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Creator: Gail Joseph
Managing Editor: Tamarack O’Donnell
Authors: Angela Notari-Syverson, Heather Floyd, Tamarack O’Donnell
Designer: Ceci Skolrud

Circle Time Magazine
Edition 2, 2019

For questions or comments contact CTmag@uw.edu

This document was prepared with support from the Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF).

For more great resources on this topic, and to watch the Circle Time Magazine professional development talk show series, check us out at: http://cultivatelearning.uw.edu/circle-time-magazine/
Physical and social environments impact behavior. Environments that are designed to be **safe**, **predictable**, and **supportive**, promote healthy social and emotional development. When infants and young children feel safe and confident, they are better able to control their behavior and deal successfully with challenging situations.

**CREATE A PHYSICALLY SAFE ENVIRONMENT**

*Physical arrangement:* A well-designed environment is free of clutter, has natural light, and good ventilation. Space arrangements, materials, and furniture are age-appropriate, comfortable, and clean.

The space is inviting, interesting, and has areas for different types of play. The environment has clear boundaries that help children understand how to use the space in an appropriate way.

**MAKE THE ENVIRONMENT PREDICTABLE**

*Consistent Schedules and Routines:* Schedules describe main activities and when they happen during the day. Routines refer to the more repetitive events that are planned parts of the day (greetings, washing hands, resting). Having a schedule and consistent routines offers a predictable learning environment for children, in which they know what to expect.

*Clear Rules and Expectations:* Rules are common standards for how children should behave in the early-learning environment. Behavioral expectations describe the appropriate behaviors expected from children during specific activities and routines. Educators who want to promote positive behavior, thoughtfully teach children rules and expectations that are:

- Developmentally appropriate and reasonable.
- Positive and clear.
- Responsive to individual children.
- Designed for greater access to learning.
- Respectful of family values.

**SELECT SUPPORTIVE MATERIALS AND VISUALS**

*Supportive and Engaging materials:* Materials need to be accessible, support children's independence and social interactions, and provide opportunities to explore and learn. An engaged child is less likely to display behaviors related to boredom or frustration. Selecting culturally appropriate materials that represent diversity in authentic ways makes learning more meaningful and demonstrates respect for the child and family.

*Supportive Visuals:* Visual supports help children know what they are supposed to be doing, when they will be finished, and what they will be doing next. Use visuals to share the schedule, explain routines, communicate rules and expectations, provide support for transitions, and more. This practice reinforces children's developing autonomy and self-regulation.
Positive Behavior Support (PBS) is a positive approach to challenging behavior that focuses on building social and emotional skills. PBS recognizes that all behavior communicates a message or need. Once educators understand the meaning of a child’s behavior they can, together with the family, teach the child more effective ways to communicate their needs.

Reflection Questions

- What rules, expectations, and routines are important to me?
- How do I expect children to behave in my program?
- What is my intent in having the rule or expectation?
- Are the rules fair to all children?

TIP: Self-reflect about how you communicate rules and expectations with children. Is your approach calm and nonjudgmental? Is it clear that the focus is on a behavior, NOT on a specific child?

The caregiving practices, routines, and expectations that we have for behavior are rooted in our cultural background and past experiences. Rules and expectations in an early learning environment reflect broad values and goals that apply to all educators, children, and families. Sometimes subtle biases that we might not even be aware of can interfere with our ability to understand other perspectives and incorporate other ways of doing things. The process of uncovering these implicit biases takes time and reflection.

Positive Behavior Support (PBS) and Supportive Environments

PBS is a positive approach to challenging behavior that focuses on building social and emotional skills. PBS recognizes that all behavior communicates a message or need. Once educators understand the meaning of a child’s behavior they can, together with the family, teach the child more effective ways to communicate their needs.

PBS Teaching Practices

A Continuum of Support

The Pyramid Model is an established PBS framework for addressing the social and emotional development and challenging behavior of young children. The framework offers a continuum of evidence-based teaching practices that are organized into four levels of support.

The second level of the foundation focuses on designing high-quality supportive environments for all children.

Supportive Environments

A well-designed learning environment is safe, predictable, and supportive for all children. When all of these components are in place, children can manage their behavior and explore with more confidence. Provide children with clear expectations, a predictable schedule, and a well-designed physical space and enjoy the time it opens up to engage and connect with children in more meaningful ways.

LEARNING ABOUT MY WORLD

INFANTS EARLY ON

Children who are at an early stage of social and emotional development are ready to learn how to:

- Observe and explore their surroundings using senses and a variety of actions to examine people and objects.
- Begin to notice and participate in routines.
- Respond to safety warnings from adults.

TODDLERS EMERGING SKILLS

Children who are at an emerging stage of social and emotional development are ready to learn how to:

- Actively explore the environment and show interest in changes in room arrangement or usual activities.
- Remember some routines and start some activities without being directed, such as getting ready for the next activity.
- Respond well to adult guidance, most of the time.
- Build independence.

PRESCHOOLERS INCREASING MASTERY

Children who are increasing their mastery of social and emotional development are ready to learn how to:

- Appropriately handle materials during activities.
- Identify simple rules and expectations.
- Follow most classroom routines, such as putting away backpack when entering the room or sitting on the rug after outside time.
- Adjust to changes in routines and activities when informed ahead of time.

For more guidance on building and supporting self-regulation in the early stages of development, refer to the following resources:

INFANTS EARLY ON

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Create a Physically Safe Environment

**Physical Arrangement:** A safe physical environment for infants offers protected space from older, more active children and choke-able materials. Furniture is developmentally suitable for infants (infant seats, high chairs, cribs, soft crawling mats, etc.). It is a space where infants can freely explore without their curiosity impeded.

**Teaching Practices**
- Ensure that play spaces are not cluttered or crowded and traffic lanes are open.
- Ensure there are areas for at least three different types of play and separate quiet areas from active ones whenever possible.
- Stay close by to see, interact, and respond to infants at all times.

Make the Environment Predictable

**Schedules and Routines:** When infants have a sense of what’s next and know they will be well cared for, they tend to feel calmer and more content.

**Clear Rules and Expectations:** When positive behavior expectations are consistently modeled, infants are more likely to demonstrate those behaviors as they get older.

**Teaching Practices**
- Learn and follow each infant’s unique schedule, routine, and cues.
- Keep the same general order of activities every day. Focus on the pattern of routines in the day rather than time.
- Talk out loud about what you are doing together and what you will do next.
- Repeatedly model and discuss desired behaviors.

Select Supportive Materials and Visuals

**Supportive and Engaging Materials:** Materials are supportive when they are easily accessible and engaging. Familiar and culturally appropriate elements help create continuity between home and the learning environment.

**Supportive Visuals:** Visual supports provide information with pictures and objects. Though infants might not initially understand what the pictures represent, they will begin to learn and feel a sense of control over their environment.

**Teaching Practices**
- Display colorful and interesting objects, pictures, mobiles at eye level for infants to look at.
- Provide choices of materials (both large- and small-motor). Organize them by similar type or use (soft toy area, cloth or board books, music, manipulative toys). Take photos of routines, then look at and talk about them together. “Look! First we changed your diaper, now we wash hands.”

Putting these strategies into practice helps infants learn to
- Observe and explore their surroundings using senses and a variety of actions to examine people and objects.
- Begin to notice and participate in routines.
- Respond to safety warnings from adults.
TRY IT OUT

Try out these activities and materials to create a supportive environment that feels safe and predictable for infants.

BOOKS

Make storybook reading a part of your daily routine. Looking at books together becomes an enjoyable activity in which infants feel safe and know what to expect.

Hands Are Not for Hitting

By Martine Agassi

Settle into a quiet, cozy area with an infant and talk about the many ways to use hands in a positive way. Focus on actions familiar to infants: waving, hugging, playing, eating, and drinking. Model actions and encourage infants to imitate.

VISUALS FOR ROUTINES

Use a First-Then visual to teach steps of simple routines. Start by selecting a couple of routines that happen each day (diapering, feeding, playing). Break each routine down into a two-step sequence.

Diapering example: First change the diaper, Then wash hands. Use photos or drawings of the two steps and put the pictures in order on a First-Then visual. Post the chart in the same area of the room where the routine happens. Talk often about the pictures and what you are doing.

VISUAL SCHEDULE

Make a picture schedule using a pocket chart or Velcro strip and photos taken of infants participating in the main daily activities and routines (i.e. arrival, playtime, outside time, mealtime, diapering and departure).

Post it where everyone can see. Point to the pictures and talk about what is happening throughout the day. Remember to be flexible and accommodate individual infant’s needs.

*HSCI visual supports and teacher tools:
http://headstartinclusion.org/teacher-tools#visual
PARTNERING WITH FAMILIES

Families have the greatest impact their child’s emotional well-being and development. Involving them in creating well-designed environments for children can strengthen the connections children make between their home and program learning environment. Be open to new ideas, though they may feel unfamiliar at first. Invite families to share information about daily routines and caregiving practices in the home.

- Ask families if there are familiar items from home that children would like to see in their learning environment to create continuity.
- Encourage families to talk to children about what they are doing and what will happen next during caregiving routines.

TALK ABOUT IT

Meaningful back-and-forth conversations help infants understand their environment and learn about expectations for behavior. Make comments, ask open-ended questions, and use novel words as you interact with infants during daily caregiving activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
<th>OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS</th>
<th>NOVEL WORDS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It’s time for your favorite song</td>
<td>You look wide awake. What would you like to do?</td>
<td>Nap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and your nap.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Diaper change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We change your diaper before nap.</td>
<td>It’s time to go home. Who is coming to pick you up?</td>
<td>Play time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up! You’ve put your arms up. You</td>
<td>All done with changing your diaper. What shall we do next?</td>
<td>Hello</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>know I’m going to pick you up!</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bye-bye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gentle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Quiet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TODDLERS EMERGING SKILLS

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Create a Physically Safe Environment

Physical Arrangement: When toddlers are safe and can use the toys they are interested in, they are more likely to be content and engaged, leaving more time for everyone to enjoy interacting and learning.

Teaching Practices

- Have spaces and related materials for at least three different types of play (active play, quiet play, and play with messy materials).
- Separate areas for active play from areas for quiet play and have a space for privacy.
- Arrange space to have clear traffic lanes and the ability to see and support all children.

Make the Environment Predictable

Schedule and Routines: Toddlers are just learning to follow a group schedule and group expectations. Be flexible and adjust duration or timing of activities based on children’s interests, needs, and individual styles.

Clear Rules and Expectations: When expectations and rules are clear and consistent, toddlers begin to manage themselves independently and self-regulate.

Teaching Practices

- Post the daily schedule and refer to it often to remind children of what to expect throughout the day.
- State simple expectations in positive terms indicating what the child can do: “Friendly touches please” or “Please use your words.”
- Provide encouragement and praise when children follow rules and expectations.

Select Supportive Materials and Visuals

Supportive and Engaging Materials: Carefully choosing and arranging materials that are accessible and ready for use enables toddlers to play with more independence and confidence.

Supportive Visuals: Using visual supports provides toddlers with information that helps them better understand what they are expected to do in specific situations. Visuals can also be used to support communication and self-direction.

Teaching Practices

- Offer open-ended materials (e.g., blocks, playdough, paint) that can be used for a variety of purposes.
- Post visuals at toddlers’ eye level in activity areas so children can reference them as needed.
- Point to and talk about the visuals often, and model behaviors you want to see.

Putting these strategies into practice helps toddlers learn to

- Actively explore the environment, showing interest in room arrangement, atmosphere, and activity changes.
- Remember some routines and start some activities without direction, such as prepping for the next activity.
- Respond well to adult guidance.
- Build independence.
TRY IT OUT
Try out these activities and materials to create a supportive environment that feels safe and predictable for toddlers.

**BOOKS**
Use your book area as an opportunity to connect with toddlers and help them learn about rules and expectations.

**Hands Are Not for Hitting**
*By Martine Agassi*
As you read this book together, help toddlers make connections to their own experiences of using hands in a positive manner during daily activities and routines (e.g., eating, drinking, dressing, undressing, saying goodbye). Encourage children to turn the pages, look at the pictures, and make comments.

**VISUAL SCHEDULE**
Make a daily schedule using a pocket chart or Velcro strip and photos, drawings, or free visuals from the Head Start Center for Inclusion (HSCI)* (see the Classroom Schedule template and Daily Schedule pictures).

**SAND TIMER**
Use sand timers as visual cues to let toddlers know what to expect and prepare them for transitions and taking turns with preferred toys. Explain why you’re using the timer: “I’m going to turn the timer over, and when the top is empty it’s time to go outside.”

**VISUAL SUPPORTS**
Make visual supports to teach routines, transitions, and expectations. Use your own photos, drawings, or download free pictures from the HSCI website.* Put the pictures on a metal ring to make a chart using sturdy paper and a strip of Velcro to hold the pictures.

**Routines:** Break down each routine into the main actions needed to complete it. Use a First-Then visual to make simple 2-step sequences. Put pictures (for example, the HSCI* Transitions pictures) of each step in order on the First-Then strip. Post the chart at toddlers’ eye level in the area where the routine happens and teach the steps. “Look Arlo, first we wash hands, then we dry them!” Increase the number of steps as each child gets more independent (turn on water, wash, turn water off, dry).

**Transitions:** As a transition approaches, select the picture of the activity that is coming next from a ring on your belt or Velcro chart (for example, the HSCI* Transitions pictures). Show the visual to the group or individual with a 5-minute transition warning followed by a 3-minute warning.

**Expectations:** Decide on expectations that are important to teach based on the needs of the children in your care. Based on the needs of the children in your care, use pictures from the HSCI Voice Volume, Classroom Expectations, or Circle Time Expectations visuals* to illustrate expected behaviors.

Place the visuals on a Velcro chart and post at children’s eye level. Teach the expectations, model them, and provide reminders. Acknowledge and celebrate with children when they choose the expected behavior.

*HSCI visual supports and teacher tools: http://headstartinclusion.org/teacher-tools#visual
TALK ABOUT IT

Meaningful back-and-forth conversations help toddlers learn how to navigate their environment and learn about schedule, routines, and expectations for behavior. Make comments, ask open-ended questions, and use novel words as you interact with toddlers during everyday activities and routines.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
<th>OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS</th>
<th>NOVEL WORDS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We’re going to put the blocks away, then go to lunch.</td>
<td>It’s time for lunch. What should we do to get ready to eat?</td>
<td>First</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First, we put our smocks on, then we paint.</td>
<td>We have a whole room to play in, what do you want to do?</td>
<td>Then</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use gentle touches when you play with your friends.</td>
<td>What are your favorite toys in the sensory table?</td>
<td>Loud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Soft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Walk</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Run</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Share</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Listen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Clean up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PARTNERING WITH FAMILIES

Families have the greatest impact on their child’s emotional well-being and development. Involving them in creating safe and supportive environments for children can strengthen the connections children make between their home and program learning environment. Be open to new ideas, though they may feel unfamiliar at first.

- Invite families to bring materials from home that relate to children’s everyday experiences.
- Ask families to share information about daily routines and caregiving practices in the home.
- Discuss families’ behavioral expectations for their children.
- Encourage families to communicate expectations by telling their child what they want them to do ahead of time, for example, “When we go to the grocery store, please stay next to me.”
- Swap information about a child’s interests and favorite activities at home and in the program.
PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Create a Physically Safe Environment

*Physical Arrangement:* Design the environment for active, independent exploration. Arrange the furniture to allow educators to see children at all times and provide children with support as needed.

Make the Environment Predictable

*Schedule and Routines:* A program schedule and daily routines provide a predictable and safe learning environment and offer a framework for setting and stating expectations.

*Clear Rules and Expectations:* Including children in the creation of rules helps them understand the need for rules and expectations. Teach rules and expectations. Provide positive feedback as children practice rules and follow expectations.

Select Supportive Materials and Visuals

*Supportive and Engaging Materials:* When children are involved in meaningful experiences with access to materials that match their interests, they are less likely to engage in challenging behavior.

*Supportive Visuals:* A supportive environment has plenty of visuals to help children navigate the classroom, follow rules, locate materials, and understand how to play in different learning centers.

Teaching Practices

- Use furniture, area rugs, and tape to define areas for different kinds of experiences.
- Offer space and materials for at least five different kinds of play, including quiet and active play, and a cozy area for comfort and relaxation.
- Arrange furniture and supplies so that children can complete routines independently.

- Post the schedule, teach it, and follow it consistently.
- Keep transitions between activities to a minimum and keep children engaged (e.g. sing a movement or learning song, recite rhymes.)
- State behavioral expectations in advance in positive terms. “Remember during circle time, please raise a quiet hand if you have a question.”
- Model expectations through role play, puppets, and stories.

- Choose open-ended materials (blocks, playdough, paint) and authentic materials that relate to children’s everyday lives and experiences.
- Choose materials that support learning outcomes: (e.g. books and dramatic play props for language and literacy, manipulatives for math and fine motor.)
- Use visuals to communicate clear expectations, support smooth transitions, and support engagement in activities and routines,

**Putting these strategies into practice helps preschoolers learn to**

- Appropriately handle materials during activities.
- Identify simple rules and expectations.
- Follow most classroom routines.
- Adjust to changes in routines and activities when informed ahead of time.
DIGITAL AND SAND TIMERS

Explain that timers show how much time is left for an activity. Discuss differences between sand and digital timers and how to use each. Teach children how to use a timer to know whose turn it is or how much time is left to finish up an activity before preparing for the next.

TRY IT OUT

Try out these activities and materials to create a supportive environment that feels safe and predictable for preschoolers.

BOOKS

Books are a powerful tool to enrich learning. Use them to prompt thinking and start back-and-forth conversations about rules and expectations.

Know and Follow Rules

By Cheri Meiners and Meredith Johnson

Read the book twice. During the first reading, focus on talking about the rules and teaching words that may be new to children (respect, responsible). During the second reading encourage conversations about why we need rules and how we have different rules in different places.
**VISUAL SUPPORTS**

Make visual supports to teach routines, transitions, and expectations. Use your own photos, drawings, or download free pictures from the HSCI website.* Put the pictures on a metal ring to make a chart using sturdy paper and a strip of Velcro to hold the pictures. Put them where children can access and use them independently.

**Routines:** Break down difficult routines into the main actions needed to complete it. Put pictures of each step (for example, HSCI* Transitions pictures) in order on the Velcro strip. Post the chart where the routine happens and encourage preschoolers to access it independently. Provide positive feedback on the steps completed and gentle reminders to check the pictures for any missed steps.

**Transitions:** As difficult transitions approach, select the picture of the activity that is coming next from a ring on your belt or Velcro strip (for example, the HSCI* Transition pictures). Show the visual to the group or individuals, giving a 5-minute transitions warning followed by a 3-minute warning. This will help children understand and emotionally prepare for the upcoming transition.

**Expectations:** When introducing a new activity (e.g. walking to a park) or approaching a time of day when you want to see more positive behaviors, clearly state your expectations ahead of time. Use visual pictures to teach and illustrate the wanted behaviors (for example, the HSCI* Voice Volume, Classroom Expectations, or Circle Time Expectations pictures.) Acknowledge and celebrate children when they choose the expected behaviors.

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**VISUAL SCHEDULE**

Make a visual schedule using a pocket chart or a poster. Write the times and names of each daily activity along with photos or free visuals from the Head Start Center for Inclusion (HSCI)* (see the Classroom Schedule template and Daily Schedule visual support.)

Teach children to reference the schedule independently using gentle reminders and prompts. As you go through the day, let children flip the card or mark the completed activities with a clip as an activity is completed.

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*HSCI visual supports and teacher tools: [http://headstartinclusion.org/teacher-tools#visual](http://headstartinclusion.org/teacher-tools#visual)
TALK ABOUT IT

Meaningful back-and-forth conversations help children learn how to navigate their environment and learn about the program schedule, routines and expectations for behavior. Make comments, ask open-ended questions, and use novel words as you engage in conversations with preschoolers throughout the day.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
<th>OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS</th>
<th>NOVEL WORDS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Five minutes to snack. It’s almost time to clean up.</td>
<td>What do we usually do after we come in from outdoor play?</td>
<td>Schedule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raise a quiet hand if you have an idea.</td>
<td>You finished reading your book. What comes next?</td>
<td>Rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remember to use your walking feet.</td>
<td>What do you do at home to get ready for lunch?</td>
<td>Behavior</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PARTNERING WITH FAMILIES

Families have the greatest impact on their child’s emotional well-being and development. Involving them in creating safe and supportive environments for children can strengthen the connections children make between their home and program learning environment. Be open to new ideas, though they may feel unfamiliar at first.

- Invite families to bring authentic materials from home that relate to children’s everyday experiences.
- Ask families about how their child participates in daily routines at home.
- Invite families to share examples of rules and expectations they have in their home and how they communicate expectations with their children.
- Share examples of visual supports that families may want to use to help their child follow expectations at home.
Green Light, Red Light

Positive or green light thinking is one approach to building resilience. Just like the traffic lights, green light thinking focuses on moving forward in a positive direction. Red light thinking instead dwells on the negative and puts up obstacles to finding solutions. Choose to think in a green light way!

• Acknowledge how you are feeling.
• Reflect and think.
• Are your thoughts red light or green light?
• Choose green light thinking. Look for the positives and find a solution.

Ideas to Try

Set a personal goal or note the strategies you are excited to try.

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

How Did It Work?

Jot down what worked well and how you felt about trying it. Is there something you’d like to do differently? Note that, too!

________________________________________

________________________________________

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________________________________________