



Little Ladybird Creche & Montessori

Policy #20

FURNITURE, FITTINGS AND EQUIPMENT

Introduction

Adequate and well-maintained furnishings and equipment are essential components of quality childcare.

“The physical environment may be as important for children’s development as the social-interpersonal environment.”¹

The physical environment has an effect on children’s behaviour, personal development and cognitive and social activities.

The way in which the environment is set up will influence how children respond to their environment and the kinds of activities they will engage in, and will therefore influence their development.

By thinking about equipment from a developmental perspective, we can ensure that children in our care will have equipment and furnishings to encourage growth in all areas of development.

Policy Statement

Our aim is to provide furniture and equipment that will support children’s development in all areas. We carefully plan the space to create an environment where the best possible care and education for young children can be provided.

Our focus is on quality and durability, rather than on immediate cost savings. We aim to:

- Provide furnishings, equipment and materials that will help create a warm and inviting environment.
- Select equipment and materials that will inspire, and not inhibit, children’s creativity and learning.
- Choose colours and textures that blend harmoniously with other features of the space.

In order to support development it is necessary to ensure there are enough materials and equipment so that:

- A child is able to complete a fair-sized project.
- Several children are able to work together or work at parallel activities without running out of equipment or supplies.
- Some can be rotated in order to create variety.

Health and Safety are also primary considerations.

¹ Theodore Wachs **The Development of Effective Childcare Environments: Contributions from the Study of Early Experience** Childrens Environments Quarterly Vol 6 No 4 1989



Procedures & Practices

Guidelines for purchasing furnishings

There are important considerations in purchasing furnishings:

Health and safety

Evaluate every piece of furniture for safety and stability:

- Does it have rounded corners and child-safe hardware?
- Is it stable and will it resist tipping?
- Will it splinter or shatter?
- Does it have protrusions or pinch hazards?

Look for furnishings with smooth, nonporous surfaces or washable fabrics. If surfaces cannot be easily cleaned and sanitised, the piece should have a disposable cover.

Aesthetics

Include colours, materials and textures that contribute to balance and harmony. The furnishings and finishes should provide a backdrop for the materials, so avoid using bright primary colours for furniture. Many toys and materials are in bold primary colours and too much colour leads to chaos and a visually over-stimulating environment for young children.

The most appealing rooms tend to have a mix of old and new pieces, the inclusion of some unusual or beautiful items, thoughtful and attractive display, and carefully arranged furnishings. In considering furnishings, ask the following questions:

- Does the piece of furniture appeal to your sense of design and beauty?
- Do you like the colours and materials?
- Have you included some furnishings with curved or rounded lines and furnishings made of natural materials?

Durability and quality

Look for furniture that will age gracefully. Think about the quality of construction and materials and the availability of replacement parts. You want to be sure that the furniture will last with daily use by the children.

Scale and suitability

Ensure that the furniture is the correct size for the children. Ensure that it will support their developing skills and independence and is appropriate for its intended use.

Economics

It is most cost-effective to invest in quality pieces of furniture that get constant hard use and economise on pieces that are used less often.

Ergonomics

Comfort and functionality are important, both in the scale and design of children's furniture and in planning the space as a work environment for adults.

For children: Tables should be approximately waist high for the children using them, and every child's feet should reach the floor when seated in a chair. Children's chairs



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should have shallow seats and slanted backs to help them position themselves in the chair.

For adults: The room should be comfortable for adult use. Furnishings and equipment should allow adults to hold and comfort children and help with their activities while minimising the need for bending, lifting, and carrying heavy children and objects. Provide adult chairs in several places around the room.

Choosing equipment and materials

(see Appendix A for more detailed guidelines on selecting furniture, materials and equipment)

In general, consider the following:

- Do they inspire rather than inhibit creativity, imagination and learning?
- Will they retain children's interest over time?
- Can they be used in a number of different ways, by different ages?
- Do they reflect diverse cultures, families, ages, abilities and/or languages?
- Can they be used by children of all abilities?
- Do they fit well with what the service already has?

Health and safety

(from A Guide to Toy Safety from the National Consumer Agency)

Look for the CE mark – you should find the mark attached to the product itself or on its packaging in a way that is visible and easily legible and cannot be rubbed off or erased.

A 'toy' is defined as a product or material designed, or clearly intended, for use in play by children aged less than 14 years old.

The CE mark means that the toy is up to the relevant Irish and European standards of safety in design, for example it is made from non-toxic material.

A 'plaything' is regarded as being different from a toy and is covered by the General Product Safety Directive. Playthings do not have to carry the CE mark. Things like sports equipment and fashion jewellery for children are considered to be playthings.

However, if something is intended for children, or is likely to be used by them, it must be constructed to as high a standard as a toy.

Basic safety guidelines

Toy manufacturers must follow the following guidelines:

- Toys must be made of materials that do not burn easily.
- Toys should be made of non-toxic materials.
- Folding toys or toys with hinges must be designed so that they will not trap little fingers.
- Toys with tubes, bars or levers should have adequate protection against trapping or cutting.
- Toys should be made so that movable parts cannot escape. This includes toys containing reeds, balls or other movable items that can be put in the mouth, such as whistles, mouth organs and rattles.
- Tricycles and cars must be stable, and must have a safety brake.



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- Bicycles must have a proper chain guard.
- Toys should be strong and sturdy and should not break easily.
- Any parts that a child can take off should be too large for them to swallow.

Although illegal, unsafe toys may still be found on sale, so it is vital to shop with care.

In addition to checking for the CE mark, always check the product for the following.

Strength

Make sure the product is strong and resilient so it won't break easily.

Flammability

Make sure the product is made of materials that do not burn easily.

Reputable seller

Buy the product from a shop with a good reputation. If you are buying toys from a jumble sale or car boot sale take extra care.

Suitable toys

Make sure the toys are suitable. Some children, particularly those under three, are more vulnerable and less able than older children to cope with particular toys.

Appropriate for the age

Pay attention to the 'minimum-age' warnings.

Bicycles and go-karts

There should be adequate brakes and guards for chains and other moving parts.

Electrical toys

Electrical toys are not ideal for encouraging creativity and those with flashing lights may not be suitable for some children, for example a child with epilepsy. You also need to be particularly careful if you are buying a toy with electrical parts or a transformer. No electrical toy that is more than 24 volts may be sold or given as a free gift in Ireland.

Electrical toys must be properly insulated and protected to prevent a risk of contact with live wires. Use the following guidelines to help decide if an electrical toy is safe:

- Are safety instructions clear and precise?
- Is it a suitable toy for the age of the child?
- Would it prove dangerous in the hands of a younger child?
- Is it properly insulated and protected from the risk of live parts?
- Does it carry the CE safety mark?

Labeling information

Always check the label or packaging for the following information:

- Name and address or trademark of the manufacturer, their agents or importer within the EC.
- Instructions for use, if needed.
- Advice on the safe use of the toy.

Other safety marks

As well as the CE mark, there may be the 'EN71' mark, which is a European technical standard for toy safety. Both marks show that the toy complies with safety regulations and that it is safe as long as it is not abused.



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Small parts

A child's product that contains detachable or small parts should be marked as 'Unsuitable for children under 36 months'.

Other hazards

Any particular hazard that exists should be pointed out on the packaging.

In some products, children's fingers can easily become trapped by moving parts, for example, toys that fold or cots that have hinges and clasps.

When buying a toy, consider the following:

- Is it suitable for the age of the child?
- Are there any detachable small parts that could lodge in ears, nose or throat?
- Are there sharp edges?
- Are materials like paints, crayons and markers non-toxic?
- Is it safe for the age group for which it is intended?
- Is the material flame resistant?
- Does it carry the CE safety mark?
- Are 'sit-and-ride' toys stable?
- Do wooden toys have nails or screws sticking out?
- Are fold-away toys likely to trap little fingers?
- Is the material flame resistant?
- Are any hazards well labelled?
- Will a child easily understand the leaflet?
- Does a dangerous missile form part of the toy?
- Are the safety instructions clear and precise?
- Is there a younger child in the building who may be at risk from the toy?
- If it makes noise, is it louder than expected?
- Does it smell funny? If it does it could mean that too many chemicals were used when it was being made.

The outdoor play space

Swings, slides, climbers, tricycles and a sandbox are not sufficient to stimulate a broad range of quality outdoor play. Spaces for children to engage in solitary play, toys and props for dramatic play and materials for construction play – outdoor blocks, wooden boards and boxes, small cable spools, gardening space and tools, old tyres – are needed to enrich the variety and complexity of the outdoor play space.

The outdoor space should be reorganised periodically, in consultation with the children, to provide new and exciting choices for the children.

The outdoor setting is an extension of the indoor space, with the same potential for enhancing development. Create zones: transition; manipulative/creative; fantasy; social; dramatic; physical and natural elements. Include a playhouse containing a table and chairs, housekeeping toys and equipment, and other home-related accessories to stimulate more social/dramatic play outdoors.

Provide a rich variety of building materials such as scrap timber (check this for possible splinters), bricks, tyres, rope and sand – under careful supervision – so that children can



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spend countless hours building, using and tearing down their structures, and then beginning the process all over again.

This equipment needs to be protected from weather and vandalism, and stored in the shed when not in use. The storage area should be readily accessible to the children, with low shelves and baskets or boxes for loose parts so that they can take responsibility for taking out and returning the equipment.

Playground & equipment maintenance

- Check daily for broken glass, animal droppings and broken or worn equipment.
- Hard play surfaces need to be swept clean of stones, sand and gravel.
- The sandbox must be kept covered when not in use. Check sand for contamination. Clean and disinfect.
- Always remove cords, string or skipping ropes tied to slides, or other playground equipment.
- In the winter, check structures for frost and/or ice build up. Restrict use of climbing structures if they cannot be kept dry.
- Ice poses an extreme fall risk. Cut, sand, or salt ice where appropriate before children are allowed to play in the area.

Conduct daily checks on equipment. Watch for signs of decay, rust, splinters, sharp pieces, nuts, rivets or nails sticking out. Log any problems and bring them to the attention of the manager for correction.

Communication Plan

All parents/carers are to be informed of the policy and procedures regarding Outside Space on registration. Staff members will check with parents/carers that they have read and understood the policy and provide any assistance needed.

A summary of this policy will be included in the parent handbook. This policy will also be reviewed with staff at induction and annual staff training.

A copy of all policies will be available during all hours of operation to staff members and parents in the Policy Handbook located in the main office.

Parents/carers may receive a copy of the policy at any time upon request.

Parents/carers and staff will receive written notification of any updates.

Review Date

Date:

Name:



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Related Policies, Procedures and Forms

- Health and Safety Policy
- Outside Space Policy
- Programme/Curriculum Planning Policy

References

- **A Guide to Toy Safety** The National Consumer Agency
- **Resource Guide: Equipping and Furnishing Early Childhood Facilities** Local Initiatives Support Corporation/Community Investment Collaborative for Kids, June 2005
- **The Development of Effective Child Care Environments: Contributions from the Study of Early Experience** Theodore Wachs. Children’s Environments Quarterly Vol 6, No. 4 1989

Contact Information:

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Policy Created

Date:

Review Date

Date:

Signatures

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Appendix A

GENERAL GUIDELINES ON CHOOSING FURNITURE, EQUIPMENT AND MATERIALS

Provide a variety of materials and equipment both indoors and outdoors to support all areas of development.

Children of all ages benefit from playing both indoors and outdoors each day. Outdoor play should not be limited to large motor activities. Expand outdoor activities to include dramatic play, sand and water, art and games. Include 'loose parts' such as boxes, planks, and fabric pieces, which can be used to transform the outdoor play area.

Climbing equipment and swings help to develop coordination and balance, as well as strengthening leg, arm and back muscles

Wheeled equipment helps children develop leg and arm muscles and learn balance and coordination.

Games equipment develops not only large muscles, but also cooperative social skills.

Manipulative toys help children develop coordination of small muscles.

Simple to complex puzzles provide manipulative and intellectual stimulation.

Cutting, painting, and drawing develop small muscles.

Blocks are important at all ages. Ensure that there are enough blocks for groups of children to complete projects.

Sets of construction toys and carpentry equipment take construction a step further than blocks.

Storage which is child-sized, open, clearly organised and accessible will help children access and put away materials.

Furnishings which fit the height and size of children promote competence and independence.

Equipment for personal health and safety - children learn about safety and hygiene through modelling, routines and discussions.

Equipment designed to support development of the senses

Children need plenty of **soft and contrasting textures** in their surroundings to help them develop the sense of touch.

Working with **sensory materials** helps children to learn concepts of measurement, conservation of volume, and density (what floats and what sinks).

Modelling activities help children develop ideas about measurement and conservation of volume.



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Cooking equipment helps children to learn concepts such as sequencing and conservation of volume.

An interesting **science area** encourages children to observe, predict and experiment with their surroundings.

Games and puzzles help children develop skills for remembering, sorting, predicting and reasoning.

Sets of **toys which can be sorted** or put in order of size or colour, help children develop reasoning skills.

Children learn about direction from a variety of activities: **water/sand play, constructing and playing with vehicles**.

Art activities are basic to the development of fine motor coordination as well as visual and creative development. It is important that art supplies are plentiful and varied.

Make sure that you have markers, crayons, clay, plasticine, and paint in diverse “people” colours. It is important to have enough art supplies for several children to use at one time.

Instruments and dance props help children develop rhythm and creativity.

Housekeeping and imaginative play help children to fantasise and practice role-playing.

Children can enjoy and learn about **grass, trees, plants and animals** in the outdoor play area or parks and beaches.

Children develop confidence in speaking when they have lots of chances to practice with their peers and with adults. They need **activities and equipment which encourage them to communicate** through words, helping them to express ideas and practice their expanding vocabularies.

Books should include stories and people from various cultures and races, disabled people, and should show men and women, boys and girls, in a variety of roles.

Listening equipment helps children to develop attentiveness, memory, and summarising skills.

Talking equipment gives children extra opportunities to practice grammar and vocabulary.

Writing equipment – even before children can read, they like to dictate stories and copy favourite words.

Children need to be able to reflect on their emotions in **soft, comfortable and private surroundings**.

They also need space for **sturdy large motor equipment** which will allow them to direct excitement, anger or aggression appropriately.

Images of themselves and their work help children to feel valued and important.

When choosing pictures of people, consider diversity in all its aspects and ensure that each child sees their identity reflected somewhere among the pictures.

Children frequently need the assurance of a soft, comfortable, safe place. **Small, quiet retreats** allow for times when children want to be alone, or one-to-one with an adult.



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Space and equipment for physical activity, along with **dolls, pets and cuddly toys**, encourage children to express feelings.

When choosing books, toys, tapes or pictures, include the cultures of all the children in the service, and other cultures as well.

Toys, books and pictures about families and friends help children to perceive themselves as important members of groups.

ORGANISING SPACE AND EQUIPMENT

The aim of the childcare environment is to encourage the child to explore freely and safely, choosing independently from a variety of activities. Creating this environment requires careful arrangement of activity centres, including clearly defined physical and visual barriers such as shelving, furniture or floor markings.

When thinking about how to arrange equipment and furniture, consider the types of activities which go well together. Active, noisy play should happen away from quiet, reflective types of activity. Wet, messy play activities need to be grouped around a sink, on a linoleum or tiled area. Pathways linking the areas need to be well marked. In all cases, accessibility is a key factor.

The equipment and materials need to be clearly visible and accessible without adult help. Extra consideration may be required for children with additional support needs. Are storage areas clearly labelled for a visually-impaired child or a young child who cannot read yet? Can a child in a wheelchair get into an area easily and access the materials? When the environment is arranged so that children with disabilities can be easily included, it conveys a strong message: *all children can play together and have fun.*

The ages of the children in the programme will dictate some of the ways in which space is organised. Infants need a clearly defined space where they can move and play without running the risk of being stepped on or pushed by older children. School age children need space where they can safely store long-term projects.

Arrangement of equipment and supplies is also influenced by an assessment of “what is enough?” Rotating sets of toys and equipment avoids crowding and over stimulation. Rotation ensures a degree of order (not overloading the available space) and a degree of surprise and enjoyment when unfamiliar equipment replaces some of the familiar. Rotating equipment requires that there is enough equipment to rotate, and that there is adequate storage to hold the equipment not currently being used in the play area.

Adults need space, too. Staff members, if they are to avoid burnout, need a place to make a phone call, or to sit quietly for a few moments.

Parents need space to hang their coats, sit down for a cup of coffee, or meet with the staff.

The outdoor play area is often considered a world apart from the indoor space: a collection of large muscle equipment such as slides, swings, climbers, and wheeled toys. Outdoor space, however, should be arranged to include much more: art and dramatic play opportunities, access to sand and water, sites and materials for building, garden sites to dig and plant. ‘Loose parts’ - pieces of timber, crates, ropes, pipes, foam mattresses, blankets and dress-up materials - can transform a barren outdoor play space into a constantly changing environment for children.



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Outdoor play areas which provide a natural setting of grass, sand, dirt, water, and plants, as well as a variety of 'loose parts' and expressive materials are much more inclusive of *all* children, including children with special support needs, than play areas with only fixed large muscle equipment. Outdoor settings are also stimulating places for infants, participating from the safety of a fenced area or a blanket spread out on the grass.

Most materials and equipment – those in current use – need to be stored close to where they will be used. They need to be stored in a way that children can see them, access them, and make sense of them. Storage needs to be the right size and shape for what is being stored, it needs to be clearly labeled with words, photos or symbols to allow for easy clean-up, and it needs to be safe.

Children with special support needs may require storage space for equipment such as walkers or standing frames.

Areas to store things not in current use should be designed for easy access and labeled clearly so that staff members can easily locate pieces of equipment.

Clearly organised, accessible storage is an important part of any childcare programme.