

BabyTalks: Responsive Learning Environments for Infants and Toddlers

Learning Objective #1: Explain components of a responsive learning environment for children birth to three.

Adults
(You!)

Safe and
Welcoming

Supporting
Autonomy

Engaging,
not Over-
whelming

- Responsive adults are always the most important part of any learning environment!
- Learning environments should be physically safes for exploration and learning. For example, is there ample space for children to crawl, run, and engage in other developmentally appropriate play activities without bumping into furniture or each other? What adaptations can you make for children with disabilities or suspected delays so they can participate fully?
- Does the environment feel welcoming to children and their families? Do children see themselves reflected in the environment and feel a sense of belonging there? Incorporate cultures and languages representative of the children and families you work with into your learning spaces.

- Environments should foster a child's autonomy and ability to do things for themselves, with agency, as supported by us and the environment. This supports physical development and school readiness goals.
- Environments should engage, but not overstimulate. Allow children to choose from open-ended materials. However, try to balance choice with not to having too many materials available at one time. Create quiet spaces in your learning environment where children can take a break when needed.

A responsive learning environment is an engaging physical space together with a safe emotional atmosphere in which teachers meet children's desires and needs to find relevant and meaningful connections between themselves and significant adults, peers, subject matter, and play and activities. Learning environments extend well beyond the classroom!

Learning Objective #2: Incorporate responsive practices that integrate the cultures and languages of children and families into learning environments.

- Children do best when rooted in their culture and language. Part of creating a responsive environment is making sure that the children and families in your program are reflected in it.
- Some ideas include:
 - Materials from representative cultures and languages: books, pictures on the walls, dolls and toys that are all reflective of the children that are in your care.
 - Provide support for children learning more than one language by using a Planned Language Approach (PLA).
 - Cruise around your center, home, or other space at the eye level of the various children you work with to "take stock" of what they see!
 - Ask families how to make your learning environment feel welcome to them.
 - Encourage and welcome home language use.



Learning Objective #3: Summarize how responsive learning environments promote general school readiness.

- The learning environment supports children's school readiness across the ELOF Infant/Toddler domains.
- For example, try counting down from three with a group of children before jumping or sliding off a safe object like a low bench or slide one by one. This supports school readiness in each ELOF domain:
 - *Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development:* Children use perceptual information and practice safety and motor skills while jumping or sliding.
 - *Social and Emotional Development:* Children build relationships with adults and peers while gaining a sense of belonging through group activities. They practice emotional regulation and using adults as a resource as they navigate waiting their turn.
- *Language and Communication:* Children practice listening and responding to verbal and non-verbal communication and language from others. They also practice speaking and using new vocabulary as they count out loud.
- *Approaches to Learning:* Children manage feelings and emotions and work on executive functioning and self-regulation as they wait their turn and count to three before they slide or jump. Children show creativity and curiosity in play.

Resources and Support:

- The Framework for Effective Practice: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/practice>
- Teacher Time series for Infants and Toddlers: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/curriculum/teacher-time-series/infanttoddler-curriculum-series>
- Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/hs/sr/approach/elof>
- ELOF2GO Mobile App: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/school-readiness/article/elof2go-mobile-app>
- HSELOF Effective Practice Guides: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/school-readiness/effective-practice-guides/effective-practice-guides>
- Early Essential Webisode 7 – Environments: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/early-essentials-webisode-7-environments>
- Managing the Classroom – Designing Environments: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/designing-environments>
- Caring Connections Series: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/teaching-practices/article/caring-connections-series>
- News You Can Use – Environment as Curriculum for Infants and Toddlers: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/learning-environments/article/news-you-can-use-environment-curriculum-infants-toddlers>
- News You Can Use – Learning At Home and Homelike Environments: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/learning-environments/article/news-you-can-use-learning-home-homelike-environments>
- Head Start Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness Resource Catalogue – Native and Heritage Language Preservation, Revitalization, and Maintenance: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic/fcp/docs/resource-catalogue-main-book-4.pdf>
- Planned Language Approach (many resources within PLA, but a few highlighted below): <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/planned-language-approach>
 - Tip Sheet – Creating Environments That Include Children's Home Languages and Cultures: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/dll-creating-environments.pdf>
 - Tip Sheet – Including Children's Home Languages and Cultures: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/dll-childrens-home-languages.pdf>
 - Teacher Guide - Selecting Culturally Appropriate Children's Books in Languages Other Than English: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/select-cultural-childrens-books-non-english-eng.pdf>