



**FSU Center for Prevention
& Early Intervention Policy**

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Sets of Four (or More) - The Purchase of Toys for Infant/Toddler Environments

Recommended Practice – Purchase sets of toys and materials in multiple sets of 4 or more with an emphasis on the variety and quality of items that promotes the development of infants and toddlers in early education and care settings.

RESOURCE	STANDARD
<p>ITERS¹ (Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale)</p>	<p>15. Fine Motor</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5.1 Many and varied appropriate fine motor materials accessible for much of the day. (“Many” means enough materials for children to use without excessive competition.) 5.2 Materials are well-organized (Ex. similar toys stored together; sets of toys in separate containers; toys picked up, sorted, and restored as needed). 7.1 Materials rotated to provide variety <p>28. Discipline</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5.1 Program is set up to avoid conflict and promote appropriate interaction (Ex. duplicate toys accessible) <p>31. Group play activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5.1 Staff are flexible and adjust activity as children join or leave the group (Ex. enough materials for all who want to join)
<p>NAEYC Accreditation Criterion²</p>	<p>9.A.08 Physical Environment Standard 9.A.08</p> <p>“Materials and equipment that facilitate focused individual play or play with peers are available in sufficient quantities to occupy each child in activities that meet his or her interests.”</p>
<p>Early Head Start Performance Standards³</p>	<p>1304.53(b)(1)</p> <p>Grantee and delegate agencies must provide and arrange <u>sufficient</u> equipment, toys, materials, and furniture to meet the needs and facilitate the participation of children and adults. Equipment, toys, materials, and furniture must be: ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “<u>accessible</u>, attractive, and inviting to children. [1304.53(b)(1)(iv)]” <p>Includes following <i>guidance</i>:</p> <p>“ensure that a variety of appropriate kinds of equipment, toys, materials, and furniture is available in sufficient quantity to avoid excessive competition and long waits”</p>

References:

¹ Harms, T., Cryer, D., & Clifford, R. M. (2003). *Infant/Toddler environment rating scale* (Rev. ed). New York: Teachers College Press.

² National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2005). *NAEYC early childhood program standards and accreditation criteria: The mark of quality in early childhood education*. Washington, DC: Author.

³ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. (2002). *Head Start program performance standards and other regulations*. Washington, DC: Head Start Bureau.

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COMPONENT	DESCRIPTION
<p>1. <i>Developmentally, infants and toddlers are not yet ready to share</i></p>	<p>Infants and toddlers are focused on their own individual needs and enjoy individual or parallel play while still being very much aware of their surroundings. When one child has a toy, other children have interest in the same thing. Multiple sets of toys provide opportunities for each child in the group to try it for themselves and to learn from their own experiences and the experiences of others.</p>
<p>2. <i>The average staff to child ratio in <u>high quality</u> infant/toddler programs is one to four</i></p>	<p>When purchasing toys, high quality programs typically buy in sets of four so that each child in the group may have a toy without competition. Some centers even purchase a 5th toy – one for the primary caregiver or one to store in case a toy is lost or broken. This assures enough materials for each child who wants to join in an activity.</p>
<p>3. <i>Sets of four offer vulnerable young children the opportunity to have enough, even if it is just for part of the day</i></p>	<p>Vulnerable young children and children living in poverty are often raised in environments where there is considerable competition for resources. From early on, many young children never have enough. High quality early education and care should be the one place each child has enough - attention from staff, time to be a child, and resources to encourage play and exploration. When sets of four are present in the room, vulnerable infants and toddlers find a place where they do not have to compete, reducing stress and increasing opportunities for learning.</p>
<p>4. <i>Multiple sets of toys offer parents and children the opportunity to play together.</i></p>	<p>In programs that serve young parents and/or parents with multiple risks, family involvement often includes learning to play on the floor with their child. When sets of toys are available, a parent can explore the toy themselves and the baby can have another of the same toy. A second parent may pick up a duplicate toy and perhaps share the 4th toy with their baby. This parallel play between parents and children can provide each person with an opportunity to experience the play and provide support for the developing parent/child relationship.</p>
<p>5. <i>Sets of four provide a classroom organizational structure that creates visual order and presents a statement that this place is special.</i></p>	<p>Providing four sets of toys lets staff, parents, children, and visitors know that special attention has been paid to classroom design and the needs of children in care. Often it decreases the actual number of toys in the room, thereby reducing clutter. Also, the caregiver and director will quickly recognize missing items or parts, reducing loss and expensive replacements. Careful attention is paid to the types of toys, the quality of purchases, and the systematic rotation of sets between classrooms. Sets of four are never labeled by room but are identified by function (ex. push/pull, nesting toys, musical instruments). Caregivers develop lesson plans and trade with other caregivers for new and interesting set of toys that promote their children’s development.</p>