



NATIONAL CENTER ON

Early Childhood Development, Teaching and Learning



Disabilities Services Newsletter

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Adapting the Environment to Support Engagement

Effective, engaging, and accessible environments have age-appropriate equipment, materials, supplies, and physical spaces. They also include developmentally appropriate schedules, lesson plans, and experiences. All of these materials can be adapted by staff and families to support all children, especially those suspected of or diagnosed with disabilities.

Read About It



Ms. Martinez, the disabilities coordinator, looks at the playground as she pulls up to the Head Start center. She sees Trisha, a 4-year-old with cerebral palsy, sitting in her wheelchair listening to Mr. Ray read to her. Mr. Ray called Ms. Martinez last week to ask how to better meet Trisha's needs. He makes sure Trisha can get around in the classroom, but he isn't sure how to help her engage in activities. Trisha talks and laughs with her friends while they play and Mr. Ray helps her take part when he can. However, he realizes it would be better for her to be more independent.

Ms. Martinez came to meet with Mr. Ray to share ideas about adapting materials to help Trisha participate more fully.

Division for Early Childhood (DEC) Recommended Practices: Environment

The DEC Recommended Practices on adapting and modifying the environment provide practices that teachers, home visitors, coordinators, and other caregivers can use. Learn to improve learning outcomes and promote the development of young children with disabilities or suspected delays and those with chronic health conditions.

Examples of the environment practices that Ms. Martinez and Mr. Ray can draw on to promote children's access to and participation in learning experiences are:

- Provide services and supports in natural and inclusive environments during daily routines and activities
- Consider implementing **Universal Design for Learning** principles to create accessible environments
- Work with families and other adults to:
 - Modify and adapt the physical, social, and temporal environments
 - Identify each child's needs for assistive technology

- Acquire or create appropriate assistive technology

Take a Look

CONNECT Module 5: Assistive Technology

Explore videos, activities, and narratives for effective practices to support full participation by children with disabilities or suspected delays in your learning experiences and environment. This CONNECT module offers an evidence-based approach to professional development. It includes helpful resources that Ms. Martinez could share with Mr. Ray and the other education staff in his program, including:

- **Video 5.4: Perl Using a Switch and Stander**

See examples of two adaptations, a switch device and a box, that help a preschool child with motor challenges to participate in a game with another child. Ms. Martinez could use this video when discussing options for adapting materials to help Trisha participate more independently.

- **Handout 5.3: Examples of Assistive Technology Adaptations**

Find out how to adapt existing toys, learning materials, and other everyday items for use by children with disabilities or suspected delays. These adaptations serve a wide variety of purposes so children can take part in all types of learning activities.

Try It Out

Environmental Support

Review strategies for using environmental support to increase the participation of children who need more support or challenge. Ms. Martinez and Mr. Ray could use the information provided to help Trisha take part in classroom activities. Find links to supporting materials, including tips, tools, and resources for teachers, supervisors, and trainers.

Environmental Adaptations Checklist

This checklist outlines environmental adaptations that promote child participation. Mr. Ray could use this checklist to do a self-evaluation. He could then work with Ms. Martinez to decide next steps for using adaptations to better support Trisha's participation.

Improve Your Practice

Materials Adaptation

See what strategies for adapting materials to support individualization look like in the classroom. Mr. Ray could use the related **Tips for Teachers** handout to get ideas. Ms. Martinez could use the **presenter notes and learning activities** when she meets with the staff.

Families, Too!

Everyday Learning at Home – Learning Guide: Environmental Adaptations and Modifications

Families will find ideas for adapting materials and the environment to increase their child's ability to take part in everyday activities. Review examples of what the practice looks like and how to know it is working.

Note: The resources offered here are only a sampling of the array of resources available on these practices.

Ongoing Features

Free Access to a Specially Selected Article from Young Exceptional Children (YEC)

Read the YEC article, **Assistive and Instructional Technology: Understanding the Differences to Enhance Programming and Teaching**. It is available through this newsletter until Dec. 31, 2017.

Head Start Disabilities/Inclusion Network

Engage with Head Start disabilities/inclusion peers around the country in an online community hosted on the MyPeers platform. Our community now has more than 1,000 members who are sharing resources, engaging in conversations, and asking questions. **Register now** as a member of MyPeers. If you are already a member of MyPeers, find the Head Start Disabilities/Inclusion Network community under "All Communities" and select the blue "Join" button.

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We Want to Hear from You

The Disabilities Services Newsletter is produced monthly by the National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning. Submit questions or suggestions for newsletter topics to ecdtl@ecetta.info.

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