



## Toddler Park



### Introduction to the Exhibit:

The perfect place for our smallest visitors, the Toddler Park is a soft play area designed for children under three years old. This exhibit allows adults to engage their little companions in exploration and observe them interacting with new friends in a safe and secure environment. Browse through the books – is there a favorite you’d like to share with your toddler? Make funny faces in the mirrors with your little one while you play with the colorful gears. Pull and stick the Velcro shapes to the wall, discover a brightly-colored new toy, crawl around the park, put on a puppet show to the right of the shapes wall, be amazed at our floating beach ball and enjoy being a little (or grownup) kid!

### The Power of Play:

Play time (such as the kind that occurs in the Toddler Park) gives caregivers numerous opportunities to expose young children to meaningful language. A child’s experiences during the first years of his life lay the foundation for his future language growth and development. Use your time in the Toddler Park to extend children’s dialogue. For example, if your child points to a specific object, such as a ball, respond to her by using a variety of descriptive words to identify the ball: “Look at the big yellow ball you found! It’s round and squishy – let’s pick it up!” This exhibit is also an ideal spot for toddlers to develop fine (stacking blocks) and gross (walking backward) motor skills. Give your toddler the chance to play with things he can pick up, push, hug, squeeze, pull, roll, lift, stack, bounce and interact with to help him learn vital physical skills, gain muscle control, increase balance and improve coordination. Although it may appear simple, a child’s basic handling of an object allows him to form new connections and process the new object to memory, realizing its relationships to previous things he has touched and picked up. This drives his curiosity and continues his

ability to identify and categorize new information about the world in which he explores as an active learner.

**ASK:** Ask your child to play peek-a-boo or to toss a soft ball back and forth. Does your child want to turn the gear crank? Who does he see in the mirror? Have the other parents and caregivers in the Toddler Park read any interesting articles lately? What have been some major milestones their little ones have experienced recently? Can your child identify specific colors and shapes around the Park?

**LISTEN:** Listen to your child's sounds as she crawls and/or walks around the Park. What specific noises does she make when she discovers something new? What are some new words she can learn while in the Park? Does she respond to other children's (real or nonsense) words? Can you find a toy that rattles or squeaks? Listen for your child's laughter – what activities seem to be the most fun and engaging for him?

**LOOK:** What do you see when looking through the tunnels? Can your child spy you through the Tree House windows? Look for a book that your child might enjoy. Model turning the pages with your child and looking from left to right at the pages...it's never too early to start developing emergent reading skills!

**Key Vocabulary WORDS to USE in This Exhibit**

see		touch	feel	soft		big	
	under		between	ball	through		over
up		down	open	close		color	
	shape		crawl	twist	small		turn

**After Your Visit: The Learning Continues!**

Continue to develop your child's motor skills at home by making an activity line. Using chalk or masking tape, create a straight line on the floor, or, weather permitting, outside on the sidewalk. Ask your child to walk the line. When he has mastered that, ask him to run the line, then as he continues to grow he can tiptoe and/or skip the line while you add circles to jump over, squares to hop in, etc. to develop new physical skills.

*\*We carefully choose the props and toys included in our exhibits. All of these items are in compliance with Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) lead testing standards.*