

Makeover Minutes

Quick tips for your learning environment



Mixed-Age Environments

Learning environments shared by children from a range of ages can be organized in a variety of ways to meet the developmental needs of all age groups. Spaces can be separated or shared, while also remaining safe for mixed-age groups to freely explore.



Watch Video:
[Mixed-Age Environments](#)

Environmental Tips

Thoughtfully arrange your space

- Consider supervision needs, number of children, staffing, and available space.
- Separation of play spaces simplifies the challenge of keeping unsafe materials away from younger children.
- Creating a shared space that is safe for all children may allow for easier supervision and can promote peer interactions among mixed-age groups.
- Offering a blend of shared space and age-specific areas for mixed-age groups provides a balance of ample space, access to safe materials, and peer interaction.
- If you have more than one licensed room and enough staff to provide adequate supervision, you can group children by age in separate rooms. This way all children have access to plentiful and safe age-appropriate materials.
- Trays help contain materials with small pieces, keeping them out of reach from younger children vulnerable to choking.



Height-adjustable tables help keep materials with small pieces out of reach of infants and toddlers.

Consider what materials are within reach

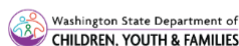
Keep materials that are potentially hazardous to young children out of reach and make smaller materials accessible to older children by storing and using them in areas where access by young children is not possible.

- An adjustable table can be used to create a space for older children to work, while keeping the materials out the reach of infants and toddlers.
- Store safe and simple materials on low shelving, and more difficult and complex materials slightly higher so that preschoolers can access them, but infants and toddlers cannot.
- Materials such as books, music, blocks, and dramatic play can be shared by all. Just be sure you adapt these play spaces to exclude items that are unsafe for infants and toddlers.
- Keep a choking hazard tool handy so you can check play materials for safety.

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Define spaces for each age group

Spaces can be defined in multiple ways, depending on the needs of the group. For example, low barriers can be used to define an infant-specific area where all materials are safe for the youngest children. You can also define an area of more complex materials where older children can play without interruption.

- Make sure barriers are free of hazards such as entrapment or pinch points.
- Potentially hazardous materials should be stored away from barriers to prevent children reaching over or dropping unsafe items over the barrier.
- Soft mats, rugs, or tape on the floor can also be used to define spaces.



This low barrier separates space for infants and the holes allow for peer interaction.



A soft mat provides a defined area for younger children, while allowing for easy supervision.

Additional Resources

Visit the [Meaningful Makeover](#) website for full episodes and more great tips!

References

Harms, T., Cryer, D., Clifford, R. M., & Yazejian, N. (2019). Family child care environment rating scale, third edition (FCCERS-3). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

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