

EARLY HEAD START TIP SHEET

No. 17

Learning Areas in EHS Classrooms, November 2003

How do EHS programs divide an infant/toddler classroom into separate learning areas?

Response:

As stated in Head Start Program Performance Standards 1304.53 (a)(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.” Infants and toddlers learn and explore most successfully within their relationships with caregivers. Therefore infants and toddlers can most easily focus on particular activities when they have easy visual and physical access to their infant-toddler teachers.

Spaces can be designed to enhance learning for individuals as well as for the group as a whole. It is important to separate messy experiences from neat ones, quiet activities from noisy events, and fine motor from large motor. Such separation can be created by strategic placement of shelves or use of an area rug. Leaving an open area in the center of the room allows toddlers to engage in vigorous walking or pushing activities and creates a space for gross motor equipment such as a tunnel. The equipment in this area can be altered to meet the changing need of the group or individuals.

Areas of learning to be considered include fine muscle manipulation (stacking, sorting, nesting, dumping & filling); dramatic play; reading, sensory and large motor experiences as well as art and music. Learning is enhanced when the room has cozy spaces where infants and toddlers can regulate intense emotions of excitement, sadness, or anger. Of course, areas where daily routines such as eating, sleeping, and diapering occur are equally vital.

Questions to Consider for Planning and Programming:

- Does the spaces adequately allow for group size and adult-child ratios that are consistent with the Head Start Program Performance Standards or State, Tribal, or local regulations the are more stringent than the Performance Standards?
- Does the space meet the minimum requirement of 35 square feet of usable space per child space to ensure sufficient space for routines and learning?
- Does the design and traffic pattern support positive interactions among children providing safety for infants who are practicing sitting, crawling, pulling up as well as space for toddlers to practice walking and pushing or pulling toys?
- Are the partitions between the various areas securely attached and stabilized, prohibiting them from moving or toppling over when children touch them?
- Does the design enable staff to visually monitor children within the various areas while providing cozy spaces for infants and toddlers to have quiet time alone or with a teacher or another child?
- Does the stimulation from noise and lighting support or challenge infants' and toddlers' ability to focus on tasks or fall asleep?
- Does the design of the space and choice of learning materials support individualization? How is the group dynamic taken into consideration?

- Are books, toys, and materials consistently placed in the same area of the room so that children know where to find them?
- Does the design of the space provide adequate room for a group of children to engage in the same activity without crowding?
- When the classroom serves mixed age-groups, is it designed to ensure meeting the developmental and safety needs for all of the children?
- Does the environment and design support adult comfort and needs?
- Is staff able to comfortably be where the children are playing?
- Does the space promote teachers' interactions with small groups of infants and toddlers?
- Are storage areas easily accessible allowing for toys and materials to change when needed?

Performance Standards, Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations:

- 1304.21(a)(4)(i)-(iv) Grantee and delegate agencies must provide for the development of each child's cognitive and language skills by:
 - (i) Supporting each child's learning, using various strategies including experimentation, inquiry, observation, play and exploration;
 - (ii) Ensuring opportunities for creative self-expression through activities such as art, music, movement, and dialogue;
 - (iii) Promoting interaction and language use among children and between children and adults; and
 - (iv) Supporting emerging literacy and numeracy development through materials and activities according to the developmental level of each child.
- 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 an 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.
- 1304.53 (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.

Resources:

Early Head Start National Resource Center. **Early Head Start Tip Sheets.** *The Early Childhood and Knowledge Center.* DHHS/ACF/ACYF/HSB.

- **10: How Can an EHS Program Have a Written Curriculum with Lesson Plans and Still Follow the Baby’s Lead as He/She Creates His/Her Own Curriculum?** March 2003.
- **9: How Do Programs Plan and Implement Developmentally Appropriate Environments that Meet the Intent of the Head Start Performance Standards for Infants and Toddlers?** March 2003.

Gonzalez-Mena, Janet. **Preparing, Ordering, and Maintaining the Environment. Infant/Toddler Caregiving: A Guide to Routines.** Sacramento: California Dept. of Education. 1990.

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.** Exchange Press: Richmond, VA. 1988.

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

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.

11/03

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.