

## Early Childhood Environments: Adapting for a Child with a Disability

Est. Time: 30 Minutes

### Objective

Consider how to make adaptations to the physical, social, and temporal components of an early childhood environment to promote the full participation of a child with a developmental delay or disability.

### DEC Recommended Practices overview

This activity addresses the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) Recommended Practices topic areas outlined below. (DEC is a division of the Council for Exceptional Children).

#### Environment

- E1.** Practitioners provide services and supports in natural and inclusive environments during daily routines and activities to promote the child's access to and participation in learning experiences.
- E2.** Practitioners consider Universal Design for Learning principles to create accessible environments.
- E3.** Practitioners work with the family and other adults to modify and adapt the physical, social, and temporal environments to promote each child's access to and participation in learning experiences.
- E6.** Practitioners create environments that provide opportunities for movement and regular physical activity to maintain or improve fitness, wellness, and development across domains.

### Overview

Creating environments that support children's learning can sometimes be difficult for early childhood teachers. Well-designed classroom environments:

- Support responsive care giving
- Foster independence and feelings of competence in young children
- Encourage staff efficiency
- Promote children's engagement
- Decrease challenging behavior
- Facilitate appropriate social interactions among children
- Provide structure and predictability

The table on the page below describes three interdependent components of early childhood environments: physical, social, and temporal. These three components need to be carefully designed and implemented to create an environment that is conducive to the learning and development of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.

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Components of Early Childhood Environments	Definition	Examples
Physical Environment	Overall design and layout of a room and learning centers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrangement of furnishings (e.g., bookcases, tables, shelves, easels, pillows) and floor coverings (e.g., carpet or foam for quiet areas, center area rug)</li> <li>• Selection and placement of materials (e.g., toys, books, art materials)</li> <li>• Design and display of visual materials (e.g., posters, bulletin boards, pictures)</li> <li>• Lighting (e.g., natural, lamps)</li> <li>• Sound (e.g., quiet areas)</li> </ul>
Social Environment	Interactions that occur within the classroom between peers, teachers, and family members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group size and composition</li> <li>• Teacher- versus child-initiated activities</li> <li>• Materials and activities that promote interaction</li> <li>• Family involvement</li> </ul>
Temporal Environment	Timing, sequence, and length of routines and activities throughout the day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A variety of activities (high-energy and quiet)</li> <li>• Effective transitions</li> <li>• Routines and schedules</li> <li>• Continuity between program and home</li> </ul>

### Activity

Identify an infant, toddler, or preschooler with a developmental delay or a disability. This child should have an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or an individualized education program (IEP). If you are currently working with young children, this might be a child in your classroom. If you are not currently working in an early childhood environment, schedule to visit a classroom that has a child with a developmental delay or a disability. Once you have identified the child:

1. Describe the strengths and needs of this child.
2. List one to two potential issues with the physical, social, and/or temporal environments that may not be conducive to the child's learning and development.
3. List two to four adaptations that could be made to the physical, social, and/or temporal environments to support this child's full participation in the classroom.