

## Early Essentials Practice Moments: Environments

Amanda Perez: The environment is a partner for staff in their work with young children and their families. Let's take a minute to think about environments for infants and toddlers. Use this practice moment and the practice guide to explore the ways that an environment can support learning. Take a look at what's happening in this outdoor area at a Family Child Care Home in Florida.

This program serves a mixed-age group of children with different temperaments and interests, and at different stages of development. Notice the ways they use the space individually and together in smaller and larger groups. Look at this group together.

What do you see here? And here? Watch this little girl. And here's another young toddler. What is happening for this child? Watch the boy in red. What is he doing?

So, this space accommodates children in a large group activity, but also offers lots of materials and child-sized spaces to meet individual needs and interests.

This infant has a protected space to be on her tummy. And when she gets frustrated, her caregiver, who's close by, picks her up to eat. With her body, this adult offers a safe environment where the baby can both enjoy her bottle and watch the other children. And those children are busy. This little girl wants to be close to her friends at first, but when she wants some quieter time, she finds a place to paint at the edge of the group.

Children have many interests, and she has lots of options here. This young toddler also likes to paint, but has chosen a different space for her project. She carefully and deliberately explores her materials sitting by herself at a low table. She has unhurried time and ample space to follow her own interests. This toddler enjoys long, uninterrupted play at the water table. Notice the ducks he has lined up here, and his fun with sand. This is an environment of yes.

The sand doesn't need to stay in the sandbox, and he built a play space for his ducks that he explores with them.

Did you see how these friends play in sand? What is sand like when it's dry?

Later, one of them plays at the water table, focuses on water, wonders how the sand his friend left behind will move through his waterwheel. In this space, children at different ages with different interests and different temperaments have lots of options. Each can play independently at their own pace and rhythm, and choose whether to be with others or alone, focusing on what interests them. There are opportunities for play that invite children to play in different ways, with small and large muscles, for example.

There are enough materials for everyone to use as they'd like, and the arrangement of the space and the adults in the environment encourage discovery, exploration, and learning. How does your environment encourage independent exploration?

For those who want more on creating environments for infants and toddlers and their families, use the resources listed in the practice guide, or watch Early Essentials Webisode 7, featuring Louis Torelli, an early-childhood educator and environmental designer, and other experts talking about those important environments.