



Environments That Invite Learning

Interesting, well-planned spaces help children and adults feel comfortable, curious, and “at home.” A well-planned learning environment helps children focus on compelling activities.

Create an environment that offers purposeful spaces and materials and provides opportunities for exploration. Children will learn where things go, what they can do in each space, and how to use materials. As children learn and grow, a well-planned space will change to reflect their work and interests and to offer new challenges.

- **Create calm and interesting settings that “feel like home.”** Consider colors, sounds, smells, softness, and light. Invite families to share pictures, books, music, and artifacts that will be familiar and comforting to their children.
- **Watch how children use each setting over time.** Young babies need comfortable places for tummy time. Crawlers and new walkers need room to move and things to pull up on and climb. Older toddlers need spaces for pretend play, building, and artwork. Adapt the space as children master new skills.
- **Remember that less can be more.** An organized, uncluttered environment helps children focus. Create defined spaces for private and small group activities with an easy flow between them. Put away toys that children are not using.
- **Make the environment work for children and adults.** Put a chair outside the infant room so visitors can take off their shoes. Use quilts and pillows to make floor spaces where you and the children want to spend time. Keep essential supplies where you can get them easily and popular toys where children can get them on their own.
- **Build in literacy.** Set out books and writing materials where children can reach them. Include children’s names and other meaningful print on displays to spark conversations.
- **Build in STEM.** Arrange materials to invite focused exploration and problem solving. Give toddlers interesting things to talk about and ways to find out more. Include living plants, animals, and natural materials that children can explore or display.
- **Create spotlight activities.** Put out something special for the children to explore, such as a collection of gourds or a set of gears. Introduce a new toy or bring back an old favorite. Create unusual combinations in the sensory table such as leaves, moss, and toy animals.
- **Rotate materials.** Bring out toys and books that interest children. Rearrange items to suggest new uses or take items away when children lose interest. You can bring them back at another time as new things to explore.
- **Make it personal.** Display items that have special meaning to you, to the children, and to children’s families. Be sure to include children’s discoveries and creations.