



CENTER FOR INCLUSIVE CHILD CARE

Tip Sheets

Essential Elements of Infant & Toddler Environments: #4 Opportunities for Safe and Natural Movement

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

All children need opportunities to move naturally and safely, both indoors and outdoors. Infants and toddlers will engage in physical activity whether it is safe or not—for example by climbing on chairs and tables. Therefore, a well-designed environment needs to include elements that safely support children's need to move.

Children with disabilities or other special needs that limit their ability to move independently still need opportunities for physical exploration. Caregivers should consult with family members and/or early interventionists about ways to create movement experiences for each child.

Important Considerations

- Furniture and other equipment should be arranged to allow children to move freely throughout the environment.
- The environment should be arranged to enable caregivers to safely supervise and keep children within sight and sound at all times.
- Young infants need sheltered places—away from areas where older infants and toddlers

may be running or jumping—to enable them to practice their developing physical skills such as rolling over, stretching, reaching, and creeping.

- The environment should include opportunities for infants and toddlers to practice their emerging skills, experience appropriate levels of challenge, and do what they need to do with minimal interference from adults.
- There should be ample opportunities both indoors and outdoors to climb, run, jump, carry/dump, push/pull, and throw.

The caregiver's role is to make sure these opportunities are closely supervised and safe. This might include, for example, creating a corner where children can jump into a padded mat or throw balls into a basket. These areas should be placed away from quieter activity areas.

Additional Resources

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

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