

# *The Sequence & Order of Practical Life Materials*

*in the North American Children's House (Ages 3 to 6)*

Practical Life refers to purposeful work that humans need to do to support our daily lives both physically and socially. Formally, the Practical Life Area includes:

- Preliminary exercises
- Grace and courtesy lessons
- Control of movement lessons
- Materials for the care of the self
- Materials for the care of the environment
- Silence exercises

When you think about the practical life area of your learning environment, do not limit your vision to one area of the room. Remember that practical life pervades the entire school or home. It includes not only physical materials but also the modeled adult behaviors and planned, consistent routines and procedures. Remember too that the overall décor and arrangement of the room influences the child's ability to complete practical activities in the space. The furniture must be arranged to allow adequate space for movement, carrying of materials, and placing work rugs. The walls should be free from clutter and full of white space. Select a few lovely pieces of art to display and change these every month or so to keep the room alive and full of interest. Place a plant or small sculpture on the top of some shelves. Use accent lights and natural light and avoid fluorescent fixtures. Choose light, natural tones for walls/carpet (and avoid patterns) and light colored wooden shelves, tables, and chairs. And be sure to prepare a space for adult belongings that is out of the children's sight or else is tidy, organized, and does not clutter the children's space/line of sight in any way.

When thinking about the shelves, remember that the order of materials always goes from left to right, top to bottom. Begin on the top left of the shelf with the first material you present for that area and then add the next one to the right of it, the following one to the right of that, and then move to the left-hand side of the next shelf for the next material. Leave enough space between each activity for children to easily reach in and take both sides of the activity's tray or basket. By setting up your shelves in the order of presentations, you provide your own control of error helping you make sure each child receives each possible presentation in the appropriate sequence. The children absorb this external order and will come to expect to receive presentations according to this order. Then, when they ask for a lesson on something too advanced for them, you simply say, "Yes, I would love to give you a lesson on that material. First, you need to practice with all of the materials that come before it."

Preliminary Exercises: These will vary based on the activities included in your room. The goal of preliminary exercises is to break the tasks that a child needs to do down into their constituent elements. For example, before they will be able to wash their hands at the sink, they will need to know how to turn the faucet on and off, how to dispense an appropriate amount of soap, how to get one paper towel, how to use the towel to dry their hands, and where to dispose of the towel. Thus, before you give them a lesson on "Washing hands at the sink," you would offer individual preliminary exercises on each of those constituent elements. If you find that your children are not succeeding in daily living tasks/practical life activities, ask yourself what preliminary exercises the child needs in order to succeed with the more complex tasks.

Here are examples of some common preliminary exercises. Remember that once the children have mastered a preliminary exercise, it can be removed from the shelf.

- Apron (folded on a shelf; just used for putting on, taking off, and folding)
- Tissues (for nose blowing lessons)
- A book (how to carry, turn page, where to read, etc.)
- Clothespins and something to clip them on (if you use them for hanging cloths/art work)
- Small pitcher in small pail with a cloth/sponge (to practice filling at the sink and emptying)
- Sponge squeezing
- Opening & closing (choose containers that match the ones they bring for lunch or have to use in other classroom activities)
- A picture of a restaurant (to remind you to give lunch grace & courtesy lessons)
- A picture of the outdoor environment/playground (to remind you to give G&C lessons on how to use each piece of equipment)
- A picture of children carrying a table (to remind you to give G&C lessons on carrying)

Art (can be considered part of Language or Practical Life)

- Clay
- Crayons on paper
- Colored chalk on paper
- Folding paper
- Cutting paper with scissors
- Chalkboard
- Easel painting
- Art drying rack
- Pasting/gluing on paper
- Tape
- Stapling
- Making books



## Care of Self

- Pouring Progression: Rice, Water, Stem Glass, Different Containers, Cup & saucer
- Hand washing (at sink)
- Hand washing: full work
- Dressing Frames
- Dressing: a cardigan that buttons and a jacket or vest that zips to practice dressing with real clothing
- Shoe cleaning and/or polishing (based on your children's shoes and local culture)
- Knife progression: spreading jam, cut/spread butter/cream cheese; cut banana/tofu/watermelon; cut bread/cake; cut pickles; cut apples; cut carrots
- Sewing progression: lacing cards; threading needle; sewing button; sewing shape; sewing seam; weaving; embroidery/cross-stitch
- Tools: screwdriver board, bolt board, nuts & bolts, lock & key
- Snack materials



- Table for 2 or 3 children
- Placemats or a table cloth
- Name cards (one for each child in the class)
- Name card holders (one for each snack place; these stay at the snack table; the first step in having snack is choosing your name card and placing it in the holder at the snack table to reserve your space)
- Snack size plates (one for each child in the class)
- Snack size bowls (one for each child in the class)
- Glasses for water (one for each child in the class)
- Forks and spoons (one for each child in the class)
- Napkins
- Serving bowls/platters
- Serving utensils (tongs, spoons, etc.)
- Cutting board and knives (for preparing snack)
- Aprons (adult and child for use while preparing snack each morning)
- Bin for dirty snack dishes/utensils
- Cloth/sponge for wiping table after snack



- Lunch materials: same as for snack plus:
  - Enough place mats/table cloths for all of the lunch tables plus extras for guests
  - Enough cloths for all of the children to wipe up after eating
  - Votive candles for each table
  - Audio speakers to play relaxing lunchtime music



- Bathroom
  - Accessible sink
  - Child-sized toilet preferred
  - Toilet paper dispenser that can be used by the children
  - Paper towel dispenser that can be used by the children
  - Storage for extra clothes/changes of clothing



### Care of Environment

- Dusting (may include a lambswool duster, a small brush for shelf/tray corners, small cloth mitts)
- Sweeping: dustpan/brush, broom, carpet sweeper
- Folding: lined cloths; unlined cloths; baby clothes; socks
- Sponge (at sink for random spills)
- Mop/bucket or floor drying cloths and a cloth drying rack
- Chalkboard washing
- Easel washing
- Floor washing
- Mirror Washing
- Table sponging
- Table Scrubbing
- Pet care
- Polishing: Wood, Metal
- Plant care: watering can, washing leaf, misting, changing vase water, removing dead leaves
- Flower arranging (include a large container for the flower supply that is low enough for the children to easily access)



### Control of Movement

- Ellipse on the floor (can be drawn on daily with chalk, taped on with fabric tape, etc.)
- CD player and line music
- Bell
- Blindfold
- Tray of objects to carry while walking on the line (rotate these regularly and provide variable challenge)



### Adult Environment

- Storage for personal items (purse, coat, phone, coffee, ...)
- Storage for didactic materials (what you'll rotate)
- Storage for consumables (cotton balls, paper towels, cups, napkins, polish)
- Holding pen for broken/damaged items
- Locations for notes coming from/going to home
- Observation chair

