

# Adapting Toys and Play Materials

Although adaptation is most commonly associated with children with disabilities, toys can and should be adapted whenever any child-or group of children– needs extra assistance. The following ideas illustrate ways that early childhood toys and play materials can be adapted.

## MAKE TOYS EASIER TO GRASP

- Add a Knob. A round ball or large bead can be glued over the small peg handle on a puzzle or wind up toy. If a puzzle piece has no handle, a spool, bead or drawer pull works.
- Attach a ring. If a stuffed animal is large and does not have arms or legs that make it easy to grasp, you can attach a plastic link securely to the animal.

## MAKE THE TOY MORE INTRIGUING

- Group toys together. Combining toys can suggest a play theme. Surrounding a stuffed animal with feeding equipment or arranging a puzzle about airplanes next to toy airplanes help children make play connections and increase the chances that one of the toys will spark a child's imagination.
- Add a surprise element. Many familiar toys can be rejuvenated by adding a sensory experience or using the toy in an unpredictable way. Freezing pretend food before putting it in the housekeeping area or putting scent on a stuffed animal or baby lotion on a doll adds a surprise element to ordinary play.

## INCREASE THE INTERACTION VALUE

- Provide duplicates of the same toy. It is even preferable to have more than one for each child. Picture 3 or 4 children in a sand box with six shovels, six buckets and six sand sieves. Children are happy to offer each other a bucket or give up a shovel because there is always another one to play with.
- Add props. When it is impossible to provide duplicate toys, arrange toys with props. Having more than one 48" ball may not be practical, but arranging the ball with large plastic hoops, construction cones, and perhaps a smaller ball or two, increases the chances that a group of children could happily play a game together.

## PROMOTE INDEPENDENT PLAY

- Store toys where children can get them without help. Store toys on low shelves, in open containers, and in the general area in which they are used. If animals or people are popular in the block area, consider storing them in the block area.
- Be aware of all limitations a child might have. If using a wheelchair, make sure play spaces are large enough to accommodate this.



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## ADD EXTRA SENSORY INPUT

Some children have disabilities that limit their ability to process information with one or more of their senses. Adaptations that add extra sensory input take advantage of all possible learning channels.

- Add food extracts. Adding familiar smells may encourage children to use toys differently or explore them more fully. Vanilla extract, when a few drops are added to a rattle, may encourage a child to grasp the toy and bring it to her mouth.
- Add new texture. Attach Velcro dots to blocks or a material with an unusual texture to a play activity, such as sponges to water play or sand to finger paint. Be aware that some children may have adverse reactions to certain textures.
- Increase visual contrast. If a child has difficulty seeing the hole for a puzzle piece or cannot distinguish between two parts of a snap, use paint or a marker to make the hole where puzzle pieces fit darker or paint one part of the snap a different color.



## RESOURCES

- Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards <http://www.collaboratingpartners.com/wmels-about.php>
- A Thinking Guide to Inclusive Child Care, Disability Rights Wisconsin <http://www.disabilityrightswi.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/02/thinking-guide-to-inclusive-child-care.pdf>
- DEC Recommended Practices <http://www.dec-spед.org/recommendedpractices>

## TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

- The Registry Training Calendar <https://www.the-registry.org>
- Wisconsin Early Care Association (WECA) Training Calendar <http://wisconsinearlychildhood.org/>
- Collaborating Partners Training Calendar <http://www.collaboratingpartners.com/>

This document was modified for use by the State of Wisconsin from the **Adapting Toys and Play Materials tip sheet** created by Montana Child Care plus+, <http://www.ccplus.org/Products.html>.

**Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge** is a cross-departmental grant that uses the talent, experience, and vision of three Wisconsin State Departments: Department of Children and Families, Department of Public Instruction, and Department Health Services. The contents of this document were developed under the RTTT-ELC grant. However, the contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Federal Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.