

## Conversation Starters in Centers

Playtime is such an important part of child development. Children learn so much from hands on activities and exploring real life situations. Teachers should plan to use this time to build relationships with children by engaging in authentic conversations with children; commenting on their play, and getting involved in the new skills children are developing.

### Art

While participating in art experiences, children have opportunities to explore and experiment with a variety of mediums. Children who actively participate in art experiences develop:

- creativity
- self expression
- small muscle skills
- a sense of color and design
- visual motor control
- sensory integration
- language
- the ability to combine a variety of materials



#### Questions to get involved

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| • What will you make/paint/draw today?       | • Tell me about your___.               |
| • What do you think we can do with___?       | • What does this make you think about? |
| • What else can you use?                     | • Who do you want to do art with?      |
| • What else do you want to do with your art? | • Why did you ___?                     |
| • What materials will you need?              | • What do you like best about your___? |
| • What do you think will happen if ___?      |  |

### House/Dramatic Play

Dramatic play is a natural part of child development that is both useful and functional. A minimum number of props and encouragement from the adults, allows children to project themselves imaginatively into a variety of roles. While engaged in dramatic play, children:

- role play - assume, model, and act out new roles/themes
- engage in career exploration - develop an awareness of the community
- develop affective skills - express concern and support for others
- develop cooperative learning - share group experiences and turn-taking
- develop self expression - use verbal skills and imagination as an outlet for feelings and thoughts



#### Questions to get involved

- |   |                                    |
|---|------------------------------------|
| • Tell me about what you are playing.         | • I'd like to play; what can I do? |
| • What did you do first?                      | • How do you feel today?           |
| • How do you feel when ___?                   | • Who's doing the dishes?          |
| • Why is the baby crying?                     | • What is she/he doing?            |
| • What would you like to eat?                 | • Where does the baby sleep?       |
| • What are you cooking?                       | • Where do the dirty dishes go?    |
| • Who's on the phone?                         | • I'd like to play; who can I be?  |
| • What kind of food are you feeding the baby? | • What do you want to wear?        |
| • Where is the doctor/nurse?                  |                                    |

## Outside Play

Young children are motor driven. Body awareness and control of body movements are developing while children push, pull, climb, slide, tumble, and spin. While participating in large motor activities, children are developing:

- balance
- language
- cooperative play
- motor control of large muscles
- coordination
- flexibility
- strength



### Questions to get involved

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where is ___?</li> <li>• Tell me about your ___.</li> <li>• What do you want to do?</li> <li>• I have a ball to play with. What can we play?</li> <li>• What is this?</li> <li>• Who can run fast?</li> <li>• What do you hear?</li> <li>• What's in the sky?</li> <li>• I'd like to play; what can I do?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who do you like to play with at home?</li> <li>• Max needs help cleaning up. What should he do?</li> <li>• How many are there?</li> <li>• Try to jump forwards/backwards like me.</li> <li>• Where are your feet?</li> <li>• How many did you find?</li> <li>• This is how I draw a circle in the sand. What will you draw?</li> </ul> |
|---|---|

## Reading & Listening

Language development and early literacy is stimulated through a variety of visual and auditory activities such as books, puppet play, tapes with corresponding books, flannel board activities, magazines, picture cards, story sequence cards, alphabet charts, and music. Children who have an opportunity to participate in reading and listening activities develop:

- an ability to learn to discriminate between sounds
- a connection between spoken and written words
- the ability to sequence a series of sounds/words
- an ability to be imaginative
- the ability to sequence verbal information
- the ability to discriminate background noise from spoken conversation
- an understanding that a picture tells a story
- the ability to retell stories



### Questions to get involved

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are you doing?</li> <li>• Tell me about ___.</li> <li>• What would you do if ___?</li> <li>• Why do you think ___ said ___?</li> <li>• What do you think will happen?</li> <li>• What happened first/next/last?</li> <li>• Who do you want to read with?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Let's see what ___ thinks. Ask him.</li> <li>• How many ___ do you have?</li> <li>• How does ___ make you feel?</li> <li>• What is your favorite ___?</li> <li>• Where's the ___?</li> <li>• Who is ___?</li> </ul> |
|---|--|

## Science

Children are natural learners. When given the opportunity to explore and manipulate materials, children make discoveries about the world they live in. While participating in the discovery/science area children are developing:

- information that will assist them with language to describe things
- a sense of discovery
- skills in problem solving
- information which encourages questioning
- skills in observation, comparing, and contrasting
- the ability to experiment with objects in different ways



### Questions to get involved

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are you doing?</li> <li>• What does that feel like?</li> <li>• Which one is biggest/heaviest?</li> <li>• Where did you find ___?</li> <li>• How many ___ are there?</li> <li>• Do you think it will float/sink?</li> <li>• Who would you like to play with?</li> <li>• What does it look like?</li> <li>• What shape is it?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does it go fast or slow? How does ___ move?</li> <li>• What do you like best about ___?</li> <li>• How can we make ___?</li> <li>• Where does ___ go?</li> <li>• Would you like to make ___ larger, smaller?</li> <li>• Where does ___ live?</li> <li>• What does ___ eat?</li> <li>• I want to play; what should I try?</li> </ul> |
|--|--|

## Writing

Children need a variety of experiences and activities that allow for the opportunity to use small muscles, visual motor skills, and coordination of perceptual motor skills. These opportunities allow children to gain skills that will lead to recognizing and writing printed words. When given the opportunity for “writing” activities, children develop

- fine motor skills
- left to right/top to bottom orientation
- an association between symbols and words
- a relationship between spoken and written language
- visual discrimination

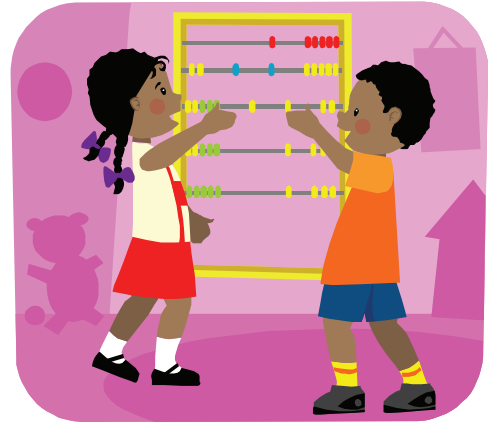
### Questions to get involved

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where's the top/bottom of the page?</li> <li>• What are you writing?</li> <li>• Let's make a list for the grocery store ___.</li> <li>• Do you want to write with a pen, pencil, chalk, or a marker?</li> <li>• Do you want to trace or write on your own?</li> <li>• What color do you want to write with?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who do you want to write to?</li> <li>• What letter is this?</li> <li>• What do you want me to write?</li> <li>• Who do you want to sit next to?</li> <li>• What do you like best about your ___?</li> <li>• What would happen if ___?</li> <li>• I want to play; what should I write?</li> </ul> |
|---|--|

## Table & Floor Activities

Children need a variety of materials that encourage a child's eyes and hands to work together. In addition to using materials at the table, floor space is often provided for those children who prefer to use materials in an open area. While using materials such as puzzles, games, and manipulatives, children develop:

- creativity
- patterning
- skills in construction
- skills in assembling parts
- language
- information about part/whole
- skills in problem solving
- control of small muscles
- eye-hand coordination



### Questions to get involved

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are you using?</li> <li>• What are you doing?</li> <li>• What would happen if ___?</li> <li>• How do you know ___?</li> <li>• Which is tallest/thickest/heaviest?</li> <li>• What would you do to make ___ bigger/smaller?</li> <li>• Try to put all of the ___ together.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are you making?</li> <li>• Who do you want to play with?</li> <li>• How are they the same/different?</li> <li>• How many ___ are there?</li> <li>• What comes next?</li> <li>• Which one fits here?</li> <li>• Where does ___ go?</li> <li>• I want to play; what should I do?</li> </ul> |
|--|---|

## Blocks/Vehicles

While participating in the block or floor play area, children have the opportunity to plan and construct using a variety of materials and objects. This area also allows for children to use their imagination through the use of miniature real-life objects. This area assists children in developing:

- the ability to share and take turns
- the ability to role play
- skills in construction
- an understanding of balance and symmetry
- creativity and imagination
- patterning skills (pre-reading)
- problem solving skills (cognition/language)
- an understanding of shapes and sizes (pre-math)



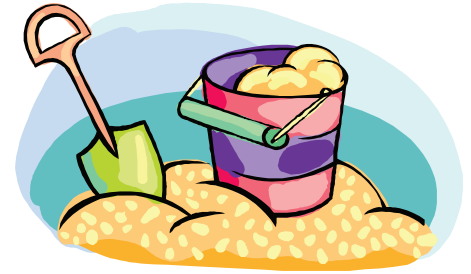
### Questions to get involved

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What would you like to make?</li> <li>• How are you going to make it?</li> <li>• How else could you use ___?</li> <li>• What will you do first?</li> <li>• Who can help you ___?</li> <li>• Who do you want to play with?</li> <li>• How does ___ work?</li> <li>• I want to play; what should I build?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What would happen if ___?</li> <li>• How can we ___?</li> <li>• What just happened?</li> <li>• Tell me about _____.</li> <li>• What's in front of ___?</li> <li>• What is between ___ and ___?</li> <li>• What's next to ___?</li> <li>• Remember ___? Let's try and build it.</li> </ul> |
|---|--|

## Sand, Water & Fluid Materials

When children use materials such as sand, water, toys, or any combination thereof, children are developing:

- creativity with fluid objects (language)
- the ability to measure (pre-math)
- an understanding of quantity (pre-math)
- small motor skills (pre-writing)
- eye-hand coordination (pre-writing)
- tactile stimulation



### Questions to get involved

- |                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| • What are you doing?              | • Who do you want to play with?            |
| • How could you ___?               | • Where is ___?                            |
| • How does ___ feel?               | • Which tool do you want?                  |
| • What else can we do with ___?    | • What do you think will happen if we ___? |
| • Is there more/less?              | • Is the ___ in/on/under/between ___?      |
| • What do you like best about ___? |  |