

# Preparing the Environment/Schedules



Our Fireflies® curriculum promotes guided discovery and multisensory hands-on activities in a safe, organized, yet flexible environment. Whether you are using this developmentally appropriate curriculum in a preschool classroom or in a family-based program, the following information will help you make the most of the lesson plans included in each theme.

Set aside a period of time each week to get organized and prepare for the following week. Our program includes a pull-out Calendar in each Curriculum Guide, and a Materials List is provided in the Teacher Pack to help you prepare more quickly. We want you to have plenty of options to choose from each day. Look through the Curriculum Guide ahead of time and decide which activities will work best for the children in your group. Implement those activities and save the rest for a later date, if desired. Be sure to consider information you've gathered while utilizing assessments to help you plan accordingly.

Many of our customers ask us how much time our program will take each day. You can provide the best situation to promote early learning by offering interesting and challenging opportunities for exploration throughout the day and allowing children to choose what is intriguing to them. Learning should happen all day long. At the same time, we realize that children need a certain amount of routine and structure within each day. Predictable routines give them a sense of security and allow your day to transition smoothly between arrivals, snacks/meals, naps, center and play activities, and departures.

## Group Activities

### Start Your Day

In each monthly Curriculum Guide, you will notice that we begin each day with a collection of group activities. Look for ways to welcome the children each day under **Start Your Day**, along with calendar and weather routines. Under Daily Basics, you will find activities to introduce and reinforce language, literacy, and math concepts. We include counting, color, and a few everyday words in Spanish. Try to include these words in your children's home languages (other than Spanish) as well. This will help your dual language learners and English speakers learn new words, and naturally make your environment more culturally diverse. Enlist the help of parents if needed.

### Discuss/Do

Under **Discuss/Do**, you will find opportunities for children to listen, speak, and expand vocabulary. Plan to do at least a few of these things near the start of each day after basic routines are completed. When using Things to Talk About, honor children's sometimes lengthy sharing of ideas. You may want to write down what children say or questions they have for future discovery or research, ideas for props specific to the theme, or items that will enhance your discussions. Family participation and community involvement ideas are also provided. These activities can be repeated later in your day or reviewed in another group/circle time. Your daily schedule should be fairly consistent but flexible enough to make the most of "teachable moments." Consider creating cue cards or a poster with pictures of your schedule to help children "read" what activity is coming next.

### Music and Movement

In **Songs and Rhymes**, we offer a rhyme, finger play, or song. Music can be used in many ways to complement and expand other components of a curriculum. It assists in language skills, as well as gross and fine motor skill development. Music can also provide opportunities for social interaction, encourage creativity, reinforce math and science, and increase imagination and cultural awareness. Use of musical instruments is encouraged for children to explore rhythm, beat, and sound. Much of the music in our curriculum takes the form of familiar tunes with either new or familiar words.

The **Movers and Shakers** section includes large or small group games or creative movement suggestions. Preschool children need lots of "wiggle time" and exercise to develop their minds and bodies! Large muscle activities also help children develop coordination and build strength. Make sure to include at least some kind of movement in your schedule each day.

Try to take children outdoors as much as possible (weather permitting) in order to provide the space needed for active play like running, jumping, or riding toys. Just when you are tiring of an activity, children are learning all the words, actions, and sequence of the task. Repeat and review games and songs. Ideally, children should go outside once in the morning and once in the afternoon.

### Transitions

Some children have difficulty moving from one activity to another. They may need extra time, an early warning of an upcoming change, or a fun way to move to the next activity. We supply quick transition suggestions to move children in an organized fashion from group time to other activities. You may use these ideas as needed during the day.



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By organizing your setting into learning centers or specific play areas, you will make good use of this curriculum, meet children's needs, and make your days flow more smoothly. You'll also be able to accommodate exploration and offer opportunities for the children to make choices on their own. This can be done simply and without a great deal of space or expense. See the Choice of Center Activities ideas provided at the beginning of each curriculum guide and consider the tips below.

- Look for ways to organize areas into centers where a certain type of activity can be focused on. For example, you may set aside one area for blocks and manipulatives (puzzles, etc.), another area as a dramatic play center with a play kitchen or dress-up clothing, and another as an art center where children have access to paper, crayons, scissors, glue, and rotated unique art materials such as metallic crayons, Wikki Stix, paper straws, etc. Avoid organizing centers that may have high noise levels (blocks, dramatic play) near quiet centers (language, writing).
- Centers should be large enough to accommodate several children at a time. Look for ways to arrange furniture and toys to provide boundaries. You can do this even with a small play area and limited materials by using area rugs, low sturdy shelving units, taped lines on carpet, etc. It will help you to maintain order and provide children with a sense of where things belong. Consider labeling center areas, storage areas, and items around your classroom with picture/word cards. These cards will help children develop independence during cleanup, as well as promote literacy skills.
- Centers should have materials rotated in and out of them on a continual basis—use our center ideas to help you! Pay close attention to the children's interest levels. If they are no longer choosing a center to play in, bring in new materials. Try to include materials that are tactile, unusual, nature-based, and relate to current themes or topics.
- Look for new items that might be unfamiliar yet intriguing to children. When covering a specific theme or topic, ask children and families to bring in items from their yards, home, or travels. A family visiting a beach, for example, might be willing to share seashells, beach sand, or pieces of driftwood when this topic is in your plan. Seasonally, go on short field trips or walks and collect materials for your science center. Invite the children to bring in leaves, flower blossoms, bugs, and other interesting things they might find. You may create a new center or area based on what the children are finding or most interested in as you follow the curriculum.
- Children should be allowed to demonstrate independence by extending play activities through the entire classroom, whether that is inside or outside. For example, materials and items added to enhance a science area may be carried over to complement play in the dramatic play area. Or a book about vegetables may be displayed or used in the science area.
- Children will naturally move materials back and forth between centers as their play dictates. For example, if tree bark or cross sections of a tree trunk are included in a science center, children may choose to transfer those same materials into a dramatic play area and haul them in toy trucks. Seashells placed in a science center might be carried to the reading corner which has been supplemented with books about seashells or the ocean. Order can be maintained by using small trays, photos for labeling where items belong, or clear plastic boxes with photo/word labels. Ask the children to help when setting up centers. They will enjoy the independence and respect the arrangement when they have ownership in its creation.

While this curriculum can be used if you choose not to set up centers or areas, the monthly Curriculum Guides do provide suggestions for center-based activities at the beginning of each month. If you are unfamiliar with learning centers, this will provide you with a great deal of guidance and support.

## Your Daily Schedule

As mentioned earlier, your daily schedule should be fairly consistent, but flexible enough to make the most of “teachable moments.” With this in mind, planning your schedule should be done thoughtfully. You will also want to consider groupings as you plan your day: large group, small group, one-on-one, etc. You will want to plan times for vigorous play, quiet learning time, snacks, rest time, and free choice during center time. Making these decisions is simple when using activities from the Fireflies® curriculum. We have considered all these factors that make up a good schedule, incorporating activities to promote a natural flow each day. Here is one sample schedule you could follow. Remember, you know your children best and ultimately, the planning of your daily schedule is up to you.

1. Start Your Day, Daily Basics, Discuss/Do
2. Music/Movement and Center Time/Snack
3. Shared Reading and Indoor/Outdoor Play
4. Group Learning Time
5. Lunch/Rest
6. Art, Songs/Rhymes, and Shared Reading
7. Outdoor Play/Snack
8. End Your Day/Wrap Up