Suggested Materials for Development and Learning
(Sources: Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale-Revised and Child Care Aware of North Dakota)

Learning Area: Fine Motor

Materials
It is recommend that ten varied and appropriate fine motor toys be available for infants and toddlers, and at least three different appropriate materials from each of the four types (manipulatives, interlocking building toys, puzzles, art). Some may be appropriate for more than one age group.

- Some should be easy, and some challenging.
- Include toys that require grasping, shaking, turning, pushing, pulling, poking and putting together.
- Consider children with special needs.
- The materials should be of different sizes, shapes, colors, sounds, textures.

Why It’s Important
Fine-motor manipulatives help children practice the skills required to handle and manipulate small objects with their fingers.

Keep in mind that immobile infants will need materials brought to them.

Learning Area: Books and Literacy

Materials
At least twenty books for a small group of children; the books should be accessible substantial portion of the day. Children should be read to at different times throughout the day. Your selection should include:

- Fantasy: pretend stories about people and animals
- Factual information: for example, books with pictures of real animals, facts about real lives of animals and plants, or other real-life experiences
- Nature and science: how the senses work, the human body, houses of different animals
- Different races and cultures: historical and contemporary stories about people from different backgrounds or books in other languages
- Different abilities: books involving or featuring individuals with special needs and how they might use aids such as eyeglasses, a hearing aid, wheelchair, or crutches
- Appropriate for the varying ages/developmental levels of all children in care: cloth books, plastic books, board books, picture books with paper pages, chapter books
Why It’s Important
Representing the different categories of books ensures children have the opportunity to understand different kinds of literature, and exposure to fiction and non-fiction kinds of stories and information.

Children should be read to so they connect the written words to spoken words.

Learning Area: Math

Materials
A least five different math materials for each age group should be accessible to children for much of the day.

- For infants and toddlers: rattles, infant floor gyms with hanging shapes, number and shape board books, simple puzzles, shape sorters, toy telephone, nesting cups, stacking rings
- For preschool: small objects to count, rulers, number puzzles, magnetic numbers, number games, books with shapes and numbers, geometric shapes
- For school-age:
  - The materials should be interesting and developmentally appropriate so the children can engage without too much frustration.
  - For the materials to be meaningful to children, they need to be sorted by type and all the pieces to games need to be stored together.
  - Additional inputs with activities helps children develop an understanding of the skills. For example, encourage children to sort or create patterns with counters, make graphs or charts, and weigh or measure things.

Why It’s Important
Offering a variety of materials allows children to use concrete objects to experiment with quantity, size, and shape. These skills build concepts for things later in life, such as adding and subtracting and completing math problems.

Learning Area: Nature and Science

Materials
At least nine examples of science materials should be accessible for much of the day with at least three of four categories represented:

- Collection from nature (pinecones, bird nest, rocks, sea shells)
- Pictures, books, games or toys with realistic representations of science
- Living things (cat, dog, garden)
- Tools (magnets, magnifying glasses, prisms)
**Why It’s Important**
With a wide variety of science materials, children will learn more about the world around them. Children need to experience science through experimentation and hands-on learning.

**Materials**
Children should experience natural objects, either indoors or outdoors, more than once a day and have a living plant or animal in the home. Programs can take field trips to zoo or aquarium. The provider can point out flowers, trees, birds, and other animals from the window.

**Why It’s Important**
Children need to see realistic accurate pictures of what animals around them look like. They will not associate a cartoon cow with a real one because they don’t look like the real thing.

**Learning Area: Art**

**Materials**
Toddlers (12 to 30 months) should be offered different art materials at least three times a week. Toddlers who are able to handle materials with more skill and self-control require more frequent art experiences. Preschoolers and older children should have drawing materials accessible for much of the day. Preschoolers and older children should have a variety of art materials accessible daily. Access to art materials should be based on children’s abilities—make them available with close supervision with younger child.

**Why It’s Important**
Early experiences with art can provide opportunities to practice eye-hand coordination. Simple art materials such as crayons and paper give toddlers opportunities to use their hands and arms in a new way and practice fine motor skills.

**Materials**
All art materials used with children are certified by the Art and Creative Materials Institute and show the Approved Product seal. Food should not be used as art materials.

**Why It’s Important**
Toxic materials may cause harm if used and ingested. Materials that pose a safety hazard (choking or cutting) may cause serious injuries. Using food for art can give a misleading message about the proper use of food.
Materials
Children should not be forced to participate in an art activity. At least two alternative activities should be available to children who are not engaged or enjoying the activity. Children should be allowed to show individual expression, selecting the subject or the medium to use. They should not be asked to copy an example or use coloring sheets.

Why It’s Important
Expecting young children to participate in a large-group art activity or to follow adult examples is not appropriate.

Learning Area: Blocks and Dramatic Play

Materials
Some blocks for each age group accessible daily (for toddlers, at least one set of six; for preschool and early school-age, at least fifteen blocks of a specific type stored together. Blocks need to be accessible much of the day with two sets of different-type blocks for each age group between 12 months and 7 years. Blocks need to be sorted by type.

Why It’s Important
Blocks are considered one of the basic play materials for young children. Older infants and younger toddlers are mainly interested in the sensory characteristics such as how they feel, the bright colors, the sounds they make as they bang together, and the different sides they see as they grasp and turn them in their hands. Toddlers are interested in filling and dumping, or throwing them to see how they fall. As they get older, developing more eye-hand coordination and muscle control, allowing them to manipulate many blocks, children start building simple structures and use accessories for pretend play.

Materials
Accessories are toys used with blocks to stimulate or expand block play. A variety of accessories, including transportation toys, people and animals (at least five of each) need to be accessible much of the day. Accessories should be sorted by type and stored near the blocks.

Why It’s Important
Storing accessories near the blocks help the children know they are meant to be used with the blocks.
**Materials**
A caregiver should encourage and participate in block play with children.

**Why It’s Important**
Because children learn not only by exploring and experimenting on their own, but also by watching and imitating others, participation and guidance is important in expanding block play.

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**Materials**
Dramatic play materials should be child-sized. There must be at least two examples from each of nine categories: dress-up clothes, child-sized furniture, cooking and eating equipment, play foods, dolls, doll furnishings, soft animals, small play buildings with accessories, and toy telephones.

Dramatic play should be extended to the outdoor play area or gym so that children can carry out more complex dramatic play. Children can pretend to drive cars or go grocery shopping with larger pieces of equipment like push cars and grocery carts.

**Why It’s Important**
Dramatic play is a child’s first opportunity to act out real-life situations and explore different roles. Children need to have access to these materials in order to make sense of the world around them. It is important to include diversity in this area because sometimes children aren’t exposed to different races, cultures, ethnicities or traditions. The dramatic play area is a great place to introduce different clothing or food that represents different cultures.

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**Learning Area: Music and Movement**

**Materials**
Many pleasant sounding musical toys or instruments should be accessible for a substantial portion of each day. The children need to be able to reach the instruments and play with them freely. There must have enough musical instruments for at least half of the children to use them at once plus some music to listen to, such as a CD player or iPod. Children should be exposed to a variety of music (jazz, classical, country, multicultural, etc.).

**Why It’s Important**
Music is a cultural experience as well as a language activity. Offering different music is a great way to teach about different cultures and communities and encourages appreciation for different types of music.
**Materials**
Recorded music needs to be played for a musical purposes—not as background music (for example, for dancing, soothing at nap time, to teach a new idea, or to encourage language development). Music should not to be played for more than twenty minutes at a time (except at naptime). Loud background music also causes children to become easily distracted so that if they are trying to work on a quiet activity that requires concentration, such as a puzzle, they lose their focus more easily.

**Why It’s Important**
If music is on all the time as background music, it means children and providers have to talk above the music. It also might interfere with the child’s ability to listen to spoken language, which is important for speech development.