

# Early Learning & Education PROGRAMS

## What's Inside

- Learning Self-Regulation Skills 2
- Health and Safety Tips 3
- Learning with Media 4
- Baked Art 4
- Rainy Day Winter Play 5

## Emotions, Self-Regulation, and Behavior

Our behavior is guided by what we learned as children about society, expectations, and consequences. As adults, we are capable of managing our own behavior, but children need the guidance of parents and caregivers throughout childhood and adolescence. It is important to support children in learning to manage their own behavior in a positive, socially acceptable way, even when adults are not present. Offer children guidance by providing them with an environment that builds their self-development and social-emotional skills, fosters positive relationships, and demonstrates effective strategies for conflict resolution and the management of emotions.



The behavior of children is also influenced by the design of their environment. For example, over-crowded areas may cause children to accidentally bump or push into each other.

Create an environment that is clean and organized with shelves and baskets that easily display their contents, and well-defined areas for learning that limit the ability to run. Limit the colors in the room to one or two neutral colors, utilize natural light, and decorate with posters that display emotions or conflict resolution skills.

Teach children emotional literacy every day. Choose books that discuss emotions such as

*continued on page 4*

## ENVIRONMENT DESIGN

Thinking of new ways to design learning environments can be a challenge. Listed below are some books that can help give you ideas for creating, or updating, your indoor and outdoor environments.

- *A Study of Early Childhood Program Environments* by Deb Curtis and Margie Carter
- *Designs for Living and Learning: Transforming Early Childhood Environments* by Deb Curtis and Margie Carter
- *Family Child Care Homes: Creative Spaces for Children to Learn* by Linda J. Armstrong
- *Natural Playscapes* by Rusty Keeler

Look for journal articles about learning environments online at <https://www.naeyc.org/resources>, <https://hub.exchangepress.com>, or <https://www.communityplaythings.com/resources/topics>



## Learning Self-Regulation Skills

Self-regulation is the ability to control impulses and respond appropriately to both situations and people. When a child develops good self-regulation, they are able to be independent and manage their own behavior in a positive way. Self-regulation is an ability that grows over time because it is shaped from life experiences that begin in infancy and continue developing well into adolescence.

Caregivers support an infant's self-regulation through the use of positive interactions and consistent routines. For example, when an infant cries to signal discomfort, the caregiver's response creates a learning experience for the infant. If the caregiver approaches the infant, smiles, gently strokes their arm, and says in a pleasant voice, "I hear you crying; I'm here to help," then the infant learns how to self-soothe and wait for help. The use of responsive routines is vital to building trust and self-regulation skills in infants.

As children grow, continue using consistent routines, offering opportunities to be independent, labeling emotions, and role-modeling strategies for controlling behavior. Caregivers can role-model how to handle emotions in order to help toddlers manage aggressive impulses. For example, "When we feel mad, we can stomp our feet!" Incorporating music such as "If You're Happy and You Know It" or "The Freeze" by Greg and Steve can also help toddlers learn to control their bodies and emotions.

By age four, children's experiences have taught them how to regulate much of their own behavior. This can be seen in their ability to share materials, take turns, and work cooperatively on a group project such as performing a puppet show. Adults can continue to support self-regulation skills by role-modeling strategies for handling conflicts and providing activities that strengthen children's self-control. Try playing stop and start games like Red Light, Green Light, or Simon Says and continue using music where children listen (wait) and respond, such as with the song "B-I-N-G-O."

Source: "Self-Regulation: A Cornerstone of Early Childhood Development" by Linda Groves Gillespie and Nancy L. Seibel (NAEYC, July 2006).



# Health and Safety Tips

Taking time to plan for safety issues and doing regular safety checks can prevent many injuries. Start by crouching down and looking at the environment through the eyes of a child. Remove anything that is not safe, put covers on electrical outlets, make sure cords are out of reach, and install safety latches on cupboards and drawers.

Next take a look at the cribs, equipment, toys, and materials. Do they meet safety standards? Have any of the items been recalled? If you are not sure, you can check the Consumer Product Safety Commission website at <http://www.cpsc.gov> and sign up to receive email alerts. If you do not have access to a small parts tester to check that toys are not a choking hazard for infants and toddlers, take an empty paper towel roll and drop toys inside. If a toy fits inside the tube, infants and toddlers could choke on it.

Visit the National Resource Center for Health and Safety website at <https://nrckids.org/CFOC>. On the website you can look through the online version of the book *Caring for Our Children (CFOC): National Health and Safety Performance Standards; Guidelines for Early Care and Education Programs; Third Edition*. In this book you will find information on development, health, nutrition, playground safety, safe use of equipment, and more.

The “Appendices” chapter of the CFOC includes many helpful charts and drawings to illustrate and highlight information. You can view the full “Table of Contents” at <https://nrckids.org/CFOC/TOC> and click on the chapters you are interested in reading. Each chapter or section can be printed as a handout to share or reference. Be sure to conduct regular safety checks once a month.

Source: The above websites were accessed in November 2024.



## Emotions, Self-Regulation, and Behavior

*The Way I Feel* by Janan Cain, and encourage children to identify emotions by playing games where they identify or match emotions, use puppets to tell stories, hang mirrors in the dramatic play area where children can make faces, or sing songs when they play such as *If You're Happy and You Know It*. As children learn to identify their emotions, help them deal with their feelings in appropriate ways. For example, "I see you crying and that tells me you feel sad. What can I do to help you feel better?" Provide an outlet for strong emotions such as playing with playdough they can pound and spending time outside running and playing.

Show children techniques for calming themselves, like taking deep breaths, or holding a comfort item. Then you can remind them of those coping skills when they become upset. The book *Peaceful Piggy Meditation* by Kerry Lee MacLean is helpful for teaching children how to manage emotions. Keep things positive by managing behavior with re-direction (guiding a child to another area or activity) and logical consequences (losing a privilege directly related to the behavior, such as having to leave the sandbox for throwing sand).

Children are more likely to pay attention to their own behavior when they feel like a community. Build a sense of community by holding class meetings to make decisions about what the dramatic play area will be next, or to solve a problem like "what can we do so we all remember to put our jackets away?" Give children the opportunity to work on solving problems themselves, with you playing the role of mediator. This will build their self-regulation skills and help them feel more confident.

Praising desirable behavior helps children understand what your expectations are, and this will guide them in learning to regulate their own behavior. For more information on positive discipline, emotional literacy, and self-regulation, visit our website at [www.chs-ca.org](http://www.chs-ca.org) and view our online interactive presentations, podcasts, brochures, and blogs.

Source: *The Power of Guidance: Teaching Social-Emotional Skills in Early Childhood Classrooms* by Dan Gartrell (Cengage Learning, 2003).

## LEARNING WITH MEDIA

*The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale Revised (ECERS-R)* and the *Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale Revised (FCCERS-R)* are tools for creating quality learning environments. Read through the following guidelines for using television, computers, and other media with children. As you read them, consider your own use of media.

- All media materials are non-violent and culturally sensitive.
- Time spent with media is limited, and other activities are accessible.
- Media materials have educational value and encourage children to actively engage in learning by exercising, dancing, or creatively problem solving.
- Adults actively participate with children during activities.
- Media materials are used to support and extend curriculum, or children's interests and experiences.
- Computer software allows for problem solving or creative expression.

Sources:

*Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale Revised Edition* by Thelma Harms, Richard M. Clifford, and Debby Cryer (Teacher's College Press, 2005).

*Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale Revised Edition* by Thelma Harms, Debby Cryer, and Richard M. Clifford (Teachers College Press, 2007).

## Baked Art

Baker's clay is a wonderful tool for creative expression. Invite children to create projects and sculptures with the clay, and then ask them to share their observations about what happens when the clay is baked in the oven. Children can explore sculpting concepts and ideas with books like *Look! Look! Look! At Sculpture* by Barbara Hepworth, or *What Is Art? Painting and Sculpture* by Nuria Roca.

### Ingredients

- 1 cup of white flour
- 1 cup of salt
- Water

### Directions

Mix the flour and salt in a bowl. Add water a little bit at a time, until the mixture becomes soft clay. Knead until smooth. If the clay is too wet, add more flour. If the clay is too dry, add more water. After the children are done sculpting their projects, you can "bake" them in a microwave for 30 seconds at a time, checking for hardness. In a conventional oven, bake projects at 225°, checking every 15 minutes for hardness. Turn project over halfway through the baking process. Allow projects to cool. Children may paint projects if desired; poster paints work best.





# Rainy Day Winter Play



Children use their senses to learn and understand that they are unique and valuable. Providing children with art and sensory activities allows them to express themselves creatively while they explore different textures and materials.

**Activity:** Rain Song

**Age group:** Infants

**What you need:** No materials needed. You will use your fingertips and the palms of your hands to make rain sounds on the floor as indicated in the parentheses below.

**What you do:** Gather infants to sit near a window where they can see the rain. Talk about the rain, the clouds, and the sounds you can hear. Then sing the following song to the tune of *If You're Happy and You Know It*. "First a little drop of rain hit the ground (tap fingertips), then another drop of rain hit the ground (tap fingertips), then another and another and another and another, and pretty soon we heard a different sound – Splash! (Slap palms against each other or the floor.)"

**What they learn:** Infants are introduced to new vocabulary about the weather such as rain, clouds, puddles, thunder, lightning, and loud while observing the rain and singing. They are also encouraged to build motor skills by moving their arms and fingers as they sing the song.

**Activity:** Rain Music

**Age group:** Toddlers

**What you need:** A rainy day and a variety of clean, empty containers or dishes such as different sized plastic cups, plastic and metal bowls, pie tins, or foil wrap squares. Make sure children have a rain jacket to wear.

**What you do:** Request that children put on their jackets to go outside. Give each child one of the containers or dishes and go outside to a cement area or a table. Invite children to listen to the rain, and then place their containers on the cement or table to see if they can make the rain sound different. Once you are all back inside, talk about the different rain sounds the children heard and ask questions that allow them to reflect on their observations such as, "Which containers made the rain sound loudest?"



**What they learn:** Toddlers practice observation skills, learn the different sounds of rain, and discover how sound can be altered with different sized containers and materials.

**Activity:** Rain Art

**Age group:** Preschool

**What you need:** Construction paper or poster board, powdered tempera paint or food coloring, plastic spoons, sidewalk chalk, and a rainy day (a light rain works best).

**What you do:** On a rainy day, invite children to use a spoon to sprinkle powdered tempera paint onto paper and place it outside in the rain. Children can then step back and watch as the rain mixes with the powdered paint and splashes across the paper to create a picture. If powdered paint is not available, try placing a few drops of food coloring onto paper instead. Discuss the effects of rain on powder and paper. Children can go outside after the rain stops and draw with sidewalk chalk on cement. This offers a different experience than drawing on dry cement, and children can observe changes in their art as the sidewalk dries.

**What they learn:** Children observe rain and its effects on the environment, learn new vocabulary associated with the weather, and build motor development by drawing.

**Activity:** Drip, Drip, Drop

**Age group:** School Age

**What you need:** An indoor space large enough for children to sit in a circle. If it is not raining, this game can also be played outside.

**What you do:** Explain to children that they will be playing a different version of the game Duck, Duck, Goose. Instead of a "goose" chasing a "duck," they will be a "raindrop" chasing the "drip." One child begins the game



# Rainy Day Winter Play

by walking around outside the circle saying, "Drip, drip, drip" as they touch each child's head. When they say "drop," that child will stand up and chase the other child. If you are playing indoors, children can tip toe rather than run. If the child that was tapping heads is caught, they sit in the puddle (middle of the circle). Continue playing until all children have had a turn. The adult can be the sun that dries

up the puddle and sends children back to the circle to play again. Talk about how many rain drops it might take to make a puddle, and how long it might take the sun to dry puddle.

**What they learn:** Children build large muscles, practice following directions, build self-regulation skills, and discuss the physical properties of rain.



## ABOUT CHS

For over 130 years, Children's Home Society of California (CHS) has adapted to the changing needs of children and families. Since 1891, CHS has worked diligently to protect our community's children and strengthen their families through diverse programs and services.

At CHS, we view a child not in isolation, but in the context of each family's health, stability, and resources. We believe that families are fundamentally strong and resilient. The mission of CHS is to reach out to children and families at risk with a range of services to ensure every child the opportunity to develop within a safe, healthy, and secure environment.

Therefore, CHS provides a variety of services to children and families in California and nationwide, working to improve their quality of life by offering vital information, education and resource services, and child care assistance.

CHS also serves as an expert resource for child care providers, other social service agencies, and government agencies at the local, state, and national level. To learn more about CHS and resources available to you, please visit our website at [www.chs-ca.org](http://www.chs-ca.org).

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