

COACH'S CORNER

Coach's Corner is a DIEEC blog dedicated to providing fresh ideas for all early childhood education professionals.

Loose Parts: Hand-on Activities on a Budget!

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Are you and your program looking for inexpensive ways to add new activities to your classrooms? This article is for you! This Coach's Corner blog is dedicated to "loose parts activities." By definition, "loose parts" refer to objects and materials that you may have around your house, classroom, or outdoors and do not need to be purchased. These items can include egg cartons, paper towel rolls, sticks, clothespins, boxes, rocks, etc. They can also be used in tandem with other items such as craft sticks, pom poms, dot stickers, pipe cleaners, etc.

Benefits of Loose Parts Play

Economical- Loose parts play is a great way to reuse items rather than throw them away. It is also an affordable way to rotate activities.

Encourages creativity- Loose parts play can be as simple as putting out some boxes and letting the children use their imagination to create things. Putting together bins of loose parts is a great way to encourage open-ended, independent play.

Supports motor skills- Smaller loose parts items can be used with tweezers to support fine motor skills. In addition, using larger items such as boxes, crates, branches, etc. can encourage gross motor development.

Supports social skills- Children can work together to create things. They can also come up with imaginary play scenarios.

Ideas for Loose Parts Play

Keep in mind that loose parts play can be done indoors AND outdoors. Below are some ideas for both spaces!

Supervision note: As with all kinds of play, safety comes first.

- Small objects can be choking hazards. Keep these out of reach of children under 3 years.
- Children must ALWAYS be closely supervised around water play areas.
- Children must ALWAYS be closely supervised when using sharp objects like scissors.

Indoor Activities



Use damp sand or kinetic sand with a variety of natural objects like seashells, leaves, and stones.



Use colorful bottle caps for mosaics or sorting and patterning.



Toilet paper tube building blocks- paint is a fun (but optional) addition!

Indoor Activities



Clothespin number match.



Counting activity with craft sticks and cardboard tubes.



Paper towel roll drop using pompoms or other objects that fit through the tubes. For younger children, tubes can be positioned any which way- the fun is in the dropping! For older children, you can set it up as a marble run as shown in the photo. (Note- closely supervise children if they use stools.)

Outdoor Activities



Letters and shapes with stones, flowers, and whatever else you can find!



Building things, big or small...with sticks, feathers, leaves, and other found objects.

Outdoor Activities



Nature sensory bin- add different leaves, flowers, and grass. Add child-friendly scissors to turn it into a nature cutting bin.



Add some loose parts to your outdoor kitchen or water table, such as seashells and some measuring cups.

A few tips for success when engaging in play with loose parts

- Check with local businesses to see if they would be willing to donate boxes, crates, or other items. In addition, ask parents to save items such as paper towel rolls, egg cartons, boxes, coffee cans, containers, lids, etc.
- Rotate different activities and materials to keep children interested!
- As noted above, remember to keep choking hazards away from children under 3 years. For family child care educators, consider having a space or table for older children to use smaller items.
- Always closely supervise children around water, when climbing, and when using scissors.

We would love to see what loose parts activities your program is doing.

Feel free to [send us pictures](#) or [tag us on social media!](#)

Professional Learning Experiences (PLEs)

Be on the lookout for DIEEC's PLE offerings that include support and ideas around loose parts play. These include:

- Outdoor Classrooms: Wonder, Explore, Learn
- STEAM: Tinkering to Making
- Creating a Cost-Effective Outdoor Learning Environment for FCC Educators

Check DIEEC's [PLE calendar](#) for upcoming courses.

Resources

- [Loose Parts: Inspiring Play in Young Children \(Community Playthings\)](#)
- [Loose Parts 2: Inspiring Play with Infants and Toddlers \(Community Playthings\)](#)
- [Loose Parts on the Playground \(Head Start ECLKC\)](#)