



# CENTER FOR INCLUSIVE CHILD CARE

## Tip Sheets

### The Role of the Environment on Infant and Toddler Development

**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? Does it send the right message to families and staff about your plans to support children's development?

The ideal classroom environment for young children begins as a space where they can feel at ease and self-assured. When children are confident in their own ability to safely explore, they are able to engage with their surroundings in a way that is meaningful. An immersive environment promotes more interaction and provides more opportunities we can use to promote developmental progression in the most beneficial ways possible.

#### Safety and Security

##### 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 early childhood educators with confidence in the environmental and situational safety of the children, we can provide a much higher quality of care.

##### Key Components of a Safe and Secure Environment

- Health and Safety
- Comfort and Convenience
- Child-initiated Exploration and Respect
- Opportunities for Safe and Natural Movement
- Choice
- Flexibility and Responsiveness

##### Social Environment

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 term temporal is defined simply as "relating to time". How do the actions we take pertain to the passage of time in our settings on an average day?

##### Basic Schedule

- Arrival
- Play time
- Meal time
- Nap time
- Small group
- Large group

The schedule should be designed such that the flow between these activities moves as smoothly as possible. A schedule allows children and teachers to transition between activities that support the children's development but also allow the teachers to know who's responsible for taking lead on the next activity.

Having a set routine allows children less anxiety about what is coming up and more freedom to play and explore the classroom environment.

## Working with Families to Support Healthy Attachment in the Child Care Setting

Recognize that the well-being and sense of significance of parents are of central importance to the child's development.

- Work to build a trusting relationship with each family.
- See yourself as a support for families instead of merely being there for their children.
- Keep in mind that if you are the child's caregiver, your attachment is secondary to that of the parents. Examine the degree of closeness with each child with a professional eye.
- Avoid competition with family for the child's affection.

It is important that we provide each infant and toddler the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships with their caregivers. When there is trust between a child and caregivers, they will be comfortable in their learning environment and can focus on educational learning and discoveries which can lead to increased physical, social, and emotional development. Work with families to provide:

- Safe and appropriate soothing methods. These can involve holding or comforting the child.
- Multiple and rich social interactions. These interactions should be frequent and include smiling, talking, singing, routine, and appropriate touch.
- Opportunities to be a child's partner as well as their protectors.
- Attention to infant and toddler's feelings and reflect them back, including teaching children how to handle them.
- Communication with a child's parents and guardians. This open communication is key.
- Everyday routines for infants and toddlers.

Communication with families is important and can occur with the following methods:

- Verbally during drop-off and pick-up times
- Phone calls
- Notes (both paper and electronic)
- Photo documentation
- Formal and Informal meetings about child development and/or relationship building (in-person or using video conferencing)

A quality caregiver provides caring environments and learning experiences that will play a key role in a child's development. This can encourage a child to be an active, self-knowing, self-respecting, thinking, feeling, and loving person.

### Additional Resources

Welcoming Babies! Partnering with Parents to Ease the Transition to Child Care

<https://www.inclusivechildcare.org/podcast-inclusion-matters/welcoming-babies-partnering-parents-ease-transition-child-care>

Promoting a Sense of Belonging

<https://www.inclusivechildcare.org/podcast-inclusion-matters/inclusion-part-2-promoting-sense-belonging>

Minnesota Department of Education. (n.d.). *Early Childhood Indicators of Progress: Minnesota's Early Learning Standards*. Retrieved December 12, 2021, from

<https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/early/highqual/el/ind/>

*For more information, visit [www.inclusivechildcare.org](http://www.inclusivechildcare.org).*

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