

Tip Sheets

Supporting Safety and Security through the Preschool Environment

Every early childhood setting has a story to tell. What does your environment say about you? What does it tell the children in your care?

“When your environment has a cozy, home-like feel that allows for and encourages strong connections among the people there, children will experience a sense of belonging and security.”

- *Designs for Living and Learning, Deb Curtis and Margie Carter*

When evaluating the safety and security of the environment, there are three main areas of concern that we need to acknowledge if we want to be thorough. These areas are the **physical environment**, the **social environment**, and **temporal environment**.

Components	Definition
Physical Environment	The room itself. The layout, design, materials, and furnishings.
Social Environment	Interactions between others. This can be between peers, teachers, and family members.
Temporal Environment	This is the routine. How things are scheduled, ordered, and activities that happen throughout the day.

The Physical Environment

When we begin designing an environment, if we place emphasis on safety first, we enable the caregiver to do more than just monitor the safety of the children. They can interact more freely with the children, and can create great opportunities to promote learning. If we approach our work as educators confident in the environmental and situational safety of the children, we can provide a much higher quality of care.

Social Environment

The social environment in a setting is how a child care environment influences and supports the interactions made between the children, educators, and family members. We want children to experience a sense of belonging when they are in our space. We want them to believe that they are well cared for, and the adults and other children in the setting enjoy being there with them. We want to foster a sense of community that is not just seen but felt.

For social environments to be positive, children need to feel heard. In these beneficial social environments, a caregiver’s primary role is to provide comfort and support. Educators do this by acknowledging children’s emotions and clearly communicating our expectations to a child in advance rather than reprimanding them for taking an action that might not have been the best choice. A proactive approach can also be an effective tool in guiding behavior as it helps children understand the social norms of the classroom environment. An investment of time and energy is required when building a classroom atmosphere based on respect.

Some themes we can recognize in an intentionally cultivated social environment include:

- Creating a sense of community within the classroom.
- Establishing that the adults in the room are the children's allies.
- Introducing and establishing group norms that reflect the values of families and educators.
- Ensuring that children with the most challenging of behaviors get the support they need to see themselves as valued.

Temporal Environment

The temporal environment refers to the routines that take place throughout the day. Some examples you would find in a preschool setting include the following:

1. Arrival time
2. Play time
3. Group Time
4. Meal time
5. Time to rest
6. Small group activities
7. Transition time

A predictable schedule and routine can help to create a sense of security, help children learn, help them adjust to a situation, and prevent behavior that can be challenging. Additionally, this routine can help children say good-bye to family members and feel safe with their caregivers.

Every day we must manage how we will facilitate and transition the children through the many activities that we engage in throughout the day. We should regularly review our scheduling of these different activities and if necessary, tweak or modify schedules to remain as responsive yet consistent as possible. Predictable schedules and routines create a sense of security not only in the children but also in the caregiver. Caregivers feel more confident following a schedule.

Plan effective transitions. Transitions are essential to every child care setting. If a transition is planned for and supported, children learn to be successful on their own and can demonstrate their capabilities.

To create smooth transitions, educators should:

1. Have a clear signal for transitioning activities, such as songs and/or giving a 2-minute warning
2. Establish rules regarding cleanup
3. Make sure the children know what they are supposed to be doing
4. Be prepared to start an activity when announced
5. Consider what the child did right before the activity
6. Limit waiting time in the transition

Additional Resources

Minnesota Department of Education. (n.d.). *Early Childhood Indicators of Progress: Minnesota's Early Learning Standards*.
<https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/early/highquality/ind/>

Head Start Early Childhood Learning And Knowledge Center. (2021, November 5). Interactive Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework: Ages Birth to Five. ECLKC.
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/interactive-head-start-early-learning-outcomes-framework-ages-birth-five>

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