

Ideas for the Tonal Stacking Construction

(EL47506, EL49270, EL49271, EL49272)

These tactile wooden tonal pieces come in three colours. They invite children to thread, stack, order, balance, roll and arrange. They can be explored on the pole or used independently, so there is no single 'right' way to use them. A child may carefully repeat the same stacking action, or become absorbed in how one piece turns, balances or feels. The ideas in this download are starting points only. Educators can select, adapt or set them aside in response to each child's interests, stage of development and preferred ways of exploring.



For Babies (10 months +) and Younger Toddlers

- Offer a selection of pieces on a firm floor or low surface with an attentive adult nearby (for younger children, you may want to start with fewer pieces). Allow time for grasping, turning, transferring, dropping and banging together. Observe how they play and what they do.
- Model sliding one piece onto the pole, then pause. The child may copy, remove it, repeat the action or explore in a different way.
- Let children discover the different textures, curves, ridges and tones. Which ones are they drawn to?
- Build a tower using the pieces (either on the pole or independently) for the children to dismantle, rebuild or they may even ignore it! Their response shows where the interest lies.



Schematic Play

- For positioning, provide space for lining up the pieces, arranging and repeatedly changing the order of the pieces.
- For rotation, notice turning, twisting, rolling and spinning both on and away from the pole.
- For transporting, add a basket or other containers so that pieces can be moved between places.
- For enveloping or enclosing, offer voiles, boxes or baskets for hiding, wrapping or containing pieces to find in play.

Movement and Physical Development

- Grip, lift, rotate and position the pieces. Threading over the pole brings the eyes and hands together, while certain pieces may invite children to use both hands.
- Try using the resource at floor level, on a low table or at standing height to improve children's physical confidence.
- Explore pieces independently by rolling, rocking, spinning, stacking or balancing them. Which movements do the children return to?
- Place pieces beside the pole and see whether children choose to build outwards, arrange a pathway, create small towers of their own or construct using the pole.

Communication and Language

- Introduce words in context: on, off, over, through, turn, balance, stack, base, top, smooth, ridged, wide and narrow.
- Comment on what is happening before asking questions: 'You chose the wide one for the bottom.' This leaves room for the child to think and respond in their own way.
- Build together. Taking turns to add or remove a piece creates a natural reason to watch, wait, communicate and share an idea. When it suits the play, wonder aloud: 'Which piece might fit next?'



Early Mathematical Thinking

- Sort and group pieces by colour tone and colour (if using variations of the resource together), size, shape, texture or any other feature noticed by the children. With more than one set, combine blue, purple and green pieces to compare quantities, make longer patterns or build larger arrangements together.
- Compare pieces and arrangements using meaningful language: larger, smaller, shorter, wider, narrower, fewer, first, next and last.
- Count pieces naturally during play, without making counting the price of joining in.
- Create repeating arrangements or patterns, then leave space for children to continue, alter or dismantle them.
- Explore order and sequence. Does the arrangement change when a wide piece is placed near the top or a rounded piece near the bottom. Can the children arrange them on the pole according to size or width?

Exploration and Scientific Thinking

- Investigate stability when using the pieces without the pole. Which pieces make a steady base? What changes when pieces are placed in a different order?
- Compare movement away from the pole. Which pieces roll, rock, spin or stay still? Provide materials so children can make a ramp to test whether a piece will roll or not.

Creative Construction, Design and Loose Parts Play

- Use the pieces freely as loose parts or construction materials. Stack, balance, and arrange them without needing every piece to go on to the pole. Try combining the pieces with other wooden blocks, tubes, baskets, voiles or other open-ended materials to extend play.
- Photograph a child's construction or arrangement on the pole if they want to revisit it. Can they rebuild it, adapt it or use the photograph as a starting point?
- A piece or whole stack can become anything: a tower, tree, rocket, lighthouse, cake or something entirely different from the child's imagination.

