

Tip Sheets

Essential Elements of Infant & Toddler Environments: #5 Choice

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

An environment that offers choice allows children to follow their own interests in selecting materials, interactions and experiences that are most meaningful to them. And caregivers can spend less time managing children's behavior or directing their play. This enables caregivers to have more time to learn about the preferences, strengths, decisions, and challenges of each child through observation and interactions with them during play.

Important Considerations

- Choices should be developmentally appropriate, interesting and safe.
- Options for different kind of activities should be available both indoors and outdoors. For example, the outdoor play space should include options for active play (e.g., push toys, sand/water play, balls, etc.) as well as quiet play (e.g., books, baby dolls, nesting cups, etc.)
- Children should have the ability to choose whether they want to be part of a large group, spend one-on-one time reading books with a caregiver, or play with one or two peers.

- Caregivers should plan different ways for children to participate in the same activity. For example, some children may enjoy finger painting with paint while others may prefer finger painting with water. Plan ways in advance to allow children to choose "how" they want to participate in an activity. This will ensure that each child feels included.
- Whenever possible, follow children's cues for daily routines such as when they are ready to eat, go outdoors, or move from one activity to another.

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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