

Tip Sheets

Essential Elements of Infant & Toddler Environments: #3 Child-Initiated Exploration and Respect

Essential Elements to Promote in Infant & Toddler Environments

1. Health and Safety
2. Comfort and Convenience
3. **Child-Initiated Exploration and Respect**
4. Opportunities for Safe and Natural Movement
5. Choice
6. Flexibility and Responsiveness

Infant and toddler environments should support child-initiated exploration and convey a message of respect for infants and toddlers.

Furniture

The use of appropriately-sized furniture and equipment contributes to a safe environment and sends a message to the children that they are valued and this environment is “theirs.” This helps to promote a sense of belonging and community and children’s sense ability to engage in developmentally appropriate and self-directed exploration.

Personal Care

Children who are able to participate in personal care routines should participate, such as in:

- Diapering/toileting
- Handwashing
- Eating
- Sleeping

Important Considerations

- Chairs should be 12 to 16 inches depending on the age and size of the child. Children’s feet should rest on the floor when they sit in a chair.
- Tables should be at a height that allows children to position their arms and bodies comfortably and reach food or materials easily (generally 5.5 to 8 inches in height).
- Toilets and sinks should be a child height.
 - Toilets – 12 inches
 - Sinks – 16 to 22 inches
- Faucets, soap dispensers, and towels should be placed at the appropriate height and be easy to operate.
- Climbing equipment, riding or push toys, sand/water tables, and other play equipment should be sized correctly.
- A sand/water table that can be place on the ground invites participation by younger infants and children who may not yet be standing independently.

Additional Resources

Early Introductions to Sensory Gardens

<https://growing-minds.org/early-introductions-to-sensory-gardens-infants-and-toddlers>

For more information, visit www.inclusivechildcare.org.

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