



MIXED-AGE GROUPS

A WELL-DESIGNED ENVIRONMENT–REFLECTION TOOL

Directions: Reflect on the following components of a safe, supportive, and stimulating environment. Determine what your environment’s strengths and challenges are. Once challenges are identified, think about changes you would like to make to increase the effectiveness of your environment. The goal is to create a positive environment that promotes security, competence, and learning.

SAFE		
Reflect What are the (S)trengths and (C)hallenges of your environment?	S/C	Ideas for Improvement How would you like to increase the effectiveness of your environment?
SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SAFETY		“Yes, you are cared for, nurtured, and respected here.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educators are consistent, responsive, and nurturing • A trusted caregiver integrates infant/toddler home routines • Feels welcoming and appealing • Home-like space and materials • Includes quiet, cozy spaces for calming and privacy • Culturally familiar materials • Photos of children and families • Art work on display at child level • Educators facilitate connection and understanding between ages 		

PHYSICAL SAFETY		"Yes, you are safe to explore here."
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educators are always close by and attentive • Educators can see all children all the time • Furniture is safe, stable, and soft • Open traffic lanes between areas • Protected space for infants/toddlers • Enough space for safe active play • Space for active and quiet play are separated 		
FURNITURE, SPACE, AND ARRANGEMENT		"Yes, this space has been thoughtfully arranged for the safety and comfort of all who come here"
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All children can be seen by adult • Play spaces clearly defined with rugs, furniture, shelves • Child-size shelves, chairs, and tables • Stable, supportive furniture • Adequate space for safe play • Adequate space in each defined area for the number of children and adults who use it • Active areas separate from quiet, so infants can sleep, calm, and remain safe while exploring • Comfortable and convenient arrangement for educators • Space and furniture comfortable for families to be with their infants/toddlers/children • Traffic patterns don't interfere with children's routines and activities 		

SUPPORTIVE

Reflect What are the (S)trengths and (C)hallenges of your environment?	S/C	Plan for Improvement How would you like to increase the effectiveness of your environment?
EMPOWERING		“Yes, you are in an environment that supports your independence and confidence.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educators are present to calm and support • Loud spaces separate from quiet • Materials are organized and in good working order • Child-size furniture, utensils, and equipment • Soft toys, mats, and spaces for infants/toddlers • Clear boundaries to define learning spaces • A consistent, posted schedule • Visual supports in place to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Establish rules and routines – Support play – Help children understand and regulate their emotions – Enhance communication – Support problem-solving 		

ACCESSIBLE		“Yes, you can participate and learn here.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educators are available to support and scaffold • All children can get to age-appropriate areas and activities • Non-mobile infants are brought to the learning experience or the other way around • All children can reach the materials in the activities and areas • All children can be in a comfortable position to participate • All children can fully engage • Modifications are made to ensure participation of each child 		
PROMOTES CHOICES		“Yes, you can express yourself here.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To play with others or alone • To engage in active or quiet play • To interact with familiar or new materials • To take time to follow their interests and finish activities • To participate or observe • To find comfort and challenge • For infants and toddlers to rest when tired and eat when hungry • Educators respond to ALL children’s choices 		

STIMULATING

Reflect What are the (S)trengths and (C)hallenges of your environment?	S/C	Plan for Improvement How would you like to increase the effectiveness of your environment?
STIMULATING		“Yes, it is SO exciting to explore here.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invites exploration of self/others • Is rich in language, literacy, and STEM • Delights the senses • Offers both active and quiet play for infants and toddlers • Is flexible based on children’s interests and development • Includes a variety of play spaces: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Art – Fine Motor – Math/Number – Books – Blocks – Sand/Water – Dramatic Play – Nature/Science – Music/Movement – Social Play – Indoor/Outdoor 		
BUT NOT OVERWHELMING		“Yes, you can explore in comfort here.”
Just the right amount of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Light • Space • Materials • Sounds • Smells/Air • Touch 		

PROMOTES DIVERSITY		“Yes, everyone is loved and represented here.”
<p>Using non-stereotypical materials, the environment includes diverse representation of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Race • Culture • Age • Ability • Gender 		
SUPPORTS SOCIAL PLAY		“Yes, relationship-building is promoted here.”
<p>Planned socialization space:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cozy furniture for adult-child and child-child interaction. • Enough space for families, educators, infants, and young children to snuggle and play • Preferred toys and materials that promote interaction and enjoyment <p>Planned socialization activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SHORT and FOCUSED • Thoughtful group size (2–3 infants, 2–5 toddlers, 5–8 preschoolers) • Enough space for adults and children • Alternative activities for infants and young children who are not interested • Modifications to support the participation of each child • Preferred toys and materials to promote interaction and enjoyment 		