RESPONSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Learning environments are the nurturing spaces that support children's development. This includes childcare centers, the home, outdoor spaces, classrooms, and other areas a child visits each day. This also includes schedules and materials in these spaces. Responsive environments are tailored to meet each child's developmental levels, needs, cultures, and interests. Responsive adults like teachers and parents are always the most important part of any learning environment. You can use the environment as a tool to support school readiness for all children.

THE TAKE HOME:

1. Responsive learning environments are welcoming and engaging. They are tailored to the individual needs and interests of all children.

2. Learning environments include classrooms, play spaces, homes, and outdoor areas. They also include other areas visited by a child during their daily life.

3. Responsive adults are the most important part of any learning environment. This includes teachers, home visitors, families, and caregivers.

? WHAT DOES RESEARCH SAY?

· Responsive adults are the most important part of any learning environment. This include parents, caregivers, teachers, home visitors, and other education staff. Responsive adults are nurturing and sensitive to each child's temperament and needs.

· Learning environments can influence relationships and support positive behavior. For example, if a child can see many things that they are not allowed to play with, you might find yourself saying "don't touch that" repeatedly. When children feel supported and engaged in an "environment of yes", they are less likely to exhibit behaviors that are challenging to adults.

· Environments engage children when they include a variety of culturally relevant materials. Children learn best when materials are open-ended, with no "wrong" way to use them. Follow children's lead: they will show you what they are interested in!

· Engaging learning environments provide extra support for children learning more than one language. Children can use the environment as a way to communicate with you. They might not know the word for "elephant" but can reach for a toy elephant to show you what they know!

· Home language is a key component of children's identity formation. This is essential for school readiness and life success. Responsive learning environments integrate the home language(s) and culture(s) of the children and families in your program.

· Environments that support high quality inclusion provide supports throughout the daily routine. Planned adaptations and modifications make things go more smoothly for staff, family members, and for the children. This also helps increase children's engagement and learning. For example, a bowl that is stabilized with a suction cup can help a child learning to scoop with a spoon eat independently.

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

- Learning spaces are safe, welcoming, and comfortable for all. Everyone can take part in activities. This includes children with identified disabilities or suspected delays. Environmental supports can help. These are small changes to ongoing activities or materials that can increase children's participation. For example, non-toxic rubber may be added to the handle of a rattle so it's easier to grasp and shake.

- Children can access materials easily. There are many engaging materials to choose from. But children are not overwhelmed by the number of available options. There are calm spaces that children can seek out as needed.

- The learning environment includes appropriate physical challenges. This supports children's physical and perceptual development. For example, there are padded areas where infants can crawl or roll. There is plenty of space for older children to run around without bumping into each other or furniture.

- The learning environment is diverse like the children and families. At children's eye level, you can see photos, books, toys, and dolls that are reflective of the children in your care. People from your community are represented, including people of varying ages and abilities.

TRY THIS!

- Ask families how to make your learning spaces feel welcoming, calm, and soothing to their child. What do their children need to feel engaged and ready to learn?

- Respect and incorporate families' cultures into the systems and services provided. Learning from families is a great place to start! One way to learn about a family's culture and values is to focus on their caregiving routines such as meal times and sleep.

- Cruise around at the eye level of the children you work with. Take stock of what they see: are there any adjustments you'd like to make?

- Create an "environment of yes" where everything children can access is safe and acceptable for them to explore. Work with families to do the same.

- Arrange the environment to reach a balance of engaging (but not overwhelming) spaces. Are there bins or baskets that can corral toys? Are there cozy spaces for quiet time? Home visitors can help families think about this in the home environment.

- Encourage physical movement throughout the day. Put out foam blocks and pillows: children can try jumping safely from these materials. Cut out paper circles and tape them to the floor: children can sit or stand in place and move to music! Home visitors can help families create safe physical challenges in their home.

- Think like a scientist! Continue to observe children in your learning spaces. Make adjustments as children grow and change over time.

LEARN MORE:

EARLY ESSENTIALS WEBISODE 7 ENVIRONMENTS:
https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/early-essentials-webisode-7-environments

CREATING ENVIRONMENTS THAT INCLUDE CHILDREN'S HOME LANGUAGES AND CULTURES:
https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/dll-creating-environments.pdf

ENVIRONMENTS THAT SUPPORT HIGH QUALITY INCLUSION (INCLUDES INFORMATION ON UNIVERSAL DESIGN PRINCIPLES):
https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/environments-support-high-quality-inclusion

LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS (LANDING PAGE WITH RESOURCES ABOUT CREATING LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS THAT ARE RESPONSIVE TO THE NEEDS OF YOUNG CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES):
https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/learning-environments

RESPONSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Learning environments are the nurturing spaces that support children's development. This includes your home, outdoor spaces, and other areas your child visits each day. Responsive environments are tailored to meet each child's developmental levels, needs, and interests. Here are some tips you can try.

GET CREATIVE

Provide a variety of materials for your child to choose to play with. You don't need to buy fancy or expensive toys. How can you play with common household items, like cooking pots and empty boxes? Can you make different sounds with items around the house?

BUILD A COZY SPACE

Try not to have too many things out at once. Sometimes children can get overwhelmed. Look for cues that your child needs some quiet time. Are they seeming shy? Or fussing or pulling at their clothing? Try cozying up together and reading a book with some comfy pillows.

ADD SAFE CHALLENGES

Children need opportunities to work on their motor skills throughout the day. This means activities like crawling, walking, or jumping. Add in fun and safe physical challenges to your home. Crawl through a tunnel of chairs! Dance to some music!

LET THEM SHOW YOU WHAT THEY CAN DO

Find ways for children to do things on their own. Can they reach the sink to wash their hands? Can they access their favorite books or toys? Do they have eating utensils that they can hold comfortably in their hand? This builds their physical, motor, and perceptual skills!