Choosing Materials for Cognitive Development

- **Ensure materials are safe.** Choking and falling are primary concerns for infants and toddlers and toys and materials need to be safe. When evaluating your materials, watch out for sharp edges or projections, as well as chipping paint. Select items that are non-toxic.

- **Select materials that are easy for infants and toddlers to handle on their own.** Young children learn by manipulating items by themselves; however, be ready to assist them if needed.

- **Select materials that support cognitive development for each age group served.** Use developmental milestone information to make choices that support cognitive development.

- **Choose items that are used in homes** (e.g. kitchen spatulas, serrated spoons, strainers, wooden spoons, plastic bowls, shoe boxes, dish towels). This links home and child care experiences in the eyes of the child and shows families that learning materials are often at their fingertips and inexpensive. A lot of these materials are also open-ended, and therefore appropriate for children at different ages and developmental stages.

- **Examine each item and evaluate how it promotes child development.** Does it support cause/effect actions? Does it utilize fine motor skills? Does it teach infants and toddlers about spatial relationships? Does it help them practice problem solving skills?

- **Include materials that support each child’s interest and skill level.** For example, if you have a few pre-toddlers who love soft toys that squeak, make sure you have several bins of soft toys that squeak available for them to play with.

- **Provide exact duplicates and triplicates (same color, size, function) of the same item.** This allows more than one infant or toddler to play and learn at the same time and also supports social-emotional growth and development.

- **Choose materials that honor diversity.** Materials should be representative of children and families who attend the program and the community and promote positive portrayal of all persons. A variety of materials should include people of differing genders, roles and occupations (female firefighter, male caring for a young child), ages, ethnicities, and ability level (person wearing glasses, person using an assistive device like a walker or a wheelchair).

- **Offer materials that include a variety of textures, skills, colors, sizes, shapes, and functions.** Items can be made of wood, metal, plastic, cloth, vinyl; be smooth, bumpy, rough, soft, and hard. Neutral and natural colored items are pleasing to infants and toddlers; bright colors don’t make an item “better”.