



Learning to Grow

MAKING A DIFFERENCE TOGETHER

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII ♥ WINDWARD COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Inspiring Young Children's Play Through "Loose Parts"



Have you ever noticed that young children can spend lots of time playing with simple materials like boxes, rocks, shells, sand, or water? What is it about these items that capture little one's attention? According to Lisa Daly and Miriam Beloglovsky, authors and teachers of early childhood education, "children usually prefer play that stimulates their curiosity and gives free rein to their imaginations and creativity." They believe that one of the best ways to enhance children's natural curiosity and play is to introduce a wide variety of materials called "loose parts" into their environment.

Originally coined by architect Simon Nicholson, loose parts refers to "natural or synthetic found, bought, or upcycled materials that children can move, manipulate, control, and change within their play." These items are a combination of natural, store bought, and recycled items that can be easily moved throughout the play space and can be used in unlimited ways.

The benefits of loose parts are that they:

- ♥ **Deepen Critical Thinking** – Children are encouraged to arrange and rearrange the

materials to consider a range of possible uses and meanings for the materials.

- ♥ **Promote Creative Thinking** – Materials are open-ended so it encourages creativity, e.g., a cardboard box can be imagined to become a car, boat, or house.
- ♥ **Support Developmental Domains** – As children use the materials, it encourages development of many skills such as, fine motor skills, working with others, and problem solving skills.

This newsletter will discuss examples of loose parts (many of these are materials that you can find in your home), that you can include in your child's play setting and tips for using these materials effectively with infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.

This newsletter includes:

- ♥ **Age-specific information and suggestions** about activities to do with your infant, toddler, or preschooler,
- ♥ **Featured activities** for each age group,
- ♥ **How This Helps:** a summary of your child's development by doing these activities together,
- ♥ **Resources:** for more information about this topic, and
- ♥ **Suggested Books:** a list of books to read with your child.

Infants

Loose parts are captivating, open-ended, and mobile objects that are intriguing and fascinating to infants. Infants are innately curious and attracted to objects, such as cardboard tubes, spoons, scarves, or large stones, seashells, and balls. These objects allow them to explore with their senses by displaying distinctive sounds, movements, textures, and colors.

Here are some ideas to introduce loose parts to infants:

- ♥ Colorful plastic cups for stacking and nesting.
- ♥ Clear plastic containers with caps (e.g., a clean empty mayonnaise jar with the label taken off) filled with colored water placed on a window sill to see how the light passes through colored water.
- ♥ Wooden spoons and plastic containers to bang and pound on.
- ♥ Medium-sized balls with a cardboard tube to see how a ball moves down the ramp.

Because infants are quick to put things in their mouths, introducing loose parts to infants requires special safety considerations. Take into account

the material's size (nothing smaller than what can fit in a toilet paper roll), durability (make sure there's no small removable pieces or any peeling paint), and cleanliness (choose items that can be effectively cleaned and sanitized).



Activity for Infants: *Texture Frames*

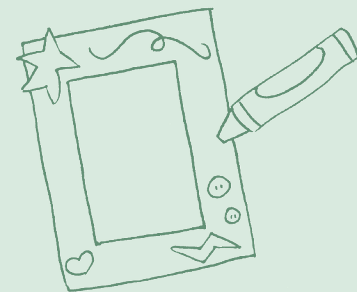
What You Need:

- Empty picture frames with the glass removed
- Cardboard or cardstock pieces, cut to the size of the picture frame
- Variety of clean objects with different textures, such as:
 - yarn pieces, placemat squares, sticks, sandpaper, carpet pieces
- Glue or tape

What to Do:

1. Arrange the various objects according to texture and glue each of the objects onto the cardboard pieces.
2. Put the cardboard pieces into the picture frames.
3. Encourage your child to rub her hand over or pat each of the texture frames. Talk about how each one feels. For example, let's touch the green yarn pieces. How does it feel? Does it feel soft? How about the sandpaper. Oh, that feels rough!"

(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps her development and school readiness.)



Toddlers

Toddlers are interested in play that includes large motor activities. They want a chance to practice their newly learned skills, such as jumping, climbing, rolling, throwing, and constructing. Introducing loose parts in various areas of your home allows her to practice her skills as well as stimulate growth in all areas of her development.

Here are some ideas to introduce loose parts to toddlers:

- ♥ Large tubes and various balls in the block area for ramp building and constructing.
- ♥ Safe handheld items, such as pom poms, bean bags, bath loofahs, or yarn balls next to containers or laundry baskets for throwing or sorting.
- ♥ Large boxes and pillows for obstacle courses or pretend play.

- ♥ Muffin tin and bottle caps for sorting and arranging.
- ♥ Measuring cups, bowls, funnels, shovels, and spoons with colorful aquarium gravel or sand for filling and dumping.



Activity for Toddlers: *I Have to Pull Harder*

What You Need:

New (never used) toilet plungers
Large container
Cornstarch
Water

What to Do:

1. In a large container, create a thick mixture of cornstarch and water (approximately 2 parts of cornstarch to 1 part of water), making sure the bottom of the container is covered.
2. Put the plunger in the container and encourage your child to explore. You can say, "Here's a plunger in the mixture. You want to see if you can pull it out?"
3. Watch as she pulls, shakes, and moves the plunger, encouraging her efforts and problem solving skills. Talk about how the mixture created a suction that may be hard to break and encourage her to share her ideas on how to pull it out.
4. If needed, encourage her to keep trying to move the plunger and see if she can push the handle all the way into the mixture to break the suction.
5. Talk about the sound the plunger makes in the mixture and encourage her to repeat her actions over and over.

Note: This activity is best done outdoors as it could become messy.

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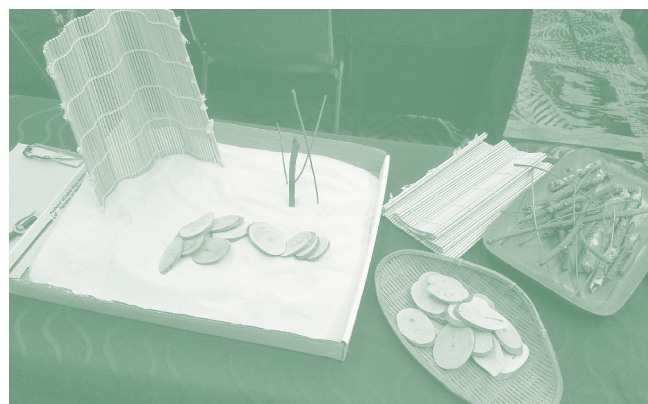
Preschoolers

Preschoolers' curiosity moves them to explore and ask many questions that lead to in-depth explorations. Loose parts in the environment can support their curiosity by allowing children to question, hypothesize, explore, and investigate how to use the materials. Encourage your child to construct structures; investigate their ideas about colors, weight, and patterns; and explore the relationship that objects have to one another.

Here are some ideas to introduce loose parts to preschoolers:

- ♥ Glass stones or rocks on a placemat to make designs.
- ♥ Large and small containers filled with pebbles, gravel, leaves, silk flowers, and twigs. These are good for creative play and exploring concepts of empty and full and how to transport items.

- ♥ Clothespins, craft sticks, Velcro rollers, scarves, hangers for children to explore how to connect and disconnect objects to build structures and imaginary play spaces.
- ♥ Pen or marker caps, hair rollers, paper clips, and rubber bands can be used as measurement tools to discover length or height of an object.



Activity for Preschoolers: *Landmarks, Bridges and Towers*

What You Need:

- Photographs or books of bridges and towers
- Large cardboard tubes (e.g., cores from butcher paper rolls, paper towel rolls)
- Wood pieces (e.g., tree cookies)
- Unit blocks
- Plastic animals, people, or transportation vehicles

What to Do:

1. Look through photographs or books of local landmarks, bridges, and towers with your child. Talk about the location and the shapes that make up the building.
2. Have her choose a picture that she likes and place the picture within eye level and encourage her to use the blocks, tubes, and wood pieces to recreate it.
3. Talk about the shapes, textures, and height of what she creates, encouraging her efforts. For example, "Look at how tall your building is! I see that you used four blocks on top of each other. I see that you used rectangles for the base and small triangles for the roof."
4. Have her expand her creation by incorporating animals, people, or vehicles and encourage her to tell you about her creation.

(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps her development and school readiness.)



How This Helps

The activities suggested in this newsletter help promote many different aspects of development:

Physical Development

- ♥ Use and strengthen small muscles such as facial muscles, fingers, hands, and toes
- ♥ Develop eye-hand coordination

Social and Emotional Development

- ♥ Develop a close bond with you
- ♥ Feel important and good about herself

Language and Literacy Development

- ♥ Learn to ask and answer questions
- ♥ Increase her observation, listening and understanding skills, and attention span

Cognitive Development

- ♥ Develop her curiosity about how things work
- ♥ Develop her thinking and problem solving skills



Kids in the Kitchen

Cooking teaches valuable lessons such as math (quantities, measurement), science (how matter changes), fine motor (stirring, pouring), and literacy (print awareness). As you make this recipe with your child, talk about kitchen safety. Show her how to handle items safely and allow her to do as much as she is capable of. Praise her efforts, and ask questions throughout the process to encourage her thinking skills. Most of all, have fun!

Monkey Bread Cupcake

Adapted from from: <http://simpleplayideas.com/3-ingredient-monkey-bread>

Ingredients:

- 1 can refrigerated biscuit dough
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ t ground cinnamon
- Sweetened condensed milk
- Optional toppings, e.g., raisins, walnuts
- Cooking spray
- Muffin tin



Directions:

1. Heat oven to 375 degrees and spray 6 regular size muffin tins with cooking spray.
2. In a small bowl, stir together the sugar and cinnamon.
3. Separate the dough into 8 biscuits and cut each into 6 pieces.
4. Together, roll the biscuits in the sugar-cinnamon mixture. If needed, place the mixture into a resealable bag and have your child shake the biscuit pieces until the pieces are covered.
5. Fill each muffin cup with 6 biscuit dough pieces. Add any optional toppings, if desired.
6. Together, spoon 1 tablespoon of condensed milk into each baking cup.
7. Bake 8-11 minutes or until browned.

