

# Blocks- Setting Up the Space

## Trajectory: Composing 3D Shapes

**Quick Description:** A properly set up and maintained block area allows children to explore beginning geometry and measurement concepts (Adapted from ITERS-3: Harms, Clifford, Cryer, Yazejian, 2017)

### Setting Up the Space:

- Blocks are smooth sided, not interlocking. Interlocking blocks can be excellent fine motor toys, however.
- If possible, have several types (e.g. hollow cardboard or plastic, wooden, and foam).
- Provide a set with variety – a classic set includes cubes, triangular prisms, rectangular prisms of various sizes, arches, semi-circles (or half circles), and sometimes half arches and buttresses that fit within half arches. Many sets will also include cylinders.
- Provide enough blocks for at least 3 children to play, approximately 30+.
- Ensure that there is a large, flat space that is protected from classroom traffic.
- Provide at least two types of accessories: transportation, people, animals, etc.
  - There should be several choices within each of these types. For example, if transportation is an accessory, there are three cars, three trucks, and a perhaps a construction vehicle.
- Clearly label locations or containers with pictures of the block face where blocks are stored. This can help children match the faces to help clean up more successfully at the end of block time.

### Encouraging Exploration:

- Provide the children with prompts that encourage them to combine blocks
- The beginning of 3D shape composition is making lines of blocks and simple stacking. Model these actions and encourage infants and toddlers to try it themselves.
  - Block play for infants and toddlers may involve you building a tower (modeling) and allowing them to knock it down.
- Very young children are excited by familiar scenarios: roads, houses, or a bed for a sleepy stuffed animal. Help them construct these objects by combining blocks. Telling a story about the object may get them even more engaged.
  - Older toddlers and preschoolers are able to engage in imaginative play. They might get excited about

### Materials

- ✓ Smooth-faced (not interlocking) blocks in different materials: hollow cardboard or plastic, wooden, foam
- ✓ “Accessory” toys: transportation, people, animals, etc.

### Notes

Providing an environment that is conducive to free play with 3D objects and time to play will support understanding of early math concepts.

### Accommodation Tips:

- If children use mobility aids or have physical disabilities that prevent them from playing on the floor, help them bring blocks to a large, open table near the block area to increase accessibility
- Match the children’s language level when introducing new vocabulary. This may mean adding just one new word at a time.

building a castle for a princess or constructing an enchanted forest. You can foster new ways of combining blocks with leading questions:

- “Let’s put a roof on your house! What block is long enough to reach from one wall the other?”
- “If you want to make a forest, you’ll need some trees. Which block looks could be a pine tree, a rectangular prism or a cylinder?”

Remember to be enthusiastic when introducing block play! The more excited and reassuring you are, the more encouraged to explore the young child will be. After modeling, step back and let the children attempt the action independently, offering more support only if necessary.

- Safety note: be sure the accessories are not a choking hazard.
- Diversity note: if including people as accessories, this is a great place to show differences in race, gender, gender roles, and ability.