

"THE WIDER THE RANGE OF POSSIBILITIES WE OFFER CHILDREN, THE MORE INTENSE WILL BE THEIR MOTIVATIONS AND THE RICHER THEIR EXPERIENCES." - LORIS MALAGUZZI, FOUNDER OF THE REGGIO EMILIA APPROACH

Loose Parts Guide



Examples of loose parts that increase levels of creative and imaginative play:

- Cardboard boxes
- Tape
- Buttons
- Spools
- Paper rolls
- Cork
- Napkin rings
- Sticks
- Rocks
- Pinecones
- Acorns
- Cups
- Beads
- Shells
- Plastic lids
- Glass gems
- Ribbon
- Yarn
- Felt
- Gutters
- Keys
- Golf tees
- Clothespins

Be aware of choking hazards and always keep a watchful eye.

What are Loose Parts?

In early childhood education settings, loose parts mean alluring, beautiful, found objects and materials that children can move, manipulate, control, and change while they play.

Loose parts possess infinite play possibilities. They offer multiple rather than single outcomes: no specific set of directions accompanies them; no single result is inevitable. Unlike a jigsaw puzzle, whose pieces are meant to be fitted together in a specific way to make a single picture, loose parts can be

WAYS
TO USE
LOOSE
PARTS

1

ON A MIRROR,
FRAME, OR
LIGHT TABLE

2

IN DRAMATIC
PLAY SPACES
OR OUTDOORS

3

USED WITH
ART
MATERIALS

joined in many ways. A scarf, for example, can become a blanket to swaddle a baby, a platform for a picnic, a fishing pond, a cover for a fort, or a veil covering the face of a bride.

Simon Nicholson coined the term in his 1971 article "The Theory of Loose Parts."

Children for generations have used found materials in their play from rocks and sticks to tin cans and wire. When an environment is rich in loose parts, children are likely to discover multiple ways to manipulate them and new ways of thinking or processing the knowledge learned by playing with the materials. Children

“Children learn most readily and easily in a laboratory-type environment where they can experiment, enjoy and find out things for themselves.”
-Simon Nicholson



can use flat tree cookies to serve as a sturdy base for a tall tower, stepping stones to lead them safely across an imaginary river filled with hungry alligators, a steering wheel for their race car, or a lily pad to shelter frogs. They become more creative and flexible in their thinking while satisfying their ever-growing curiosity and love for learning.

When children interact with loose parts, they enter a world of ‘what if’ that promotes the type of thinking that leads to problem solving and theoretical reasoning. Loose parts enhance children’s ability to think imaginatively and see solutions, and they bring a sense of adventure and excitement to children’s play (Daly and Beloglovsky, 2015).

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Beautiful Stuff: Learning with Found Materials by Cathy Weisman Topal and Lella Gandini

Loose Parts: Inspiring Play in Young Children by Lisa Daly and Miriam Beloglovsky

Loose Parts 2: Inspiring Play with Infants and Toddlers by Lisa Daly and Miriam Beloglovsky

The Hundred Languages of Children: The Reggio Emilia Experience in Transformation by Carolyn Edwards and Lella Gandini

