

Dramatic Play



Creating an Engaging Interest Center

What Children Are Learning

- Imagination and creativity
- Language skills through expressing ideas and role-dependent language
- Math skills through numbers on lists and how many children participating in the center
- Understanding roles in the world around them, such as mother, father, doctor, firefighter, hairdresser, etc.
- Social-emotional skills through acting out feelings, sharing, and making and carrying out a plan with friends



Developmental Skills Typically Acquired

Toddler Skills

- Imitate using objects (around a year old), like using a toy brush to brush hair
- Substitute toys for a different object (around two-years old), like using a plastic banana as a toy phone

Preschool Skills

- Negotiate different roles and themes during play

School-Age Skills

- Cooperate to develop and carry out plans and scenarios that last multiple days



NOTE: This is not an exhaustive list, and children will develop according to their own individual timelines.

Materials and Storage

Thematic Props

- Stethoscope for a doctor's office
- Hoses for a fire station
- Tools for an auto shop
- Lanterns for camping
- Menus from local restaurants
- Flowers for a florist

Food Props

- Clean, empty food containers
- Boxes
- Plastic bottles

Everyday Experience Props

- Dolls
- Small blankets
- Toy highchair
- Toy car seat
- Telephone
- Kitchen items
- Dress-up clothes

All Materials Are Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) for All Age Groups

NOTE: Appropriately monitor children and include variations based on interest and developmental skills.

Storage



Use small and large containers, such as buckets, laundry baskets, etc. You can also use other furniture to store props and define the center's space.

Contact the OECOSL Child Care Support Line at 1.800.299.1627 for assistance.



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Best Practices

Locate this center away from quieter centers such as the reading center.

Provide younger children with real objects when possible.

Observe children's play to document physical, cognitive, language, and social-emotional skills.

Allow children to freely explore and have conversations about new or unfamiliar props.

Use open-ended materials; allow children to experiment – there is no right or wrong way.

Make dramatic play child-centered; join in children's dramatic play at their developmental level and scaffold learning, but do not take over the play.

Create prop boxes that contain items related to specific themes and interests or related to the children and families represented in the program (e.g., doctor's office items or restaurant items).

Swap out items in the prop box regularly to renew engagement.

Include writing materials and children's books to reflect the theme.



Activities and Project Ideas



Use Relevant Items

- Prepare activities and props tied to the theme, like gloves and scarves for winter.
- Connect a field trip to a dramatic play theme.

Include Community

- Set up themes around local places children visit on a regular basis; include the grocery store, bakery, gas stations, veterinarians, post office and restaurants.

Family Engagement

Encourage family engagement by suggesting they include dramatic play as part of regular routines and experiences. Suggestions include the following:

- Invite families to contribute items from their homes.
- Share photos of children engaging in dramatic play with families; be sure to include a brief written description.
- Invite family members to visit to talk about their family activities. Offer items that represent these activities in the dramatic play center.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- **Accessing Knowledge and Extending Learning: Pretend Play Center**
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1RNOfaKXr0yg0htK_SelgSeYqKMs6E5Nk/view
- **Dramatic Play in Child Care**
<https://childcare.extension.org/dramatic-play-in-child-care/>
- **The Dramatic Play Center in Child Care**
<https://childcare.extension.org/the-dramatic-play-center-in-child-care/>

