

EARLY HEAD START TIP SHEET

No. 16

Dividing a Large Space into EHS Classrooms, November 2003

What are the guidelines for dividing a large space into separate infant/toddler classrooms?

Response:

Programs must ensure that every space adequately meets the Head Start requirement that *at least* 35 square feet of usable indoor space be available for the care and use of each child. It is important to recognize that this standard suggests a minimum requirement and that programs are encouraged to utilize larger spaces to fully support adequate programming to promote child development in all domains.

Challenges emerge when one room is divided to create space for more than one group of eight. Each group must be capable of functioning separately and of meeting and maintaining the Head Start Performance Standards. Guidance in the Performance Standards states that a large room may be divided with “appropriate room dividers.” Although there may be many possible interpretations of “appropriate”, the stated goal is to ensure that the Education and Early Childhood Development Performance Standards are fully met and that the infants’ and toddlers’ mental health and learning are supported, not compromised.

Appropriate room dividers

A well-divided space will encourage positive interactions and support infants’ and toddlers’ ability to regulate their emotions, explore the environment, and master tasks. The environment will not be over-stimulating and therefore make excessive demands on young children’s coping skills. A well-divided space will be comfortable for infants and toddlers with different temperaments as well as for their teachers and parents.

The potential for over-stimulation for infants and toddlers is often overlooked, but can be avoided when thoughtful consideration is given to the amount of movement, noise, light, and exposure to noise, light, and the movement of people. The Head Start Center Design Guide states that “solid or glazed partitions at full height, doors, casework, cabinets, panels, and railings can be used for separation. Three types of separations must be considered: acoustical, visual, and physical”.¹ To determine the use of partial versus full partitions as well as their placement, programs may want to think about how daily programming will be affected.

Options for dividing spaces

One option for dividing a large room is to design separate and individual classrooms. Each space is dedicated to no more than eight children and staff and functions autonomously. Another is to design barriers and structures between the rooms so that the majority of the areas are divided allowing a minimal open-connection to another classroom, such as a gated hallway. This model allows for autonomous classroom function but enables rooms to share some resources such as adult work-space or storage closets. Rooms still maintain separate diaper and kitchen areas.

¹ GSA, 2005, Section 7.2.4, 78-79.

Questions to Consider for Planning and Programming:

- Is the space divided to ensure autonomy and separation of the two groups so that each group functions separately and is able to meet/maintain the Head Start Performance Standards?
- Does the spaces adequately allow for group size and adult-child ratios that are consistent with the Head Start Performance Standards or State, Tribal, or local regulations the are more stringent than the Performance Standards?
- Does each space meet the minimum requirement of 35 square feet of usable space per child?
- If this is a new building or renovation, what input did staff and parents have on the design? Is the architect and/or builder knowledgeable in early childhood concepts and design?
- Does the space meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements?
- Do parents and staff need to travel through one “room” to get to another? How does the traffic pattern affect classroom activities and children’s behavior?
- Does the stimulation from noise and lighting support or challenge infants’ and toddlers’ ability to focus on tasks or fall asleep?
- Does each space access natural light?
- Is the room set up so that infants and toddlers can safely explore? Can the teachers celebrate mastery rather than prohibit exploration? For example, are the partitions securely attached and stabilized or would they move or topple over when children touch them?
- Does the sleeping area(s) have adequate space allowing for cribs/mats to be spaced 3 feet apart from one another?

Performance Standards, Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations:

- 1304.21(a)(5)(i)-(iii) In center-based settings, grantee and delegate agencies must promote each child’s physical development by:
 - (i) Providing sufficient time, indoor and outdoor space, equipment, materials and adult guidance for active play and movement that support the development of gross motor skills;
 - (ii) Providing appropriate time space, equipment, materials and adult guidance for the development of fine motor skills according to each child developmental level; and
 - (iii) Providing an appropriate environment and adult guidance for the participation of children with special needs.
- 1304.21(b)(1)(i)-(iii) Grantee and delegate agencies’ program of services for infants and toddlers must encourage:
 - (i) The development of secure relationships in out-of-home care settings for infants and toddlers by having a limited number of consistent teachers over an extended period of time. Teachers must demonstrate on understanding of the child’s family culture and, whenever possible, speak the child’s language;
 - (ii) Trust and emotional security so that each child can explore the environment according to his or her developmental level; and
 - (iii) Opportunities for each child to explore a variety of sensory and motor experiences with support from teachers and family members.
- 1304.21(b)(2)(i)-(ii) Grantee and delegate agencies must support the social and emotional development of infants and toddlers by promoting an environment that:
 - (i) Encourages the development of self-awareness, autonomy, and self-expression; and

- (ii) Supports the emerging communication skills of infants and toddlers by providing daily opportunities for each child to interact with others and to express himself or herself freely.
- 1304.21(b)(3)(i)-(ii) Grantee and delegate agencies must promote the physical development of infants and toddlers by:
 - (i) Supporting the physical skills of infants and toddlers including gross motor skills, such as grasping pulling, pushing, crawling, walking, and climbing; and
 - (ii) Creating opportunities for fine motor development that encourage the control and coordination of small specialized motions, using the eyes, mouth, hands, and feet.
- 1304.52(g)(4) Grantee and delegate agencies must ensure that each teacher working exclusively with infants and toddlers has responsibility for no more than four infants and toddlers and that no more than eight infants and toddlers are placed in any one group. However, if State, Tribal, or local regulations specify staff: child ratios and group sizes more stringent than this requirement, the State, Tribal, or local regulations must apply.
- 1304.22 (e)(7) Grantee and delegate agencies operating program for infants and toddlers must space cribs and cots at least three feet apart to avoid spreading contagious illness and to allow for easy access to each child.
- 1304.53 (a)(1)-(6) Head Start physical environment and facilities.
 - (1) Grantee and delegate agencies must provide a physical environment and facilities conducive to learning and reflective of the different stages of development of each child.
 - (2) Grantee and delegate agencies must provide appropriate space for the conduct of all program activities.
 - (3) The center space provided by grantee and delegate agencies must be organized into functional areas that can be recognized by the children and that allow for individual activities and social interactions.
 - (4) The indoor and outdoor space in Early Head Start centers in use by mobile infants and toddlers must be separated from general walkways and from areas in use by preschoolers.
 - (5) Centers must have at least 35 square feet of usable indoor space per child available for the care and use of children (i.e.: exclusive of bathrooms, halls, kitchen, staff rooms, and storage places) and at least 75 square feet of usable outdoor play space per child.
 - (6) Facilities owned and operated by Early Head Start and Head Start grantee or delegate agencies must meet the licensing requirements of 45 CFR1306.30.
- 1301.10(a) except as specified in paragraph (b) of this section, the following HHS regulations shall apply to all grants made under the Act: 45 CFR part 84 Nondiscrimination on the basis of handicap in Federally assisted programs. 45 CFR 84.23 New Construction.
 - (a) Design and construction. Each facility or part of a facility constructed by, on behalf of, or for the use of a recipient shall be designed and constructed in such manner that the facility or part of the facility is readily accessible to and usable by handicapped persons, if the construction was commenced after the effective date of this part.
 - (b) Alteration. Each facility or part of a facility which is altered by, on behalf of, or for the use of a recipient after the effective date of this part in a manner that affects or could affect the usability of the facility or part of the facility shall, to the maximum extent feasible, be altered in such manner that the altered portion of the facility is readily accessible to and usable by handicapped persons.

Resources:

Early Head Start National Resource Center. **Early Head Start Tip Sheet, 9: How Do Programs Plan and Implement Developmentally Appropriate Environments that Meet the Intent of the Head Start Performance Standards for Infants and Toddlers?** DHHS/ACF/ACYF/HSB. 2003.

General Services Administration (GSA) Child Care Center of Expertise. **“Interior Space Design,” Chapter 7: Head Start Center Design Guide for Head Start Facilities, 2nd Ed.** DHHS/ACF/ACYF/HSB. 2005.

Greenman, Jim. **Caring Spaces, Learning Places: Children’s Environments that Work.** Richmond, VA: Exchange Press. 1988.

Harms, Thelma, Debby Cryer and Richard M. Clifford. **Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale - Revised.** Teachers College Press: NY, NY. 2006.

Information Memorandum, ACYF-IM-HS-03-06: Final Rule for the Purchase, Major Renovation and Construction of Head Start Centers. 6/10/03.

Lally, J. Ronald and Jay Stewart, Eds. **Infant/Toddler Caregiving: A Guide to Setting Up Environments.** Sacramento: California Department of Education. 1990.

The **Program for Infant/Toddler Care (PITC) [videos].** Sacramento: California Department of Education and WestEd.

- **Spaces to Grow: Creating a Child Care Environment for Infants & Toddlers.** 1988.
- **Together in Care: Meeting the Intimacy Needs of Infants and Toddlers in Groups.** 1992.

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This Tip Sheet is not a regulatory document. Its intent is to provide a basis for dialogue, clarification, and problem solving among Office of Head Start, Regional Offices, TA consultants, and grantees. If you need further clarification on Head Start Policies and regulations, please contact your Regional Program Specialist.