nearby. For example, when Marie fits pegs in a pegboard, Alana joins her with another pegboard. As Alana starts to sing "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" while putting pegs into *her* board, Marie sings along with her. The two girls enjoy doing things together — going down adjacent slides, playing together in the rocking boat, scaling the climber side by side, painting next to each other, and using phones together. As they begin to have a strong sense of "me" and "mine," toddlers also tend to engage in social conflict. And, as they begin to be able to hold mental images, some toddlers may, when asked, indicate what they plan to do: They may point to the art area when they want to explore with play dough, for example, or say "balls" before they run to find some balls to play with.

How Caregivers Support Children During Choice Time

During children's choice time, caregivers make themselves physically and emotionally available to observe and interact with them. At the same time, they respect children's need to explore and play at their own pace with people and materials of particular interest to them. The following strategies are all part of this balanced role:

- Pay close attention to children as they explore and play.
- Tailor actions and responses to follow children's leads and ideas.
- Engage in communication give and take with children.
- Support children's interactions with peers.
- Use a problem-solving approach to children's social conflicts.
- Offer older toddlers opportunities to plan and recall.
- Encourage toddlers to put materials away after choice time.

Pay close attention to children as they explore and play

As they venture out to explore the physical and social world, infants and toddlers depend on teachers and caregivers to see and understand what they are doing and to provide the support, encouragement, and assurance they need. A caregiver's attentive, responsive presence during choice time assures infants and toddlers of the immediate availability of a known and trusted adult. Caregivers also benefit when they pay attention to children. It allows them to enter the child's world; see each child's strengths, interests, and temperament; attune themselves to each child's pace and interests; and collect anecdotal information that guides the way they support, plan, and advocate for the children in their care.

Literally joining children at their level in the play space lends an important physical dimension to paying them "close attention." In active learning settings, caregivers find themselves crawling along on hands and knees with the creeper-crawler, lying on the floor near the baby who is stretched out on a blanket, or squatting next to toddlers playing at the sand table.

Joining the children at their level in the play space allows this caregiver to enter their world so that she can see and better understand her children's strengths, interests, and temperaments.

A caregiver might sit on the floor with a lapful of children, sit on a small chair at a low table as children scribble and mold play dough, or serve as a leaning post for a child who is learning to sit or stand or cruise.

If caregivers assume vantage points such as these, they will find that they can readily see, hear, and touch the children in their care. Once a caregiver is down on the floor and physically close to children, she watches and listens carefully in an attempt to understand what individual children are doing and communicating and carefully considers each child's choices and intentions so she can interact and

respond in a meaningful way. This is better than swooping down on a child with new and possibly unrelated ideas, which may actually be disruptive to what the child is doing. Anne (p. 338), for example, watches T.C. crawl and climb onto the platform with his block in hand, but she doesn't understand what he has in mind until he proudly starts to bang the hollow platform with his block.

Caregivers who are observing play at the children's level are ready and available when children need comfort and contact. The caregiver provides a "home base" children can come back to before heading out again on their own. As very young children explore and play at choice time, they may momentarily lose their nerve and may search out a touch, hug, or cuddle or a lap to sit on before returning to their chosen activity. For example, a creeper-crawler may climb into his or her caregiver's lap for refuge when a loud toddler pushing a big truck huffs by. Or consider this scenario of a child in need of contact and reassurance before he risks trying a new material or working alongside his peers:

> *Jason, a toddler, is sucking his thumb, his other arm wrapped around his caregiver's leg. He is watching two children molding clay at the art table. His caregiver kneels down, slips her arm around him, and says, "Jason, it looks like you're watching the kids with the clay." He nods in agreement. "Shall we go to the art table and work with some clay too?" she asks. He nods yes, takes her hand, and leads her to the art table.*

Tailor actions and responses to follow children's leads and ideas

Throughout choice time, children make a series of spontaneous choices and decisions. By tailoring their actions and responses to follow children's cues, caregivers acknowledge and respect children's intentions, which shift and change over the course of their explorations and play. When their caregivers heed, respond to, and build on children's communications and actions — instead of ignoring or overriding them — children retain a sense of control over what is happening. By taking this nondirective but participatory approach, they also have the opportunity to gain insight into children's thinking and reasoning and are better able to scaffold their learning.

Often, the cues infants and toddlers offer are expressed not in words, but in actions, gestures, or facial expressions. For example, when nonmobile infant Ike's ball rolls away from him (p. 338), he is too young to crawl after it or to say "Hey, I want my ball back!" Instead, he conveys this message to El, his caregiver, by turning his head and reaching toward the ball. From her attentive position next to him, El reads his gestures (This is how Ike *expresses initiative* [approaches to learning KDI]), gets the message, and rolls the ball back within his reach. By still letting Ike reach for the ball, instead of giving it to him, El is also supporting the KDI that children *do things for themselves*.

In another situation, caregiver Sandy joins toddlers Sarah and Micah at the

This caregiver follows the child's interest in the spider and the magnifying glass by using the magnifying glass herself and describing what she sees.

water table (p. 338). Watching the children put rocks and shells into their sieves, Sandy follows their lead by imitating their actions — with a slight variation. When Sandy begins to select *only shells* for her sieve, the toddlers find this of interest and spontaneously begin to say "shell" each time they offer her another shell. Sarah and Micah continue their play and include Sandy in it, because instead of attempting to redirect or restructure their play, Sandy follows their idea and builds on what they are already doing. At the same time, Sandy learns about Sarah's and Micah's ability to distinguish shells from stones and to name objects they have chosen. She recognizes

this ability as a cognitive development KDI: *Exploring same and different*.

Older toddlers often indicate that they want to do things for themselves. At choice time, it is not unusual for them to push away a helping hand or to say "Me do it!" as they try to take the top off a container, fit shapes into a sorting box, or try to climb into a low carton and get stuck with one leg hanging over the side. In these situations, caregivers respect children's initiatives and their desire to figure things out on their own. They simply remain attentively present and offer the children encouragement by describing what they see ("You're turning that block a lot of different ways to try to fit it in the slot, Chris"). If the child is becoming too frustrated, the teacher might offer a suggestion ("Sometimes when I wrap a baby doll, I put her on the floor") or might offer some physical support, for example, holding a bottle still while the child unscrews its cap. Although toddlers' problem-solving attempts are often awkward, time consuming, and difficult for caregivers to witness, it is clear that most children take great pleasure in solving these toddler-sized problems on their own with a minimum of help.

Following children's leads and ideas requires caregivers to be observant, patient, flexible, and open to the child's viewpoint. They also need to resist the urge to jump in with a set agenda based on preconceived ideas of what an infant or toddler of a specific age should be doing. On the other hand, this approach does not

Following a young child's lead and ideas requires a caregiver to be observant, patient, and flexible.

mean the caregiver is passive. To the contrary, the more the caregiver knows about child development and how to support early learning (using the KDIs as a guide), the more the caregiver can actively support children's active learning.

Engage in communication give and take with children

At choice time, caregivers in a HighScope active learning setting communicate in an even give-and-take manner with infants and toddlers in both conversation and play. This means encouraging the child to set the pace and to freely contribute to each interchange, and it means matching, not ignoring or overriding, the child's contributions. This allows them to share control with the children and to model the partnership of everyday social exchange.

Before they learn to talk, infants and toddlers keep up their end of the conversation with sounds, gestures, and actions. Caregivers, in turn, incorporate children's nonverbal contributions into their part of the conversation. The following examples illustrate some exchanges between caregivers and nonverbal children at choice time:

Aneesha, a young infant, lies on her back, touching her stuffed lamb and cooing to it. Still touching her lamb, she turns to smile at Elba, her caregiver, and then smacks her lips at Elba. In return, Elba smiles at Aneesha; imitates her lip smacking; and says, "I see you, Aneesha!" Aneesha wiggles and smacks her lips again. Elba, in turn, smacks her own lips and says to Aneesha, "You like *to smack your lips! Aneesha wiggles and then turns her attention back to her lamb.*

~

Bryce sits on the floor, dropping chestnuts into one of two empty tin buckets. At one point he stops and, catching the eye of Cora, his caregiver, drops another chestnut into the bucket with a clatter; then he laughs. In return, Cora picks up a chestnut and drops it into the other bucket. They repeat this chestnut-dropping exchange until Bryce finally turns away from Cora and focuses his attention on patting down his bucket full of chestnuts.

~

From his perch at the top of the climber, toddler Ethan drops a rubber ball over the rail. He watches where the ball finally comes to rest on the floor, then climbs down to retrieve it, and scrambles back up the climber with it. He then throws it down again, this time looking at caregiver Brandon and making the sound "ffwiiisssss" as he throws it. "Ffwiisssss," says Brandon, "there goes the ball!" They repeat this exchange several times as Ethan goes through the same action sequence over and over again until he finally tires.

Older toddlers like Sarah and Micah (pp. 338–339) incorporate words into their exchanges. Note that each time Sarah or Micah says the single word "shell," Sandy,

their caregiver, makes a reply that is relatively short as well ("Thanks for the shell"). By making a short reply, Sandy matches the child's contribution instead of burying Sarah or Micah in a barrage of words. Consider another situation at choice time:

> *Caregiver Sylvia watches Jamie paint on a large sheet of paper on the art area table. Jamie stabs his brush at the paper over and over again. As he pauses to examine the resulting splotches of color, he says "Feets!" "It looks like you made feet on your paper," observes Sylvia. "More feets!" Jamie says, as he selects a new brush and a new color and resumes making splotches. "You're making more feet," says Sylvia. Jamie is too engrossed in painting to respond to this second observation, and Sylvia does not press him to do so.*

While these conversational exchanges may seem brief and mundane, they are examples of how adults respect the style and pace of the children involved. Notice that Jamie's caregiver does not try to press her point or prolong the conversation with such questions as "Do you like playing with paint?," "Are you having fun?," and "What color are you using?" Toddlers need time to find the language that fits with their actions. Questions often pressure children to respond to subjects they may not be inclined toward at the moment and tend to disrupt children's actions or thought processes. Consequently, when questioned by an adult, children many times ignore the question or even leave what they are doing (perhaps to get away from the questions and the questioner). Caregiver questions can thus interfere with communication, whereas caregiver comments, observations, and acknowledgments tend to keep conversational exchanges going. (For more information on appropriate questioning strategies with young children, see Hohmann, Weikart, & Epstein, 2008.) By contrast, when teachers quietly work alongside children (e.g., using art materials in the same way), children remain engaged in their play for

Toddlers need time to find the language that fits with their actions, so caregivers spend a lot of time patiently listening — in this case, the conversation is about pigs!

extended periods of time and use materials in more complex ways (Kindler, 1995).

Support children's interactions with peers

In child care settings, choice time takes place within a social context. Though infants and toddlers often choose to engage in solitary pursuits, they also take the opportunity to observe, play alongside, and imitate their peers. By thoughtfully supporting these early bids at social interaction, caregivers can help children to form positive peer relationships and to see themselves and others as members of a community.

Caregivers in infant-toddler settings find that given the opportunity, even children as young as two months old may exhibit interest in one another. For example, putting a pair of nonmobile infants on their back close together on the floor at choice time allows them to enjoy each other's company. The two infants will often communicate their interest in each other through wiggling; turning their heads toward each other; and exchanging gazes, smiles, coos, and babbles. If one cries, the other cries. One of the pair may become less animated or even sad when his or her special "blanket-mate" is out of sight or at home for the day. As caregivers pay close attention to certain pairs of infants, they gently comment on the social interactions they see: "Meagan, you're watching Lu." "I'll bet you miss Rabb today, Jack. He's home with a cold."

Caregivers continue to watch for and acknowledge peer preferences as infants begin to creep and crawl and to pull themselves up to stand. At choice time, these infants will often use their newfound mobility to seek the company of a particular child, as in this scenario:

> *Toddler James deliberately chooses to sit on the floor and explore materials next to another toddler, Tab, and he even makes a friendly but unsuccessful attempt to touch the wire whisk Tab is examining with his hands and mouth. When Tab finally gives up his whisk, crawls over to the sofa, and pulls himself up to a standing position, James abandons his basket of household items, crawls after Tab, and pulls himself up to stand at the other end of the sofa. After a struggle, Tab climbs onto the sofa. James works very hard to climb onto the sofa too. During a moment of rest, he looks over his shoulder at his caregiver, Marsha. "James," she says, recognizing his action and its social implications, "you're working very hard to climb onto the sofa with Tab."*

Caregivers support toddlers' peer interactions by providing equipment that allows children to play side by side: wide slides, climbers, and stairs; lots of table, floor, and easel space; rocking boats; cozy chairs and nooks with room for two. They provide two or more similar wheeled toys, shovels, and buckets, so children can play with such toys together and try out one another's actions with the toys. Finally, they provide play materials that two or three toddlers can gather around and still

Caregivers support toddlers' peer interactions by thoughtfully describing children's intentions to help facilitate their attempts at social play.

Here caregiver Julie asked Marco where he was going. He replied, "Tain…Cogo."

"What do you need for your train trip?" Julie asked.

"Oney," Marco said.

"So Marco needs money for this train trip to Chicago. I wonder where he will get it," Julie said.

The "train" made a quick stop at the dress-up area, where Eliza got a purse with money and shared it with Marco.

retain individual control of, such as play dough, sand and water, and finger paints.

When a toddler's attempt to connect with a peer goes unnoticed by the other child, an attentive caregiver can help bridge the gap by describing the child's attempt, as this scenario with toddlers Sasha and Max illustrates:

> *Sasha is stacking the large cardboard blocks. Max sees what Sasha is doing, gets two more blocks from the shelf, and puts them down in front of Sasha. When Sasha does not notice the blocks, caregiver Mona comments, "Max, you brought some blocks for Sasha to use." At this, Sasha looks up, sees the blocks, and adds them to his stack. Max goes back to the shelf for two more blocks. This time, as Max approaches Sasha, he says "Blocks," puts them down, and adds one to the stack himself. Sasha looks up and adds the remaining block to the stack.*

By thoughtfully describing children's intentions toward their peers, caregivers can help to facilitate toddlers' attempts at social play.

Use a problem-solving approach to children's social conflicts

Toddlers are primed for social conflict! They are strong, mobile, and adept. They have a growing sense of possession ("Mine!") and a fixed belief in their own point of view. During the most peaceful choice time in a well-stocked setting, toddlers, with their gusto, emerging communication skills, and social inexperience, are bound to engage in disputes with peers over claims to space, materials, and even caregivers. At the same time, with adult support, they are usually capable of quickly settling their own disputes — possibly because they are so focused on the immediate present. Conflicts and disputes at choice time are opportunities to help toddlers find sociable alternatives to such negative behaviors as biting and grabbing. As described in Chapter 3, teachers can use the following six steps to help toddlers resolve disputes: calmly approach toddlers in conflict, stopping hurtful actions; acknowledge children's feelings; gather information; restate the problem; engage toddlers in describing the problem and finding a solution; and offer follow-up support. Here is an example of these problem-solving strategies in action:

> *Colin and Justin, two older toddlers, stand in the block area. Colin holds a plastic figure of a firefighter that Justin is trying to take away from him. They struggle, becoming increasingly upset. Nancy, their caregiver, approaches calmly and kneels on the floor beside them. They stop struggling to look at her. "You look upset!" she says to the two children, stroking each one gently. Colin nods in agreement. **"I angry!"** Justin announces loudly. "So, you're angry," Nancy says to Justin. "And you're upset," she says to Colin. "You both want the firefighter," she continues, stating the problem as she sees it. Colin and Justin nod yes. "Let me hold the firefighter," she says to Colin, who*

This caregiver calmly works through the problem-solving approach with two children who want the same plastic giraffe. In the end, the children decide on taking turns, with the young boy having it first.

then opens his hand, releasing his grip on the figure. Nancy takes it gently from him and holds it in her hand so both children can concentrate on the problem rather than the toy itself. "What can we do about this?" she asks the boys, seeking their ideas rather than offering her own. She wants them to think, and she knows that they will be far more interested in carrying out their own idea, rather than hers, for a solution. At first they look at her blankly, but after a minute or so, Colin says "Bambulance ban!" and heads off toward the toy shelf. He returns shortly with a figure of an ambulance driver (belonging to the same toy set as the firefighter). He hands his "ambulance man" to Justin, who takes it with a smile. "So now Justin has the ambulance man," states Nancy. "I can give the firefighter back to Colin." Neither child disputes this. She hands the firefighter to Colin, and the two boys toddle off in different directions, each clutching his own toy figure. With their caregiver as mediator, they have solved the problem themselves.

Offer older toddlers opportunities to plan and recall

Planning (thinking about what you are going to do before you do it) and recalling (remembering and reflecting on what you did after you did it) are intellectual processes that depend on the ability to imagine, to form mental images of materials, places, people, or actions. From HighScope's work with older children, we know that three-, four-, and five-year-olds are increasingly able to plan and recall — to think about their own future and past doings and to talk about and describe these thoughts. As older toddlers approach age two-and-a-half to three, they are beginning to develop these same capacities. They communicate these intentions and recollections through a streamlined combination of gestures, actions, and key words.

Simple, brief times of planning and recalling individually with older toddlers

One way to support older toddlers who may be starting to plan and recall is to briefly describe what you see them doing — "You're putting dinosaurs on blocks!"

help them to call up mental pictures of what they would like to do or what they did, to connect their ideas with these actions, to communicate their intentions to others, and to begin to organize their past actions into a simple narrative. (*Note:* Preschoolers plan and recall in small groups at fixed times in the daily routine as well as during individual adult-child interactions at opportune moments. Planning and recalling with toddlers takes place in one-on-one exchanges with caregivers, at whatever point during the day the adult senses an opening and the child's readiness.) This planning before children have started their exploration or play and recalling when they have come to a stopping point gives caregivers a chance to support children's emerging ability to think about future and past events. Planning and recalling are the hallmarks of *executive function,* two of the higher-order abilities that will later allow children to organize and complete tasks.

Caregivers using the support strategies for choice time that are listed on page 343 are already supporting toddlers' planning and recalling as they describe what they see and hear children doing:

- "You're banging the box with your block, T.C.!"
- "Sharelle, you climbed up the ladder, and now you're at the top!"
- "You're turning that block a lot of different ways to try to fit it in the slot, Chris!"
- "Meagan, you're watching Lu."
- "James, you're working very hard to climb onto the sofa with Tab."

These descriptive statements help toddlers build the language to refer to their own actions and playthings. Eventually, with his caregiver providing a wide array of climbing choices and patiently describing what he is doing when he climbs, James, for example, as an older infant, begins to understand what it means to "climb." By the time he reaches later toddlerhood, based on his broad range of experiences, James may well be able to picture himself climbing something before actually doing so. When his caregiver says at the beginning of choice time, "James, show me what you will play with at choice time today," he may point to the climber and say "Cwimb!" before heading off to put this simple, toddler-appropriate plan into action.

Caregivers plan and recall with individual toddlers when they see some signs that a child might be ready for and interested in this process. One sign is the child's ability to form mental images. In an active learning setting, infants and young toddlers accumulate a wealth of sensory-motor experience. Eventually, as older toddlers, they begin to be able to hold in mind pictures of these experiences. For example, Teri, a toddler, realizes when settling down for naptime that she does not have her favorite blanket with her. From her position lying on her cot, she cannot see the blanket, but she has a mental picture of it lying on the floor between the couch and the wall in the book area,

where she last used it at choice time. Seeing that Teri can retrieve an unseen object by remembering its location,[1] Teri's caregiver knows that the toddler can hold an experience in mind and therefore may be ready to indicate a simple plan before going into action at choice time.

Other signs that a toddler may be ready to plan are the child's spontaneous actions and pronouncements. In the anecdote on page 339, for example, Kevin brings his caregiver a book he has selected, plops down in her lap, and says "Read!" Through his actions and words, he lets her know that he has a pretty clear picture of what he (and she!) are about to do. In another situation, Jamie (p. 349) pauses to look at his painting, names his splotches "feets," and then declares "more feets" before continuing to work on his idea with a new brush and new color. Saying "more feets" (and selecting a new brush and color) is his toddler shorthand for *Now I'm going to make some more feet using a different color.*

When a toddler like Teri, Kevin, or Jamie seems ready to plan, a caregiver can ask that child at the beginning of choice time (or perhaps during choice time — at the point of an activity change) a simple question about his or her intentions. It should be a question the child can answer with an action, gesture, or word. Here are examples of ways to begin:

> ***"What will you play with, Jody?"*** *Jody leans against her caregiver and looks around. "Can you show me something you'd like to play with?" asks her caregiver. Jody goes to the doll buggy, grabs the handle, and looks back at her caregiver, who nods and says, "You're going to play with the buggy." Jody pushes the buggy toward the house area.*

~

> ***"Can you show me where you will play, Amir?"*** *Amir points toward the block area. "Oh, you're going to play in the block area," says his caregiver. Amir nods and heads for the shelf of wooden unit blocks.*

~

> ***"What will you do at choice time, Mimi?"*** *Mimi sits in her caregiver's lap, removes her thumb from her mouth, points to a child drawing with markers on a large sheet of white paper, and says, "Do that!" "Oh, you're going to draw with markers, like Elana," interprets her caregiver. Mimi nods and repeats, "Do that!" "That's what you're going to do," affirms her caregiver. Mimi heads for the art area, selects a sheet of paper and a marker, and begins.*

Note that planning with toddlers is a brief, intimate, one-to-one interaction. The caregiver kneels or sits on the floor next to the child, often putting an arm around the child or in some way offering comfortable

[1]See COR Advantage (Epstein et al., 2014b), item C, level 2, "Child returns to where something he or she wants or has played with is located."

physical contact. The child communicates a plan by using actions (pointing, nodding, looking at, or going to an object or place) and sometimes by saying a key word or two (naming a material, action, or possibly a peer already engaged in that activity or with whom he or she wants to play). When the caregiver translates the toddler's plan into a short verbal statement, it is a way of checking to make sure the child's intentions are understood. It's a good idea for caregivers to ask toddlers about their plans for choice time when they are in a relatively open part of the play space, where it is easy for them to look around to see what their choices are.

Recalling with toddlers often begins quite spontaneously, like this, as children share home stories with their caregivers:

> *When he arrives in the morning, Kamari runs to his caregiver, saying "Puppy, puppy!" "Oh, Kamari," exclaims his caregiver, "you saw a puppy?" "Puppy Nama's," he explains. His mom nods, backing up his story. "You saw a puppy at your Nama's house?" asks his caregiver. "Lick me!" says Kamari. "And the puppy licked you!" responds his caregiver.*

This puppy story illustrates how recalling occurs because children, like adults, want to share the important things that happen to them with the important people in their lives. The recalling about a toddler's activity might occur *during* choice time, as Jody leaves playing with the doll buggy to play with puzzles, for example.

Like planning, recalling is a brief, intimate caregiver-toddler exchange. "Something happened!" comments the caregiver. "Popped!" says the toddler to her caregiver, pointing to the pop-up toy.

Or the recalling might occur *at the end of* choice time, as Amir is putting away some blocks. A caregiver may encourage a child to recall with a simple statement or question:

> ***"I saw you pushing this doll buggy over to the climber, Jody,"*** *says her caregiver. She has joined Jody, who is now standing next to the buggy but gazing across the room. Jody nods. "What did you do with the buggy?" asks her caregiver. "Babies," says Jody patting the babies in the buggy. "You put babies in the buggy?" asks her caregiver. Jody nods yes. Then Jody takes her caregiver's hand, leads her across*

the room to the puzzle shelf, and says "Puzzles!" She is announcing her next plan. "Oh, so now you plan to play with puzzles," her caregiver says, interpreting Jody's new plan. Jody dumps out the three-piece duck puzzle and begins to move the pieces about.

~

***"What did you do with the blocks, Amir?"** his caregiver asks, as she and Amir stack the blocks on the shelf at the end of choice time. Amir raises his arm over his head and says "Up." "You stacked the blocks up. I remember — I saw you!" interprets his caregiver. "Up, up, up!" says Amir. "You stacked the blocks up, up, up!" his caregiver affirms.*

Like planning, recalling is a brief, intimate caregiver-toddler exchange. Either one — planning or recalling — may occur at almost any time of the day. At naptime, for example, Mimi sits on her cot, taking off her shoes and socks. She looks up and sees her drawing hanging on the wall. "Me do!" she says. When her caregiver sees what Mimi is looking at, she tries filling in the context for her story: "That's the picture you drew in the art area today." "Me draw!" agrees Mimi, making drawing motions with her arm. "You moved your arm back and forth to draw," comments her caregiver.

The idea behind planning and recalling with older toddlers is to provide them the opportunity to think about what they are going to do and what they have done and to express these thoughts in their own particular blend of actions and words. To do so, each child needs individual support from an attentive caregiver and freedom to get started on his or her plan right away. Although as noted above, planning and recalling generally take place one-on-one, for some toddlers who are approaching three years of age and playing in small groups, these processes might take place with a group of two or three. (See "Strategies for Planning and Recalling With Older Toddlers" on pp. 360–361.) This initiation into small-group planning and recall time provides an early experience in listening and sharing (communication, language, and literacy) and develops a sense of participation in group routines (social and emotional development).

Encourage toddlers to put materials away after choice time

Toddlers exhibit a number of developmental characteristics that enable them to participate in the process of putting things away at the end of choice time. Because they like water and are interested in imitating adults and using adult tools, they see washing the paint off the art table as an enjoyable activity, not a chore. Also, toddlers like to fill and empty containers, so putting balls back into the ball tub or shells into the shell basket is as satisfying as taking them out! Because toddlers notice similarities and differences, they can see that the books on the couch belong back on the rack with the other books, whereas the blocks on the couch belong

back on the shelf with the other blocks. At the same time, toddlers have no need to be thorough, efficient, or exact. Even in a well-organized and labeled play space, toddlers participate in putting toys away in their own particular manner ("Me do it!") and at their own pace, as the following anecdotes illustrate:

At the end of choice time, Mario's caregiver suggests, "Let's put these books back on the shelf, Mario." Mario picks up an armload of books from the pile of cushions where he and several other children have been looking at them, carries them over to the low bookshelf, and places the whole armful in a pile on the shelf.

~

John picks up the empty food containers, plates, and utensils he has spread out on the table in the house area; puts them into the wooden refrigerator; closes the door; and looks with satisfaction at the now empty table. "Aw gone!" he says.

~

Lydia stands at the sink with several paintbrushes. She holds each brush under the running water for quite some time, watches the colors swirl down the drain, and then "paints" the counter next to the sink with water.

~

Blake loads some blocks he has been playing with into a wagon, pulls the wagon to the block shelf, turns over the wagon, dumps out the blocks next to the shelf, rights the wagon, and heads back to load some more blocks into his wagon.

Putting toys away works best when caregivers put toys away along with the children and are willing to accept toddlers' ideas about how to do things. Caregivers should remain calm and positive and not expect toddlers to handle the cleanup process all on their own or even to completely pick up any one area or group of items. With patient support and encouragement, toddlers can participate in the *process* of cleanup and enjoy the contact, interaction, and satisfaction it affords. After a good effort on everyone's part, caregivers move on to the next part of the day. After all, they can always complete cleanup while children nap or after they have left for the day.

Understanding Outside Time

At outside time, two nonmobile infants, Tabor and Lizzy, are wiggling and cooing as they lie on a blanket. Sheila, their caregiver, sits next to them on the grass holding a third infant, Kaylee, who is sucking her thumb and gazing at Tabor and Lizzy. "Here we are outside, looking all around," Sheila sings to all three babies as she gently rocks Kaylee.

~