

Early Childhood Classrooms should be busy and active. Young children, especially young children with delays and disabilities, often experience difficulties with the expectations of the classroom. Teachers and staff can ease the frustrations of children by providing an environment that is developed to be welcoming and accepting to all children.

While young children need a structured daily routine, it is vital that the daily schedule include adequate time for movement and motor activities, as well as time for practicing self-care routines. Social interaction and self-regulation are skills that are important for lifetime learning and these skills should be intentionally and consistently taught and facilitated.



1. Create an environment that is welcoming, accepting, and safe.

- a. Greet children as they enter the classroom. Welcome them by name and with enthusiasm.
- b. Respond to children with specific, descriptive, and positive feedback. Praise them often.
- c. Provide individual areas for children to store personal items. Label areas with names, photos, symbols.
- d. Display children's art projects and photos of classroom activities. Talk to the children about the displays.
- e. Take time for children to have opportunities to talk about their experiences and feelings.
- f. Be respectful of confidentiality for every child. Adults follow guidelines for communicating with families and for having appropriate classroom conversations.

2. Create an environment that is organized and structured.

- a. Provide a visual schedule of the day. Teach and refer to the schedule consistently.
- b. Arrange materials and toys so that they are accessible to all children.
- c. Label bins and shelves so that children can easily find, use, and put away materials.
- d. Arrange furniture and centers so that there are clearly defined areas for activities.
- e. Put toys and materials of a variety of levels and interests in each center. Don't forget to add some literacy materials to each center!
- f. Consider the physical, communication, cognitive, and social needs of all children when arranging the room and developing the schedule.

3. Develop a daily schedule based on age- and developmentally-appropriate activities.

- a. Allow time for children to learn and practice self-care and independent functioning routines.
- b. Include lots of time for songs, music, and movement.
- c. Schedule hands-on activities that include real-life objects and photos.
- d. Provide adequate time for play and social interaction.
- e. Provide for adult facilitation and assistance so that all children can participate.
- f. Remember to limit amounts of time that children are required to sit and attend. Provide short lessons with movement breaks.
- g. Schedule activities that enhance and facilitate communication for all children.



4. Be pro-active in teaching and providing practice in social skills and self-regulation.

- a. Teach social interaction skills using pictures, books, role-play and guided practice.
- b. Teach emotions, as well as how to recognize and react to emotions of self and others. Use pictures, puppets, role-play, and guided practice.
- c. Provide and teach calming strategies. Teach, practice, and encourage children to choose and use strategies for calming. Provide visuals, materials, and a "calm down" area in the classroom.
- d. Teach expectations and display visual reminders of rules.
- e. Emphasize empathy and kindness in teaching social interactions.

