



National Center on

Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning

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## Creating Supportive and Joyful Learning Environments

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# Presenters



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**“My journey has just begun...protect me and guide me so that I will know all the beauty of this world.”**

Traditional Native American Saying



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Create environments  
that lead to exploration  
and joyful learning



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#1 Take care of yourself!

# Learning Objectives

- Describe key elements to create learning environments that foster exploration and joyful learning for all children.
- List strategies to create quality learning environments that are joyful and developmentally appropriate for for each age group.



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# Environments that Foster Exploration and Joyful Play

Create an engaging environment:

- Children see themselves
- Invites exploration
- Promotes social interaction
- Learning is joyful
- Reflects families and staff



# Play and Learning

## Why Is Joyful Play so Important?



Intrinsically motivated

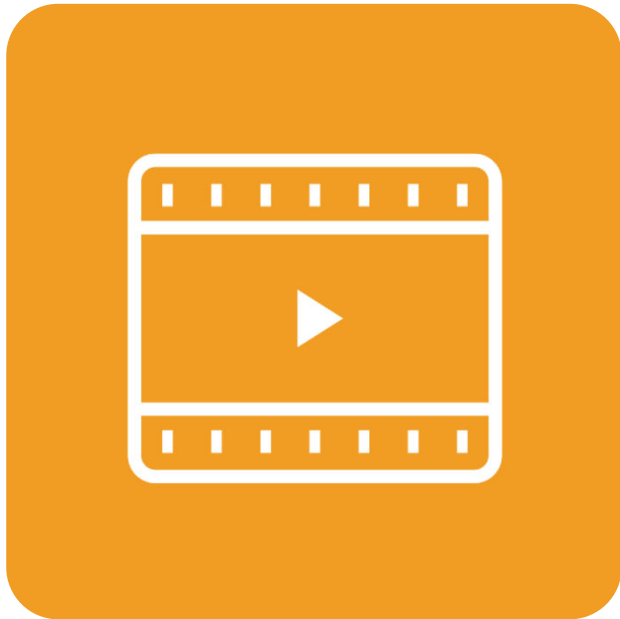


Positive affect



Flexible





# A Moment of Joy

*Collaborative Play*



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# Video



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Reflect on what you saw in the video about exploration and joyful learning.



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## Families Are...



The first and most important teachers of their children

Our partners with a critical role in their family's development

Experts about their child and their family

Valuable and important contributors.



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How do you plan for a joyful indoor learning environment that fosters exploration?



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# Learning Environments that Reflect Children and Families



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# Setting Up the Environment for Joy and Engagement



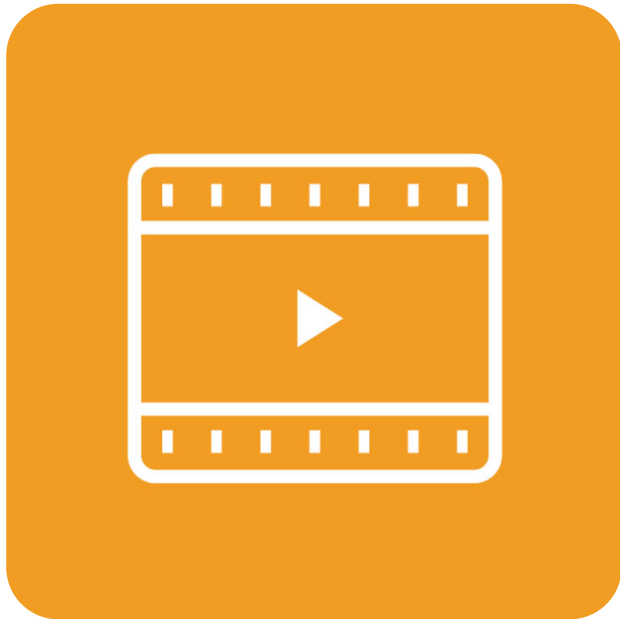
- For adults and children
- Following the child's interests
- Being curious and engaged
- Educators as researchers



# The Indoor Environment



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## Setting Up the Environment

Considering children's interests



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# Video



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# Feeling at Home

Children and adults need to feel they are at home in the program



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# Feeling at Home

## Cubbies to store personal items



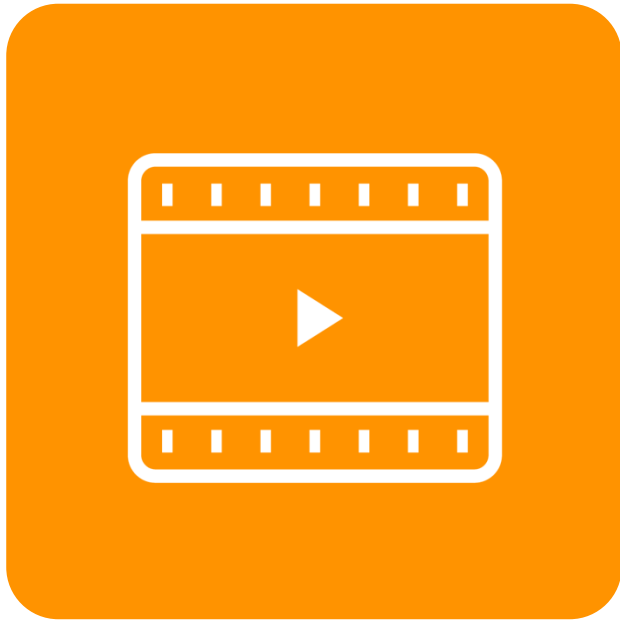
# Materials and Furniture

Make sure:

- Materials and furniture are appropriate for the abilities and levels of development.
- Children see themselves in their learning environment.



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# Learning Environments: Organizing Materials



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# Video



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# Video Reflection



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# Materials and Furniture



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## Designing for All

What elements should we consider to ensure children with disabilities or suspected delays can connect in meaningful ways with peers, adults, and the learning experiences in our environments?



# Environments and Universal Design Practices in Early Childhood Education Settings



<https://headstart.gov/publication/universal-design-learning-udl>



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# Environments and Universal Design Practices in Early Childhood Education Settings



- Materials encourage exploration, learning, and inquiry
- Promote children's interaction
- Accommodate all individual energy levels



## Space Arrangement

- Welcoming environment for every child and family
- A schedule that creates a flow
- Variety of learning centers with clear boundaries
- Noisy and quiet zones
- Avoid wide open areas
- Visually closed areas when they are not open for use
- Intentionally chosen visuals and materials



# Create a Prepared, Engaging, and Inviting Environment

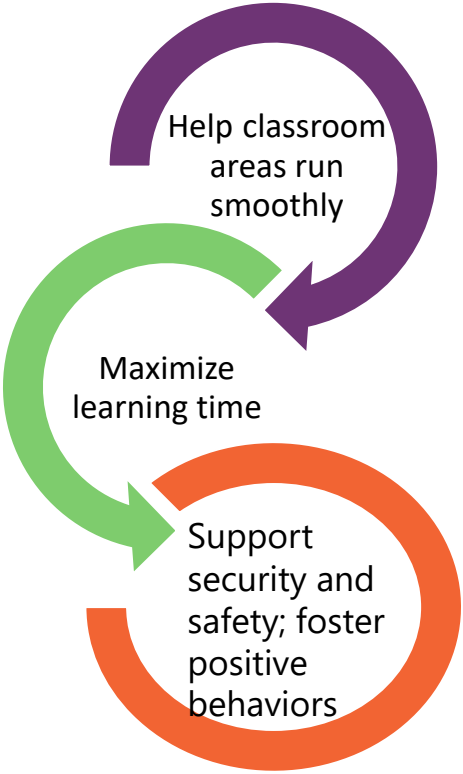


- Organized and ready before children and families arrive
- Visual supports
- Play choices



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# Establish Routines



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# Establish a Predictable and Flexible Schedule for Young Children



- Visual schedule
- Use consistently
- Keep it simple
- Balance activities
- Post it!
- Refer to it often
- Communicate changes
- Individualize



# The Outdoor Environment



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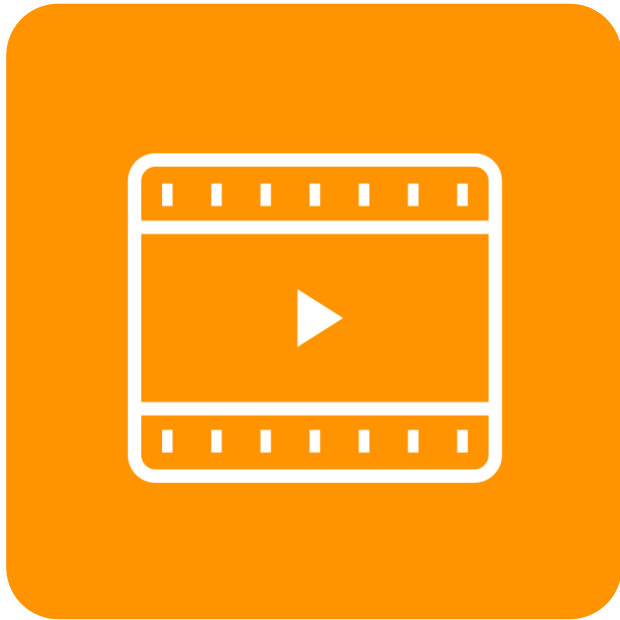
“Spending time in nature is part of a ***balanced diet*** of childhood experiences.”

## Outdoor Benefits

- Develop an appreciation for nature
- Increased attention span
- Improved mental health
- Increased production of vitamin D
- Multiple opportunities to develop motor skills
- Creativity and exploration
- Social skills: peer-to-peer interactions and cooperative play
- Extension of the curriculum



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## Video: Outdoor Spaces for Learning



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# Video



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Why is being outdoors  
important for joyful learning?



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## Materials – Loose Parts

- Not toys
- Versatile materials
- Can be moved around
- Can be used in endless ways
- Must be developmentally appropriate and safe





## Materials for the Outdoors



What additional materials could support joyful outdoor learning?



# Families Concerns and the Outdoors

- Engaging families in planning for natural experiences can help everyone think through safety issues and learning opportunities.
- Play with natural materials should always be **closely supervised**.
- Provide families with information about doing safety checks and what to look for.





## Activity

# Reflection



- What *aspects* of your indoor and outdoor environments have been *working well*?
- What *components* of your indoor and outdoor environments need *redesigning*?
- What *resources* do you need to upgrade your indoor and outdoor environments?



# Questions and Comments



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We want to hear  
from you!

Please take some time  
to complete the session  
evaluation.

For more information contact:  
[ecdtl@ecetta.info](mailto:ecdtl@ecetta.info)  
(Toll-free 1-844-261-3752)

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# CREATING SUPPORTIVE AND JOYFUL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

## Resource List

### BIRTH TO THREE

- [Early Essentials Webisode 7: Environments](#)
- [Environment as Curriculum for Infants and Toddlers](#)
- [News You Can Use: Play](#)
- [Playful and Fun Learning Environments for Infants and Toddlers](#)
- [Supporting Outdoor Play and Exploration for Infants and Toddlers](#)
  - [Going Outside Build's Children's Connection to Nature](#)
- [Infant and Toddler Outdoor Play Space Assessment](#)
- [Spending Time Outdoors Matters for Infants and Toddlers!](#)
- [Outdoor Learning Environment Plan \(Infants and Toddlers\)](#)

### THREE TO FIVE

- [Playful Learning and Joyful Teaching in Preschools](#)
- [Resources for Preschool Learning Environments](#)
- [Play Space Assessment for Preschool](#)
- [Outdoor Learning Environment Inventory \(Preschool\)](#)



## BIRTH TO FIVE

- [Interactive Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework: Ages Birth to Five](#)
- [Learning Environments](#)
- [Making It Work: Implementing Cultural Learning Experiences in American Indian and Alaska Native \[AIAN\] Early Learning Settings for Children Ages Birth to 5](#)
- [Play the Head Start Way](#)
- [Play Promotes Early Development: It's Time for Play!](#)
- [Safe and Nurturing Learning Environments \(Teacher Time\)](#)
- [Strategies to Create Positive Learning Environments for Children and Staff](#)
- [Supporting Children with Disabilities or Suspected Delays](#)

## SAFETY AND PLANNING

- [10 Tips to Enhance Your Outdoor Play Space](#)
- [Active Supervision At-a-Glance](#)
- [Affordable Settings and Elements: Ideas for Cost Effective Solutions](#)
- [Facilities](#)
- [Keep Children Safe Using Active Supervision](#)
- [Reducing Stress](#)
- [Resources for Safe Playgrounds](#)
- [Tips for Keeping Children Safe: A Developmental Guide](#)
- [Universal Design for Learning \(UDL\)](#)



## WORKING WITH FAMILIES

- [Active Play: Health Tips for Families](#)
- [Building Partnerships: Guide to Developing Relationships with Families: Strength-Based Attitudes](#)
- [Connecting Research to Practice: Tips for Working with Infants, Toddlers, and Their Families](#)
- [Nature Club Toolkit for Families \(Toolkit\)](#)

## OTHER RESOURCES

- [Guided Play with Roberta Golinkoff, Ph.D.](#)
- [The LEGO Foundation: Learning through Play: A Review of the Evidence \(summary\)](#)
- [The Power of Playful Learning in the Early Childhood Setting](#)

## MOBILE APPS

- [ELOF2GO Mobile App](#)
- [Mobile Tools for Home Visitors](#)
- [Ready DLL Mobile App](#)
- [Text4Teachers](#)

## ONLINE COMMUNITIES

- [MyPeers: Teacher Time Community](#)





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