

- A well-planned room for infants and/or toddlers is a welcoming place for children and families and a pleasant, efficient place in which to work.
- Areas that are conveniently located, organized and well-equipped make routines easier to manage and allow caregivers to focus on their interactions with children.
- Areas for experiences also need to be arranged according to the strengths and needs of the children.
- The setting, layout, and equipment all give infants and toddlers many opportunities to challenge themselves through seeing, touching, feeling, and moving.
- In surroundings that are safe to explore freely, infants and toddlers learn to map their environment cognitively, to manipulate it, and to master it.
- Through the use of platforms, lofts, recessed areas, low walls, and canopies, all placed along the walls of the classroom, the room can be sculpted to provide a variety of age-appropriate activity areas.
- The walls frame the activity areas, while the center of the classroom remains fairly open, allowing for the circulation of children and adults, as well as providing flexible space that can change depending on the teachers' observations of the children's interests.
- Sculpting the classroom into defined multilevel activity areas encourages individual and small-group play without herding all the children from one activity to the next.

Private Spaces

- While easily supervised by the caregiver, these semi-enclosed activity areas provide for private and semi-private environments which are critical to the development of the young child's self-concept and personal identity.
- Much of the aggression and breakdowns that children experience in group care can be traced to the stress of being in a large group for upwards of ten hours a day, five days a week. Creating spaces where children can retreat in privacy can help to alleviate this stress.
- Private spaces can also be achieved by incorporating into the classroom a tunnel; a carpeted, built-in cabinet with the doors removed; a cozy loft space; or a few risers enclosing a small corner of the room.
 - Instead of experiencing the stress of being in a large group all day, an infant can withdraw to a private space to rest, observe, and recharge emotionally.
 - With access to these small-group activity areas, two toddlers who are just beginning to develop a relationship can go off together.

Lofts

- An appropriately designed loft can be a wonderful addition to an infant/toddler classroom.
- Along with supporting motor exploration, it provides a "get-away" place for a child, where he can watch the rest of the group yet be by himself.
- It is also a place where an infant can snuggle with a caregiver. As well as creating the feeling of more space in the classroom, an appropriately placed loft can help define two additional activity areas.

Defined Spaces

- The construction of low walls (24"-30" high) and carpeted platform areas (5" high) along the edge of the room creates several different environments.
- Low partitions allow children to feel that they are in a discrete space. This layout also allows the child care provider to supervise children easily.
- Children can engage in extended individual and small-group play, while the child care provider supervises two or three of these activity areas simultaneously.

Spaces for Movement

- Movement is essential to a child's physical and emotional development.
- Once an infant can crawl and pull herself up, moving becomes a major focus of her day.
- Even if there is nothing safe in the classroom to climb on, she will find a way to climb-onto tables and shelves, rocking chairs and high chairs
- Creating a classroom that supports appropriate movement is a fundamental component in designing a developmentally appropriate environment.
- Motor competence and emotional competence are closely linked in infants and toddlers.
- Feeding oneself, crawling to a desired toy and picking it up, climbing to the top of a loft, and going down a slide are all activities that help the infant develop a sense of self, a feeling that he is capable, that he can achieve, that he can master.

Ease of Supervision

- A well-designed environment allows teachers to supervise children from anywhere in the classroom.
- Place activity areas along the walls, leaving the center of the room open, with diapering and food-prep areas separated from the classroom by half-height walls

Choosing Materials

The materials caregivers select make the environment interesting for the children to investigate. Caregivers should choose materials that gently challenge children's developing abilities and skills and keep some familiar items that still interest them.

- Choose materials that promote children's development and learning.
- Include materials for a wide range of skills.
- Provide multiple of favorite toys.
- Choose materials that honor diversity.
- Incorporate homelike touches and noncommercial materials.
- Involve families in collecting materials.

Displaying Materials

- Store toys and related materials in the area where they will be used most often.
- Display toys so children can see what is available and choose what they want.
- Use picture and word labels on containers and shelves.
- Rotate materials regularly.
- Hang pictures, unbreakable mirrors, and interesting toys where children can see and touch them.

Organizing for Mixed Age Group

- Place displays at different levels.
- Arrange areas where children can interact safely.
- Include a variety of toys and other materials that are appropriate for the developmental levels of each age group.

Creating a Structure for Each Day

Structure is an important aspect of the learning environment for infants and toddlers. A predictable sequence of events enables children, their families and caregivers to feel a sense of order. While the daily schedule and plans need to be flexible, they give direction for working with children.

- The schedule is flexible and adaptable. It is changed to meet individual needs.
- The schedule sets an unhurried, child-directed pace for routines/experiences of the day.
- There is sufficient time for routines, play experiences, and transitions.
- There is a balance between active and quiet times.
- Children have opportunities to be alone (although supervised) or with a familiar caregiver.
- Children have opportunities to spend time in small groups of 2-3 children.
- Children have the opportunities to spend time outdoors.

Creating Places for Routines and Experiences

Areas that are conveniently located, organized and well-equipped make routines easier to manage and allow caregivers to focus on their interactions with children. Areas for experiences also need to be arranged according to the strengths and needs of the children.

Greeting Area	Locate the greeting area just inside the room. It serves as an entry way and a transition area between the outdoors or hallway and the room. Separate the area from the rest of the space to make it feel cozy and welcoming. It should be large enough to accommodate two or more parents with their children.
Diapering and Toilet Area	<p>One of the challenges of organizing a diapering area is setting it up so caregivers can see what the other children in the group are doing while caregivers are changing a child’s diaper or helping a child use the toilet. Ideally the space should be designed so that caregivers can face the room, if this is not possible, place a mirror on the wall so that caregivers can see the room.</p> <p>Hand washing is an integral part of diapering and toileting so locate the diapering/toileting area near a hand sink and to prevent the spread of disease, away from the food preparation area.</p>
Sleeping Area	State licensing requirements and the design of the facility will determine the options caregivers have for sleeping areas (i.e. separate sleeping area for cribs). Ideally the sleeping area will be separate from noisy, active play areas so it can accommodate each child’s individual needs. Cots or mats can be placed in play areas of the classroom. Reserve some space for one or two children who sleep on a different schedule from the other children.
Eating Area	<p>A separate eating area is not necessary for the infants. Create a quiet comfortable place where caregivers can hold infants while caregivers feed them. Mobile infants and toddlers need a space for eating, although the space can also be used for play experiences.</p> <p>Nursing can be part of the sleeping area or it can be located in another quiet area of the room. This area should have comfortable seating, a footstool and a small pillow to support the nursing mom’s arm.</p>
Areas for Experiences	A variety of play experiences include playing with toys, imitating and pretending, enjoying stories and books, connecting with music and movement, creating art, tasting and preparing food, exploring sand and water and going outdoors. While all of these experiences require particular supplies and materials, not all require separate space.

Designing Spaces for Each Age Group

Working with a partner or with your small group, select an age group (Infants, Mobile Infants, Toddlers & Twos) and discuss ways Caregivers can arrange the environment to support learning.

Document some key ideas in the space provided.
 Be prepared to share with the large group.

What Infants Can Do	Ways Caregivers Can Arrange the Environment
Notice and look at what is around them	
Distinguish familiar from unfamiliar sights and sound	
Reach for, bat, and poke objects: grasp objects that can be held easily	
Bring toys to their mouths to explore	
Respond to being held and rocked	
Developing the ability to roll, sit and crawl.	

What Mobile Infants Can Do	Ways Caregivers Can Arrange the Environment
Pull themselves to a standing position	
Repeat a movement to learn it well	
Push, pull, fill and dump objects	
Take comfort from familiar objects and reminders of home	
Uses familiar adults as a base for exploration	
What Toddlers and Twos Can Do	Way Caregivers Can Arrange the Environment
Walk, run, climb, and jump	
Make choices and have favorite toy	

Eat as part of a small group	
Sleep at scheduled times	
Sometimes want to do more than they can do	
Play near and with others	

New Ideas to Implement: