

Effective Learning Environments

The play space that you provide inside and outside at your home is a child's Learning Environment and it is very important that it supports child development and growth. The best way to begin evaluating your current environment and its suitability for learning, simply requires you reflect on each child's individual needs and their personalities.

Ask yourself:

How old are my children?

Are they predominantly an indoor or outdoor child?

What they like to do?

What they don't like to do?

How long is their attention span?

Do they need a rest during the day?

Do they have behavior challenges you need to meet?

Your Physical Environment is Central to Education through Play, so it should:

Be safe and child friendly.

Be able to provide for quiet and active play.

Challenge children to develop physical competence.

Look pleasing to the eye.

Invite the children to explore, be imaginative and encourage their curiosity.

Provide equipment and resources that allow children to make choices.

Includes items from nature: pot plants, rocks, logs, trees etc... (indoor and outdoor)

Have storage that is easy to access and named for identification (words/pictures)

As you know children of different ages have different learning styles and capabilities, so this means that the way in which we accommodate their needs will affect our Learning Environment. In Family Day Care we have children that range in age from 6 weeks to 12 years, so our environment needs to be adaptable so it can be changed easily, perhaps on a daily basis for some.

Learning Environment Consideration for Babies

Babies have a basic need for trust, mobility and sensory/language experiences.

But don't forget that we need to provide sense of attachment for the parent and child to the carer. Your environment needs to be inviting and have a baby focus this helps parents feel welcomed.

🌱 **Trust:** provide an environment that is stable and predictable in routines.

🌱 **Mobility:** babies need to be able to move and should not be kept confined for long periods of time. Provide as much freedom of mobility as possible. If babies need to be moved or restricted frequently for safety then your environment is inappropriate. Space needs to be relative to the age of the baby, large rooms need to be broken down to make smaller play spaces, use pillows, toy boxes, toys to segregate a large room.

🌱 **Sensory:** stimulating a child's interests with smell, sound, texture and taste will help your baby to learn, and awaken the desire to explore. Be sure to regulate sensory stimulation because overloading your environment can lead to distractions.

🌱 **Language:** be sure to sing, laugh, talk with and to baby during the day. Change/nappy time is great for this as it is a one on one opportunity for quality interaction.

Learning Environment Consideration for Toddlers

Just like babies the older toddler needs just a bit more to help them develop in their environment. Toddlers begin to investigate and stretch their personal abilities; they challenge themselves and try new things with an enthusiasm for learning. You often hear toddler learning referred to as "Absorbing like a sponge." Toddlers begin to learn about their sense of self, they learn what they can do with and without adult support and this leads to discovering their new found right to self govern (autonomy) we need to support them as they begin to do for themselves, so changes in our Learning Environment will make it easier for the toddler to express their new autonomy.

- Have a set area for their belongings that they can access. This lets them put their shoes away, get you a nappy at change time, put their bags, toys etc... away when not being used.
- Make toys easily accessible so that they can choose from materials available, this encourages self selection.
- Try to have few restrictions, include those important restrictions into your environment. As toddlers have little sense of danger we need to ensure that our Learning Environment is Toddler proof. **Examples:** toys they are not aloud to access should be out of reach.
areas that are not play areas should be behind safety barriers/gates or have closed access.
- Provide child size tables and chairs, move him/her from their cot to a bed/mat as soon as possible, provide steps near the sink for hand washing etc...
- Provide small Learning Environment rather than one large area. If you have your Day Care room in a large area, segregate this with furniture, curtains, toys to make smaller play areas. **You may like to create:** Home Corner, Art area, TV/gaming area, Construction Area, Music/Dance area, Reading area, Puzzle Table, Dress-up Area etc...

Learning Environment Consideration for Older Children

The best way to help yourself with older groups of children is to answer the following questions and then adapt your environment where needed.

What causes changes to my play environment?

How do I foster self esteem?

How do I provide choice?

How do I encourage children to show initiative?

How does my Planning reflect the children's interests?

How does my Learning Environment support independence while building confidence?

How do I encourage children to explore what their bodies can do?

Is my environment too safe; preventing challenges?

How do I challenge language, numeracy and Literacy skills?

Carer Practices

- When you play with the children show pleasure.
- Protect play from interruptions (child, carer, parent)
- All for long periods of play time
- Complete regular observations to help you develop a Plan that reflects the children in care.
 - Look at what they are representing in their play situation?
 - What ideas are they expressing?
 - How can you improve or extend on those ideas?
 - What resources will you need to advance the play next time?
 - Can you help advance the play now?
- Believe that children are competent.
- Show a genuine interest in each child, in their activities (both verbal and non verbal)
- Never assume you can join in with their play always ask for permission first.
- Ensure that your children experience success by mastering new skills and challenges.
- Plan to talk with each child individual during the day.
- Praise children regularly as they display good play skills, not negative play.
- Arrange small group play that requires interactions.
- Provide a wide range of materials, have them readily available and easily accessible but age appropriate.
- Look at combining play areas. eg: home corner and dress-ups or construction and cars.
- Use equipment that is mainly open ended.
- Involve children in every day activities like setting the table, tidying up the toys, watering the garden, hanging the washing.
- Embrace outdoor play and find value in it for your planning, outdoor play should provide challenge and just a little risk.
- **Again!** complete Observations both planned and spontaneous.

Regularly evaluating your Learning Environment ensures that you will meet the needs of your children in care.

Equipment for Communication and Language Skills	
	Books for all ages
	Puzzles for all ages
	Games for older children
	Writing materials
	Matching/Pairing games
	Music: Instruments, DVD and CD.
	Multi-cultural books, music, posters.
Social and Emotional Learning Skills	
	Soft toys
	Dolls
	Games that require co-operation
	Toys that need team work.
	Materials and equipment that promote different cultures
	Materials and equipment that promote people in the community eg: veterinary, Doctors, Police ...
	Materials and equipment that promote disability
Equipment and resources for Pretend Play:	
	Telephones
	Keyboards
	Safe kitchen items
	Dress-ups: Clothes, shoes, hats, bags
Active Learning Processes	
	Drawing materials
	Painting materials
	Gluing materials
	Play dough/clay: tools to work with
	Access to natural resources
	Cooking facilities and necessary equipment
	Scissors (child safe)
Furniture for Children	
	Child Size Table and Chairs
	Storage for easy access: book cases, shelves, plastic tubs
	Personal Storage of bags, shoes etc....
	Cots/porta cots/mattresses
	High Chairs
	Pillows
	Room Dividers