

How to Facilitate a Positive and Safe Play Space and Reduce Chaos

Introduction:

As one author stated: "All children benefit from opportunities for healthy development. For that reason, high quality child care environments become important for children with and without disabilities." Here are some suggestions to use as a guide to support a positive and safe play space and help reduce chaos.

Room Set-up

Room set up should be well defined.

- choose toys and other play items with care.
- keep in mind the children's age, interests, and skill level
- activities should be set up for small groups or small ratios at a time
- limit the number of children to an activity
- have pictures of activity areas, pictures of the children presently in the activity area or display a number system of how many children can be in a specific play or activity area
- scan the play areas regularly, to assess for impending chaos or perhaps safety concerns
- label bins by placing pictures of the actual objects that go into those bins. A number system on the bins, as well as corresponding number on the shelves where the bins will go can be helpful in maintaining order and with tidy up
- teach children to tidy up an activity such as a toy, once they're finished playing with it. This teaches children to put things away and to help maintain a play-safe environment
- encourage children to remain with an activity or in a play area for a reasonable given time. This allows for the enhancement of purposeful play, peer interaction, and to remain focused

Toys and Props

Remember to frequently check play objects and toys for missing parts or broken pieces. This reduces the child's frustration in not having the correct parts of a toy to play with and also reduces the possibility of getting hurt by a broken toy or protruding part of the toy or object.

Sensory Materials

Most children enjoy playing with sensory materials such as water, sand or playdough. Remember to limit the number of children to these play areas and provide the necessary props or tools needed for these activities.

Book Time

Book time is another wonderful learning experience for all children.

- select an appropriate area in the room that's reasonably quiet and comfortable
- select books that are appropriate for the age group, developmental levels of the children and diverse in culture
- check to see that the books are not missing pages or in very bad shape. If that's the case, it might be helpful to replace those books with ones in better condition

Circle Time or Small Group Time

Circle time or small group time is another activity to share experiences, skills, and feelings with one another. Children should enjoy themselves, enjoy meeting together to sing and make up songs, play musical instruments, move to music, play games and discuss upcoming events.

- promote a cheerful and stimulating environment for circle time; be animated
- circle time or small group time should also be short and fun
- consider your props such as puppets, musical instruments, songs and nursery rhymes and books
- incorporate gross motor activities into circle time, to promote learning about body and self-image
- choose stories that appeal to children's sense of adventure and imagination

Dramatic Play Area

The dramatic play area can be a wonderful place to imitate peer actions, enhance social awareness, and provide for spontaneity. The dramatic play area provides opportunities across all developmental areas: fine and gross motor skills, social skills, speech and language skills, cognitive development and self-help skills.

- remember this area needs supervision as well
- be there to support and guide children through these learning experiences. At the same time know when to withdraw and allow the children to further explore on their own
- select a variety of props such as clothing and other dressing items, things found in the kitchen and in the grocery store, dolls, puppets, cultural items
- minimize on clutter: provide hooks to hang clothing items and hats; shelves to place items in bins so that the children can tidy up when it's time to

Creative Area

The creative area provides for a sense of achievement, confidence and pride.

- include a variety of materials; different sizes, shapes, textures and colours; paintbrushes, sponges, feathers, crayons and markers, scissors
- remember to introduce materials gradually
- prepare your materials in advance – this allows time for pre-cut shapes, and to check on durability of crayons/markers/paint brushes
- avoid doing the work for the child
- keep activities short and simple
-

remember: process is more important than product