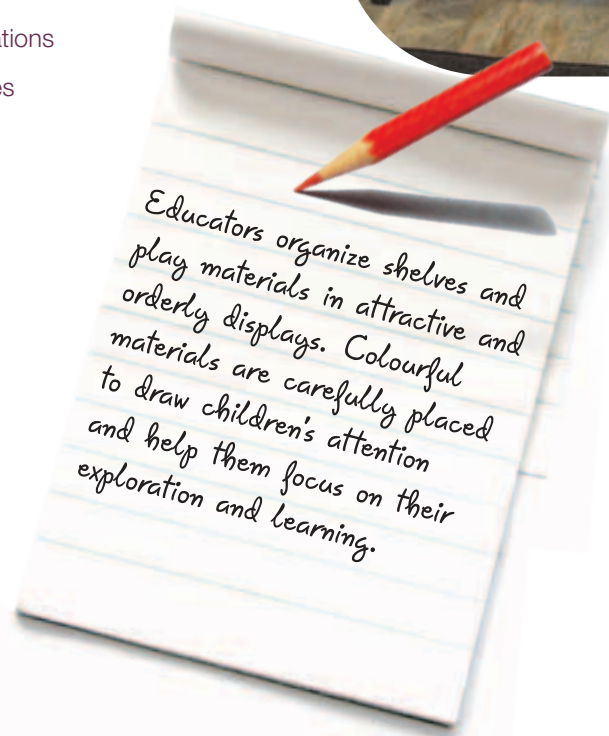
Children are better able to focus their attention in early learning programs that create calm surroundings. They are less likely to become distracted or agitated when rooms and materials are well organized.

When learning areas offer a reasonable number of choices, children are not overwhelmed and can make decisions on their own.

When the walls of learning areas are painted in light colours and furnishings are home-like and well designed, children feel relaxed, comfortable and better able to learn.

## What will you see in your child's learning program?

- neutral colours and natural wood selected for walls, display boards, carpets and furnishings
- uncluttered wall space featuring children's original creations
- displays with stories and photos of learning experiences
- children's creations displayed at children's eye level
- plants, natural objects and comfortable furniture



Educators organize shelves and play materials in attractive and orderly displays. Colourful materials are carefully placed to draw children's attention and help them focus on their exploration and learning.

## What can you do at home?

Help your child organize play materials on low shelves or in baskets, bins, or boxes; play materials will be easily accessible and easily put away when play is done.

- Your own home may already have shelves, sturdy boxes, baskets or bins that can be repurposed to help your child organize and store play materials.

Consider storing some toys or play materials away for future play.

- Too many toys at one time can be distracting for young children. Fewer numbers of play materials enable children to more easily choose what they will play and to focus their attention.
- Changing play materials occasionally can also spark renewed curiosity and interest.

Allow your child to use some child-safe, real-life materials in play.

- Adults' hats, handbags, notepads, unused wallets, old watches or unused sets of keys help children take on and play out the roles of real life.

If your child has a special interest in collecting small items such as stones, beads, badges or buttons help him/her keep the collection together in a basket or box and in an easy to find place.

## More Ideas

Parks, ponds, woods, farmyards or the lake shore provide important opportunities for children and families to interact with nature – get messy, garden, make mud pies or collect bugs, stones or leaves.

Community spaces such as art galleries, museums, libraries and recreation centres with skating rinks or swimming pools offer additional learning adventures.

Visit [healthycanadians.gc.ca/kids](http://healthycanadians.gc.ca/kids) to find all sorts of children's safety information in one place. Parents can sign up for updates on recall information regarding car seats, cribs, toys and foods. A section of the website also lets parents create a customized safety handbook for each child.



Saskatchewan  
Ministry of  
Education

For more information on the *Play and Exploration:  
Early Learning Program Guide*, go to

[www.education.gov.sk.ca/ELCC](http://www.education.gov.sk.ca/ELCC)