

READY, SET, EXPLORE!



Introducing Classroom Materials with Intention

Thoughtful early childhood settings offer abundant opportunities for children to experience new and novel materials, tools, and manipulatives. The way they're introduced can shape how children explore, understand, and interact with these resources in the days and weeks ahead. Purposeful modeling, clear expectations, and time to revisit or practice can support confident, collaborative use. It helps children engage fully and gives them time to make sense of both the material and each other. This sets the stage for meaningful learning and shared ownership.

First Things First

Consider the nuances of your group and the item at hand. Some materials are best introduced in a small group, where children can take turns, ask questions, and explore closely with guidance. Others may lend themselves to a large-group setting, where a shared sense of excitement and curiosity can generate connection. With this in mind, decide on the setting and group size for your introduction.

Meeting the Material with Care & Curiosity

Begin by inviting observation through open-ended questions, before giving directions or naming the material's purpose. This helps connect to existing experiences and shared discovery. Children's responses can guide how you model, scaffold, and support its use in the days ahead.

- Let's look carefully. What do you notice? [Teachers may prompt children to consider shape, size, texture, what the item is made from, and any unique features.]
- What do you think it might be used for?
- Does it remind you of anything you've seen or used before? What seems similar or different?

Modeling Matters

Demonstrate the use and care of the material. If there are aspects that are open-ended, leave room for children's interpretations. Specify any considerations about cleaning up and storing the material, and clearly highlight any safety considerations. Thoughtful modeling demonstrates exploration *and* responsibility.

- We can use these tree blocks in our block area, or as loose parts. When it's time to clean up, we don't need to sort them by shape on the shelf. They can all go together in this basket.
- Listen carefully ... I'm going to push the lid onto the marker. Can you tell me when you hear it click? That's how we'll know the lids are on tightly to keep the markers from drying out.
- The fountain bowls will stay in the Sensory Area. Carrying wet materials from one area to another makes the floor slippery.

Novelty = High Interest

Anticipate that new materials may generate a lot of attention and interest, or even a sense of competition. In classroom settings, this usually wanes as materials get integrated into everyday use. Tools like visual waiting lists, photo-name cards, and timers can help scaffold children's turn-taking skills. While this can take time and require adult support, it's also an opportunity to build patience, flexibility, and social skills.

Observe, Reflect & Revisit

Watch how the material is being used. Are children engaging as expected? Are there challenges? These observations guide next steps. We don't always get it right on day one. It's more about building a rhythm, a culture, and a mindset within your classroom community.