

EARLY HEAD START TIP SHEET

No. 9

Developmentally Appropriate EHS Environments, March 2003

How do programs plan and implement developmentally appropriate environments that meet the intent of the Head Start Performance Standards for infants and toddlers?

Response:

Every Early Head Start classroom is to be designed to provide a safe, developmentally appropriate environment. Both center-based infant/toddler care and home-based socialization spaces should follow a similar design process to ensure an optimal environment for daily routines and learning.

The Head Start Performance Standards on facilities, materials, and equipment (1304.53) provide a framework for creating and designing appropriate environments. However, each program is responsible for creating a space that will best meet the developmental stages for the age groupings they plan to serve in a specific space. The process incorporates three phases of development: planning, designing, and implementing. This involves a carefully planned systems approach including but not limited to issues of finances, facilities, environmental and community assessments, collaboration, staffing, training, and planning. The considerations listed below provide some guidance about the various systems that must be integrated to effectively plan a developmentally appropriate space.

Questions to Consider for Planning and Programming:

Planning:

- Has the program designed/utilized a systems approach to the design and implementation of the environment for infants and toddlers?
- Does the system include plans for a start up planner who has experience in planning infant/toddler environments?
- Does the program include a plan for training staff about facilities requirements, Head Start Performance Standards regarding spaces for serving infants and toddlers, and local licensing regulations?
- Have resources been adequately allocated for the design of spaces?
- Does the fiscal plan include funds for plumbing, flooring, and lighting?
- Does the plan include a hazardous materials study?
- How has the program collaborated with community partners in child care and licensing to maximize their resources?

Designing:

- Has the program secured the services of an architect who has experience in the design of spaces for infants and toddlers?
- How will the program involve parents and staff in the space design process?
- What steps has the program taken to plan for adequate square footage and usable space to ensure infants and toddlers have sufficient space for routines and learning?
- Does the space meet the minimum requirement of 35 square feet of usable space per child and the outdoor minimum space requirement of 75 square feet per child?

- Does the space designated for sleeping allow for 3 feet between each crib?
- Does the space adequately allow for group size and adult-child ratios that are consistent with the Head Start Performance Standards or state regulations, if they are more stringent?
- Has the program considered noise levels, lighting, and circulation patterns in the design of their space?
- Does the design include spaces where children can have quiet time by themselves; yet still be supervised by teachers?
- Does the design include cozy spaces and furnishings that ensure staff can sit comfortably with children when reading to or comforting them?
- If two groups of eight children will be in the same room, has the space been divided to ensure autonomy and separation of the two groups, with a minimum of distractions and noise between the groups? [Note: the Head Start Center Design Guide states that “separation can be achieved by using solid and glazed partitions, either partial or full heights, doors, casework, cabinets, panels, or railings. General Services Administration (GSA) advises that three types of separations should be considered: acoustical, visual, and physical” (p. 71).]
- Does each group space have adequate resources in their space, such as diapering, toileting, and hand washing facilities?
- Is there adequate plumbing for hand washing and toileting areas?
- Are sinks for hand washing, toileting and food prep separate; yet, accessible to children and staff?
- Are sinks and toilets child-sized?

Implementing:

- Does the program have a continuous improvement plan for ongoing improvements in use and maintenance of space?

Performance Standards, Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations:

- 1304.53(a)(1)-(7) 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.
 - (7) Grantee and delegate agencies must provide for the maintenance, repair, safety and security of all Early Head Start and Head Start facilities, materials and equipment.
- 1304.53(a)(10)(xvii) Grantee and delegate agencies must conduct a safety inspection, at least annually, to ensure that each facility’s space, light, ventilation, heat, and other physical arrangements are consistent with the health, safety and developmental needs of children. At the minimum, agencies must ensure that adequate provisions are made for children with disabilities to ensure their safety, comfort, and participation.

- 1304.53(b)(1)(iii) Grantee and delegate agencies must provide and arrange sufficient equipment, toys, materials, and furniture to meet the needs and facilitate the participation of children and adults. Equipment, toys, materials, and furniture owned or operated by the grantee or delegate agency must be age-appropriate, safe, and supportive of the abilities and developmental level of each child served, with adaptations, if necessary, for children with disabilities.
- 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.
- 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:

American Institute of Architects (AIA). www.aia.org

Crooks, B. “**Early Head Start Facilities: Doing It Right.**” *Head Start Bulletin*, 69: Early Head Start. (October 2000): 18.

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

Early Head Start National Resource Center. **Technical Assistance Paper 1: Early Head Start Program Implementation: Start Up Planning.** DHHS/ACF/ACYF/HSB. 1999.

McKinney, Karen. “**The Rosemount Story.**” *Head Start Bulletin*, 69: Early Head Start. (October 2000): 19.

National Head Start Facilities Assistance Desk. *The Early Childhood and Learning Knowledge Center.* DHHS/ACF/OHS.

This resource provides a toll free telephone number [800-303-0705 (8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. ET)] and Web site services. It will provide information, training, and assistance to meet center design, construction, renovation and maintenance.

Torelli, Louis and Charles Durrett. **Early Head Start Resources.** *Spaces for Children.* <http://www.spacesforchildren.com/hdstrt.html> (accessed August 14, 2010).

Torelli, Louis. “**Enhancing Development through Classroom Design in Early Head Start: Meeting the Program Performance Standards and Best Practices.**” *Children and Families.* (Spring 2002): 44–51.
<http://www.spacesforchildren.com/articles/EarlyHeadStart.pdf> (accessed August 14, 2010).

Torelli, Louis and Charles Durrett. **Landscapes for Learning: Designing Group Care Environments for Infants and Toddlers.** Berkley, CA: Torelli/Durrett, Inc. 1998.

Torelli, Louis and Charles Durrett. **“Landscape for Learning: The Impact of Classroom Design on Infants and Toddlers.”** *Earlychildhood NEWS*, 8 (2). (1996): 12–17.
<http://www.spacesforchildren.com/articles/landc2.pdf> (accessed August 14, 2010).

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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.