

Create a Well-Designed Space (Physical Environment)

Well-designed physical environments are systems that support emotional growth and well-being. Space can be structured to reflect a welcoming and a caring tone to all who enter. Calm, relaxed, and comfortable spaces provide for emotional release, while stimulating and interactive spaces promote children's development and help to reduce challenging behaviors.

Benefits:

1. Parents and children feel welcome and safe.
2. Encourages children's creativity and independent exploration (initiative).
3. Provides external supports for children to express ideas and feelings (self-regulation).

The physical environment encompasses the overall design and layout of a space, including its learning opportunities, materials, and furnishings. A supportive environment is:

- **Welcoming:** Inviting to parents and children and is reflective of home and culture.
- **Organized:** Areas and pathways are clearly defined and grouped by similar function.
- **Interesting:** Materials are selected for the age group and are easily accessible so that children can manipulate, explore, and learn.
- **Responsive:** Provides children with a safe and supportive space.

10 CONSIDERATIONS FOR DESIGNING A SUPPORTIVE PHYSICAL SPACE

1. The environment has a homelike feel that reflects diversity of children and their families.
2. The environment is safe and free of dangerous materials or potential for harm (e.g., there are no large open spaces or obstacles).
3. Each learning area is easy to enter and exit.
4. The environment includes a calming or be-by-myself space.
5. The environment provides a space for parents or caregivers to assist or work with children.
6. Materials are developmentally appropriate and provide opportunities for learning.
7. Learning materials are clearly labeled and are within children's reach so children can make an independent choice.
8. Activities and materials are rotated to motivate children and maximize engagement.
9. Materials are provided that encourage children to explore feelings (books, posters etc.).
10. Key information is displayed for children, families, and visitors.

Putting it into practice: Examine your space. Does it reflect you or the children and families? What changes could you make to create a space that better reflects the children? How can you involve families in these changes?
