

Tip Sheet: *Modifying the Class Environment - Centers*

Environmental Modifications

Many teachers begin the day by offering children fun activities that entice children to play, for example, adding new colors to the easel, mixing water and starch in the sensory table, placing boxes in the dramatic arts center for fort-building. Whatever the activity, children are attracted by the novelty and get to playing by picking up a paintbrush, touching the goop, or stacking boxes.

However, what if the child is blind or doesn't use his or her hands to play? Children with unique abilities often play differently than their peers without disabilities. Planning for children with unique abilities in daily activities is called inclusion. Simple modifications to activities can help ALL children be part of the classroom.

Adapted from McCormick, L. & Feeney, S. (1995). Modifying and expanding activities for children with disabilities. Young Children, 50(4), 10-17.

Sand & Water

Add Sensory Cues

Use a variety of textures such as sensory beads, water beads, different-sized cut up papers, shaving cream, frozen paint, or mud

Stabilize it

Raise the table to ensure access to wide areas of the table, adapt the position of the table to meet the needs of the children. Make sure all adaptations to the table are sturdy.

Contain it

If no table is available, make individual containers of water and sand using small bins or buckets

Simplify it

Ensure that the table contains a range of toys to meet different developmental needs. Have a range of simple to complex pouring, sifting, and squeezing toys.

Use an alternative

Attach a switch to a small fan that can be operated by a child who has difficulty manipulating toys. Fan can help blow soap bubbles, streamers, or pin wheels.



Blocks

Add Sensory Cues

Experiment with blocks of different textures and colors. Glue sand paper or patterned paper to your unit blocks.

Stabilize it

Use blocks or tiles with magnets or Velcro.

Contain it

Play with blocks on a table. Use a tray.

Simplify it

Use fewer blocks; start a tower for a child.

Use an alternative

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Stack beanbags, bottle caps, cups, shoeboxes, sticks, stones, and other natural materials, etc.

Dramatic Play

Add Sensory Cues

Add 3D labels on shelves: glue a fork to the drawer that stores the utensils to identify that drawer as the utensils drawer.

Stabilize it

Toy furniture can have large knobs and handles to open. Raise doll cradles and doll houses to usable heights.

Contain it

Use shelf liners to stabilize plates and pots for children to pretend mix.

Simplify it

Keep the organization of the space the same even when you change themes. Designate the area with a different- colored rug. Provide dress up clothes with large head openings and Velcro instead of buttons and zippers.

Art

Add Sensory Cues

Place a raised or textured background for painting and writing (think of leaf rubbings in the fall or using rubbing plates). Wrap crayons or paintbrush handles with foam or Velcro for a better grip. Add scents to the paint.

Stabilize it

Drawing and painting on vertical surfaces helps kids position their hands more naturally. Use tape to stabilize the paper further or hold in place trays.

Simplify it and Contain it

Work in stages with fewer materials at a time. Paint with bingo markers, squeeze bottles, or other no-spill containers. Use other types of tools to paint, like plungers, combs, strings, nylons. Use spring-assisted scissors.



Library

Add Sensory Cues

Books with sounds, textures, and or easy- to-turn pages (tabs).

Stabilize it

Use a block stand, clipboard, or beanbag snake to hold a book open and steady.

Simplify it

Add picture symbols to the page to correspond with the words.

Contain it

Provide a cozy place for reading, a beanbag, rocking chair, or even a small tent – to block out distractions.

Use an alternative

A child can read and listen to stories using CDs or iPads. Record children’s stories and comments and play back.