

Materials: Number and Variety

Relevant Satellite Accreditation Standards

II. Physical Environment, Equipment and Materials

B. Materials and equipment are developmentally suited and appealing to all children in the group.

3. There is a sufficient amount and variety of toys and materials for the number and development range of children in the group.

Appendix I: [Recommended Materials](#)



The Basics

What is an appropriate number of choices? Children in settings with stimulating, engaging materials develop better cognitive skills, including language comprehension and short-term memory. Family child care environments have many children of varying ages playing alongside and with each other, so there must be *enough* options for children to play harmoniously but not *too many* that it becomes overwhelming. For instance, toddlers with access to fewer choices **play longer, more creatively, and more focused** than toddlers in environments with many choices (Dauch et al., 2018). The appropriate number of materials is different for every program and is dependent on **culture, educational philosophy, physical space, age span, and number of children**. Family child care professionals should experiment with children's available options, keeping variety in mind, and observing its impact on play, behavior, and relationships. Consider these questions:

- How are children engaging with the materials?
- Are the materials developmentally appropriate for the ages represented?
- Is there adequate space for children to engage with the materials?

Why is material variety important? Different types of materials **nurture unique aspects** of children's development. See examples in the table below.

Material Type A few developing skills...

<i>Blocks</i>	spatial relationships	measure objects	count and quantify
<i>Dramatic Play</i>	expressive language	empathy	storytelling
<i>Art Materials</i>	self-expression	planning	symbolic thinking
<i>Books</i>	receptive language	phonological awareness	print concepts
<i>Manipulatives</i>	hand-eye coordination	persistence	sequencing and patterns
<i>Sensory Play</i>	sensory integration	body awareness	self-regulation

Variety also includes materials that evoke the different sensory systems. Do children have access to materials that have a variety of **textures, colors, smells, and sounds**? Do children have access to materials that facilitate different types of big body play such as throwing and bouncing? The number and variety of materials refer to the **choices accessible to children** to engage with freely and without help from an adult. Have limited space in your program? Try rotating different types of materials often to keep children engaged and spark growth in all areas of development. Explore examples of different types of materials to consider offering in your program in the section below.

I want to learn more!

- [Good Toys for Young Children by Age and Stage](#) (Article)
- [Tips for Choosing Toys for Toddlers](#) (Article)
- [Materials Guide: FCCERS-3](#) (Resource)
- [Using Materials Creatively to Enhance Toddler Learning Environments](#) (Article)
- [The influence of the number of toys in the environment on toddlers' play](#) (Research article)
- [Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards: Interest Areas](#) (Resource)