

BORN TO TINKER:

SUPPORTING INFANT LEARNING WITH LOOSE PARTS



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Meet your Facilitator and Coach!

Sophie Rayner-Grignon, RECE

A portrait of Sophie Rayner-Grignon, a woman with long brown hair and glasses, smiling. The image is partially overlaid by the 'THE ecc' logo on the left.

THE ecc™

Sophie Rayner-Grignon is a passionate ECE Coach & Facilitator with The Early Childhood Coach and a proud Registered Early Childhood Educator (RECE) leader based in Canada. With 10+ years in the Early Years sector, her work has focused on Infant and Young Toddler Learning and Care, early literacy, and advocating for educators across the field.

Over the years, Sophie has gained hands-on experience in many roles, including international volunteer, nanny, lead educator, replacement cook, bookseller, and professional learning leader, all shaping her grounded, community-centred approach.

She currently works as a Lead Infant Educator in a mental health centre, supporting the young parent community with care, connection, and literacy-rich experiences. Sophie believes in lifting others up, sharing knowledge, and creating meaningful moments through stories, support, and advocacy.

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The Early Childhood Coach's Learning Space



GROWTH



SAFETY



**COMMUNITY &
COLLABORATION**



REFLECTION



BELONGING

About The Early Childhood Coach!



The Early Childhood Coach is a team of educators, coaches, and experts who support the Early Childhood Education (ECE) industry through coaching, advocacy, and professional education. Our founder, Anisha Angella, brings over 15 years of diverse experience in the ECE industry as an entrepreneur, author, Registered Early Childhood Educator (RECE), and ECE leadership coach. Through education and support, we empower ECE educators and leaders to overcome challenges, strengthen their communities, and find fulfillment in their careers. Our experienced coaches support and guide educators, leaders, and ECE programs at all stages of their careers and development. Partner with us and gain a savvy sidekick to help you become the superhero of your ECE journey!

Our interactive workshops offer valuable insights and education on communication, diversity, leadership, burnout, and more. We've shared our work internationally and gained exposure through Breakfast Television, Authority Magazine, and The Today Show. The Early Childhood Coach has built a community of 20,000+ ECE professionals across our platforms. Our collaborative sessions are praised for their ability to energize educators, transform teams, and enrich ECE communities for professionals, parents, and children. Whether you wish to level up your leadership skills, create new programming, or find renewed passion for your career, we are your one-stop shop for community and support.

**SCAN THE QR
TO VISIT OUR
WEBSITE!**



LET'S SELF REFLECT!

Think deeply about Loose Parts and Babies...

How do you feel about this kind of play... Comfortable? Uncomfortable?

What do you know or want to learn about Infants and Loose Parts...

When and Where do you offer Loose Parts - or are they missing?



LET'S SELF REFLECT!

Hey Baby! Facts or Myths?!

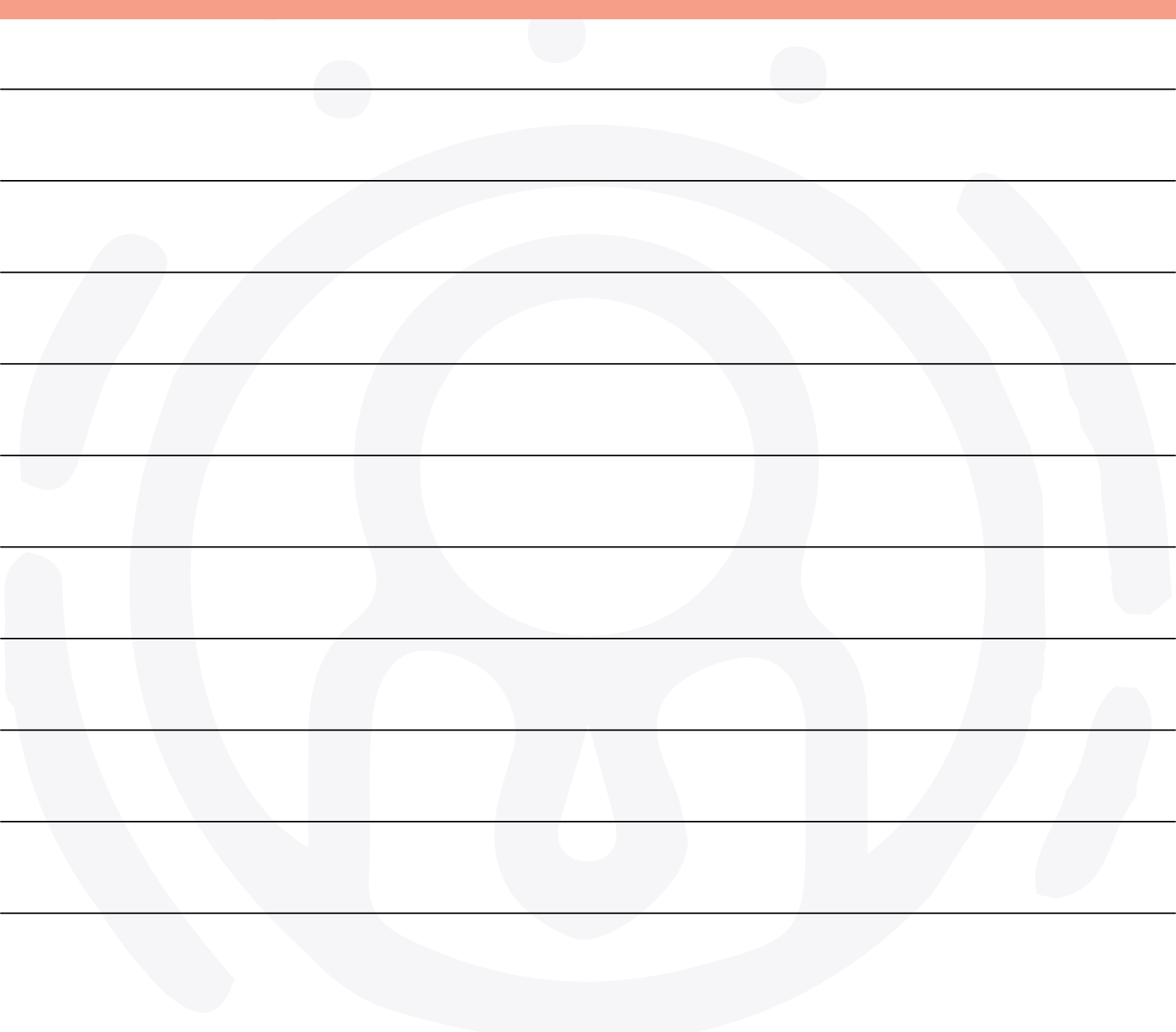
Think about these common Infants and Loose Parts Myths...

- Too Little
- Unsafe
- Doesn't Work

Flip it Forward: Reframe

- Adapt & Adjust
- Safety 1st & Always Possible
- It Takes Time to Grow

~~Too Little~~
~~Unsafe~~
~~Doesn't Work~~



WRITE YOUR FAVOURITE TIP(S) HERE!

Loose Parts for Infants Inspiration List:

Recycled

- ☐ Small Cardboard Boxes
- ☐ Clean Food Containers & Lids
- ☐ Small Cardboard Boxes
- ☐ Large or Medium Spools
- ☐ Safe Cans & Bottles

Repurposed

- ☐ Measuring Cups & Spoons
- ☐ Silicone Muffin Liners & Straws
- ☐ Different Sized Bowls
- ☐ Curtain & Napkins Rings
- ☐ Pillows & Blankets

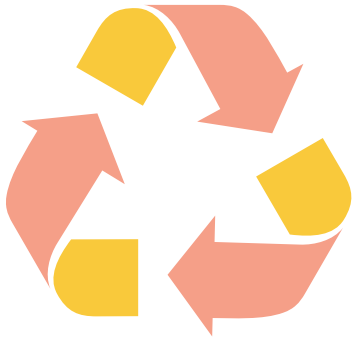
Manufactured

- ☐ Silicone Curves
- ☐ ALL Blocks - Plastic, Wood, Fabric, Cardboard
- ☐ Stacking Cups
- ☐ Fabric Scarves
- ☐ Teething Rings

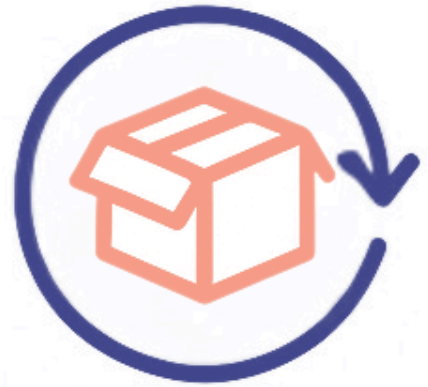
Natural

- ☐ Safe Smooth River Rocks
- ☐ Wooden Slices (Tree Cookies)
- ☐ Pinecones
- ☐ Large Sea Shells
- ☐ Sticks, Twigs, or Driftwood

Loose Part Types Graphic Visuals:



Recycled Loose Parts



Repurposed Loose Parts

How to use:

1. Print Visuals
2. Cut Out (Optional)



3. Laminate (Optional)

4. Post & Play

Label Storage, Post in Play Areas,
Share with Children, Etc



Manufactured Loose Parts



Natural Loose Parts

Loose Part Types Real Photo Visuals:

**Recycled
Loose Parts**



**Repurposed
Loose Parts**



How to use:

1. Print Visuals
2. Cut Out (Optional)



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**Manufactured
Loose Parts**



**Natural
Loose Parts**



Loose Part Types

Real Photo Visuals:



How to use:

1. Print Visuals
2. Cut Out (Optional)



3. Laminate (Optional)

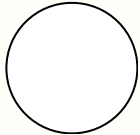
4. Post & Play

Label Storage, Post in Play Areas,
Share with Children, Etc



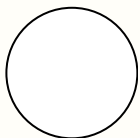
Loose Parts Thrift Tips

Bring an Educator Friend



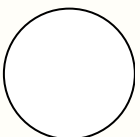
Two sets of eyes can double spot and find interesting loose parts!

Make a List



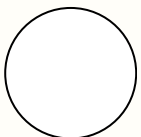
List out what you are looking for - think about the sections of the Thrift Store (wood decor, metal decor, kitchen, bathroom, etc.)

Double Check the Bags



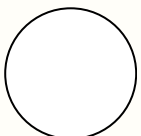
The bag area is BUSY so double check the bags and scan slowly.

Grab, Sort, and Buy



Load your cart as you go, when done sort... what's a yes and what's a no, and now you're ready to check out. 🛒

Never Give Up!



Even if you don't find what you're looking for there is always another thrift, donation, and day.

Additional Resources

ARTICLES

whereby this could be achieved:

1. Give top priority to where the children are

All children, and particularly many of the most needy such as those living in an urban ghetto or who are disadvantaged, spend a lot of the most important time of their lives in K-6 elementary schools, day-care, preschools and children's hospitals. These are the environments that need immediate transformation. This holds true even in innovative school districts that have extended or abolished the classroom walls. They should simply give top priority to the environment of the new classroom or playground, whether it be a mobile unit, exploratory museum, ecological reserve or study center, or wherever the children may be.¹² Ten years of vest-pocket parks, concrete plazas and adventure playgrounds have failed to do this: we *must* solve this problem. Even if a local community is sold on the idea of a pocket-park or adventure-playground it is still better to use the asphalt area of an elementary school for it, for this is where the children are.

2. Let children play a part in the process

Children greatly enjoy playing a part in the design process. This includes the study of the nature of the problem; thinking about their requirements and needs; considering, planning, alternatives; measuring, drawing

Simon Nicholson - How not to cheat: Loose Parts Article

This article was written in the 1970s and includes terms like needy, urban ghetto, and disadvantaged to describe children. These terms reflect the language of that time and are not consistent with today's inclusive, strengths-based approach. We include them here for historical context and awareness.

Loose Parts Play | Child Care Providers Resource Network

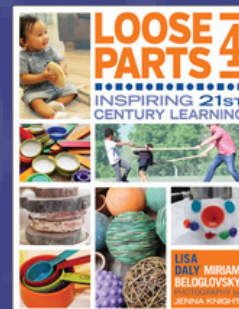
Simon Nicholson and The Theory of Loose Parts – 1 Million Thanks

Making It Work: Barbara Hepworth on Motherhood

Wikipedia | Simon Nicholson

UK theory of loose parts paper article 1971

BOOK RECOMMENDATION



What are Your Next Steps?





Empowering the ECE industry, one professional at a time.



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Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that The Early Childhood Coach operates on the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, and Huron-Wendat peoples. We recognize their enduring presence on this land and the valuable contributions they have made and continue to make to the community, culture, and heritage of this region.

While our business is located in Mississauga, Ontario, Canada, we are committed to working internationally to support early childhood development and education. As we extend our reach across borders, we acknowledge the Indigenous peoples of the lands where we connect and collaborate, and we honor their deep-rooted histories and ongoing connections to those territories.

We recognize that land acknowledgements are only the first step in fostering meaningful relationships with Indigenous communities. We strive to learn, listen, and engage with respect and humility, acknowledging the ongoing effects of colonization and working towards a more just and equitable future for all.

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Land Acknowledgment... Small Extension

Quick but Important Acknowledgement

- Streaming in from Unceded Anishinaabe Algonquin Territory
- I encourage to put Reconciliation with ACTION into your work on whatever Land you are on - Learn about the Land you live on:

[Native Land.Ca](#)

Reflect...

- Think about your view of the child in a deep way
- Acknowledge and think about the influence of Indigenous teachings and traditions on connecting with children and respecting them in a deep community way

Go Deeper: Reflect and learn about acts of colonialism that removed and diminished/stole knowledge of respecting children and connecting with them through culture, tradition, language, and more.



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3



4



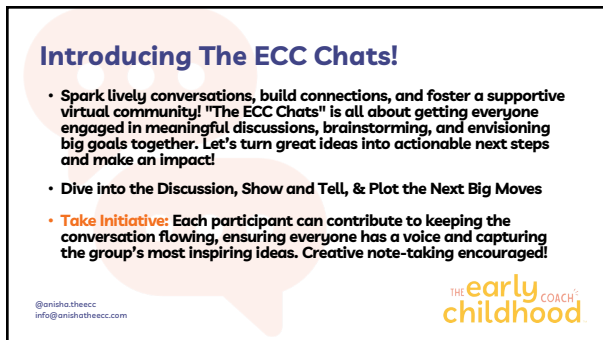
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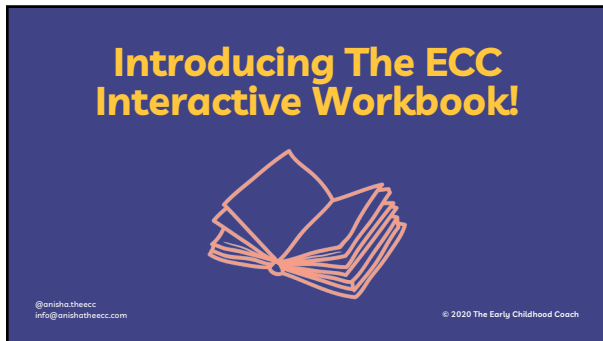
6



7




8




9

Introducing The ECC Interactive Workbook!


What you'll find inside:




Interactive Exercises



Real-World Application



Collaborative & Fun



Reflect & Revise

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What are the goals of this experience?

- Grow Your Understanding of Loose Parts For Infants
- Gain Deeper Knowledge of How Babies Build Brain Connections with Loose Parts
- Reflect on Facts, Myths, and History of Loose Parts Play
- Take Actionable Loose Parts Tips and Tricks Back to Programs (Indoors and Outdoors)

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LET'S SELF-REFLECT!

Think deeply about Loose Parts and Babies...

How do you feel about this kind of play... Comfortable? Uncomfortable?
What do you know or want to learn about Infants and Loose Parts...
When and Where do you offer Loose Parts - or are they missing?

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Poll Pause:

Who is here today?

Let's learn about our community!



Who's Here Today Baby?
Past Infant Educator
Current Infant Educator
Aspiring Future Infant Educator
Supervisor - Infants or Any Age
Different Age Educator (Toddler, Preschool, Kinder, School Age)
Other Friend to Babies (Student, Parent, Professor, Practitioner, etc)

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Loose Parts require the hand and mind to work in concert, they are catalysts to inquiry.

MJ SUTTON

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What are Loose Parts?

- Loose Parts as a term and theory was first introduced in 1971 by British architect, **Simon Nicholson**
- Nicholson referred to **Loose Parts Materials** as **Variables** and his definition of these **Variables** was very very broad - Reminiscent of it's origin word meaning "Able to be Changed"

Natural Resources, Building Materials and Tools, Scrap Materials, and Most Essentially Random Found Objects

Soooooooo... Loose Parts are a Variety of Random Found Objects that can be Changed / Used in Many Ways



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Speedy Early Learning History Moment

Simon Nicholson

(The Thread Blog, 2022)

- Simon Nicholson (1934-1990) outlined his Loose Parts Theory in a 1971 Article, "How NOT to Cheat Children: The Theory of Loose Parts" Written for a Landscape Architecture Magazine (Oct. 1971) - Ultimately changing Early Years History!
- Nicholson viewed Loose Parts Theory very broad - He had a grand look at his whole theory believing ALL environments (beyond classrooms) would benefit from Loose Parts
- One of Three Triplets - Simon's mother was a famous sculptor who utilized infant nursery care in the 1930's - this was quite scandalous for the time!
- Eventually their mother set up a studio that was infant & child safe so she could create art while they played

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So... Loose Parts for Babies?!

- Loose Parts for Infants are the SAME!
- Infants are capable and creative players in their many ages and stages
- Adaptable, Accessible, and Adjustable

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Understanding Baby Play

- Infants are Sensory & Experience based learners - AKA babies learn by physically and emotionally experiencing the world and other people
- Babies in the first 3 years are connecting millions of brain neurons every second... this means there are millions of Brain Building Opportunities
- Infants have deep emotions, thoughts, and capabilities Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health is Real - Infants express their trust and security physically through their bodies and interactions

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19



20



21

Connecting Family

- Share what Loose Parts Are - Give a quick definition and simple examples like boxes, blocks, and rocks
- Talk often about Infant Brain Building & Play - Answer Questions as they come up!
- Encourage Family to look for Loose Part play at home - Send home a Loose Part so Baby can show off. Do siblings play with Loose Parts?
- Start Small + Have FUN!

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**Growing imagination?
Loose parts are as critical for the
imagination as dumbbells are for
the biceps.**

KIMBERLEY CRISP

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SEE HOW THEY PLAY



**RIE - Resources for Infant Educators
Founded by: Magda Gerber (1978)**

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24

Let's Self-Reflect!
Hey Baby! Facts or Myths?!
Think about these common Infants and Loose Parts Myths...

- Too Little
- Unsafe
- Doesn't Work

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Flip it Forward: Reframe

- Adapt & Adjust
- Safety 1st & Always Possible
- It Takes Time to Grow

~~Too Little~~
~~Unsafe~~
~~Doesn't Work~~

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REMEMBER:

- You & the Babies are Growing Every Single Day 🌱
- Our Toolkit is Packed 🧰
- You Are Not Alone ❤️

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Empower children to lead their learning journeys through the magic of Loose Parts play and watch their creativity, resilience, and sense of agency soar.

MIRIAM BELOGLOVSKY

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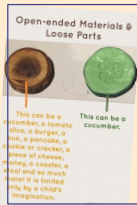
28

Sorry Not Sorry

I might cause controversy with this one...



Lil toys, veggies, snowmen, tiny cars etc. are NOT Loose Parts



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29

Small Action



Mix & Match

Mix Loose Parts and Toys that Compliment each other!

Example:

- Baby Dolls with Scarves, Bowls, Boxes
- Banks with Bracelets, Tree Cookies, Coins



Go with Classics

This isn't NEW stuff - Remember the classic baby toys? Many are Loose Parts! So fall on familiar!

- Scarves, Blocks, Balls, Containers & Lids, Stacking Cups & Rings, Etc.



Loose Treasure Baskets

- Offer Interesting Parts and Resources in Baskets, Buckets, Bowls, Etc
- This can be Guided or Open

30

Big Action



Share with Community

Share Loose Parts learning in a community way.

- Bulletin Boards about Learning
- Interactive Loose Parts Activities
- basket of Parts to play with in Lobby
- Loose Parts - Take a Part Leave a Part



Do a "Loose Parts ONLY!" Experiment

Do a trial of minimum 2 weeks of ONLY loose parts! No toys allowed! What will happen?!

- Offer Based on Interests



Play Invitations

Set up Loose Parts in Enticing and Inspiring Ways - Adjust More or Less

- Can be as simple as a circle of Loose Parts
- Or as BIG as a XL basket full of stuff!

31

Mouthing is Guaranteed




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32

Easy Clean



Dishwasher Safe



Washable Fabric




Disposable / Art

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Safety


Images Jars Visual / Virtual

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The wider the range of possibilities we offer children, the more intense will be their motivations and the richer their experiences.

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35

PLAYFUL PAUSE:

Think about your own play (in childhood, currently, maybe your own children, etc)...

- Are there loose parts you love or loved?
- Take a moment to think deeply about how this play felt or feels?

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Loose Parts + Nature + Babies = Math



**Nature
Outside & Inside**



**Observe Natural
Gentleness**



Art & Creativity

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**Nature is imperfectly perfect, filled
with loose parts and possibilities,
with mud and dust, nettles and sky,
transcendent hands-on moments
and skinned knees.**

RICHARD LOUV





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38

Inclusion

- Every Child is Capable, Creative, and Worthy of Play.
- Mix in Loose Parts that Promote Inclusion: Wheels, Blocks and Fabric with Textures, International fabric, Setting up Different Heights and Levels, High Contrast B&W Loose Parts, Local Nature and Nature from FAR away, etc
- Utilize local inclusion services for play support - Resource Consultants working with children are all about play! Shout out to CISS Ottawa!



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39

Reflect... Future of Loose Parts



Creativity
Artist... Painter, Sculptor, Poet,
Dancer, Musician, and More



Architect / Engineer
Interior or Exterior Designer
Construction / Plumbing / Electrical



STEM & Technology
Robotics / AI
Green and Eco Tech

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Loose Parts are Everywhere...

ANONYMOUS

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Tips & Recommendations for



Born to Tinker: Infants and Loose Parts

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Tip #1:
Observe Observe Observe

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Tip #2:
Collect as You Go & Grow

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Tip #3:
Mix and Match

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Tip #4:
Get Thrifty

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Tip #5:
Shop the Kitchen Section

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Tip #6:
Invest in Success Parts

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Tip #7:
Ask your Community

- Families & Team
- Businesses

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Tip #8:
Let Your Babies Guide You

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Tip #9:
It's NOT Stealing

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Tip #10:
Hey Grownups! Let's have FUN!

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**What are
Your Next Steps?**

Pause + Think

**Next Steps...
For Me?!**

Try it Out?

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Q & A

THE ecc

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54



55
