
Block Construction in Toddler Settings

INSTRUCTIONS

This handout was designed for use with the article, “Block Construction in Toddler Settings,” from The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). The questions and activities in this handout could be used in a work session (e.g., professional learning community, professional development session), for individual coaching, or for self-reflection.

Goals

- ◆ Discuss the benefits of block play and how they support developing skills like reasoning.
- ◆ Reflect on young children’s access to block play and the resources you provide in your learning environment to support reasoning skills.
- ◆ Create a plan to support children’s reasoning skills through rich block play or similar play experiences.

Activity

- ◆ Read the article.
- ◆ After reading, use the questions below to guide your discussion.
- ◆ Implement your plan and adjust as needed to support reasoning skills.

One study found that by 3 years old, children from lower-income families were falling behind their peers from higher-income families in block assembly.

Verdine et al.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- ◆ “Research indicates that building with blocks supports math, science, and general reasoning skills across the first four years of life.” The article suggests that with infants, block play can begin in developmentally appropriate ways, from less complex to more complex combinations of block play. Consider how infants will first explore blocks before they start to build with them.
 - What kinds of reasoning skills have you noticed infants and toddlers developing during exploration and block play?
 - The article defines affordances as clues that give insight into an object’s function. Discuss how the affordance of stacking supports reasoning skills for young children. Consider how children may reason when practicing the spatial concepts involved in stacking.
 - Do you notice developmental differences among the children in your care? How do their reasoning skills differ? What strategies do/can you use to support reasoning?

- ◆ The article mentions that children who come from various socioeconomic statuses may have different experiences with block play. Specifically, some may come from under-resourced communities and may not have much exposure to block play.
 - How could these differences in experiences with block play impact children’s development of reasoning skills?
 - What can you do to support their learning so that children can reason and problem-solve on their own during block play?

- ◆ Consider alternatives to block play for children who may not have been exposed to such play experiences. How can you encourage something similar to block play in your learning environment to set the stage for reasoning?
 - Identify available resources in your learning environment that will support the same types of learning through block play but with alternate materials. Consider the suggestions offered in the article (e.g., cars, animals, containers (to fill and dump) near blocks, etc.).
 - Which accessories are familiar to the children in your care? Think about introducing new materials that would expand their learning.

- ◆ Create a plan to support children’s reasoning skills through rich block play and/or similar play experiences.
 - What role can you play while children explore blocks? What can you do to expand their block play experiences to include opportunities for them to use reasoning skills?
 - Consider any challenges that may arise from block play experiences. What supports might you need to support rich play experiences and reasoning?
 - The article highlights several ways to create rich block play experiences for young children. Identify strategies that you could apply in your own practice.
 - Make observations about which strategies worked well and adjust as needed to meet each child’s individual needs.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Learn more about supporting children's reasoning skills:

- ◆ **Source:** Center for the Early Childhood Education at Eastern Connecticut State University
 - ◆ **Video:** Supporting Critical Thinking in Toddlers
 - ◆ **Link:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gzibCR7get0>
 - ◆ **Description:** An educator shares her strategies for supporting the development of critical thinking skills of pre-verbal toddlers.
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- ◆ **Source:** Zero to Three
 - ◆ **Article:** Developing Thinking Skills from 12-24 Months
 - ◆ **Link:** <https://www.zerotothree.org/resource/developing-thinking-skills-from-12-24-months/>
 - ◆ **Description:** This article explores several ways to nurture a child's growing thinking skills from 12-24 months.