

CREATING A POSITIVE PLAY ENVIRONMENT FOR INFANTS



There are many things to consider when planning a successful program for newcomer infants. One important aspect is creating the right environment. An environment that is welcoming and inviting will help both children and families to feel more comfortable.

In this tip sheet we will look at:

- Welcoming newcomer parents and children to your program
- Making your child care space inviting
- Involving parents in your program

GREET FAMILIES WARMLY.

The way you interact with children and families will go a long way toward easing any tension or discomfort they may be feeling when they begin your child care program. When you meet the newcomer parents and the child, be conscious of your body language and facial expression. Smile and make eye contact with both the parents and the child (at eye level) when you say hello. The warmer your visual signals, the more relaxed the parents and the family will feel.

MAKE YOUR SPACE INVITING.

A positive play environment is also a place where the newcomer families and infants feel welcome to participate, explore and manipulate all the toys and materials. Ideally, the space will be comfortable, organized and predictable, represent cultural diversity and respect, and encourage inviting choices and creativity. An environment like this will support the infants in adapting more easily to their new surroundings. It will also reassure the parents that they are leaving their children in the best care possible.

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CARE FOR
NEWCOMER
CHILDREN
RESOURCE
SERIES

POSITIVE PLAY ENVIRONMENTS HAVE:

- An attractive, inviting and cozy environment that stimulates the infants physically, cognitively and socially, as well as providing sensory experiences.
- An area where both the infant and family will feel eager to participate.
- A program where infant play is supported and encouraged through the experiences provided by you and your team.
- A predictable, consistent but flexible daily schedule so the infants will begin to feel secure with choices and routines.
- The day should flow rather than be over-directed, respecting each infant's individual schedule.
- An environment where social interaction is promoted between you, the parents and infants.
- A balance of active and quiet play.
- A room with familiar things including family photo albums, objects, magazines, music, maps, from the infants' backgrounds and countries of origin.
- Signs displayed with words and greetings in the infants' first languages to support speech development in both languages.
- A written and pictorial program plan posted on the wall.
- Play areas with appropriate toys that allow the infants to make choices.
- Easy access to an optimum number of toys and materials for the number of infants in the room.
- A variety of sensory activities such as sand and water play to help the child learn and relax.
- A room arrangement that provides opportunities for cozy one-on-one interactions between you and the infants.

INVOLVE PARENTS IN YOUR PROGRAM.

When parents are involved in the program planning, everyone benefits. Give parents the opportunity to share their knowledge with the team by asking them to share hobbies, songs, games, stories, holiday customs, foods and dances.

Make the parents feel welcome and needed in the room, especially in the first weeks while the infant is becoming familiar with the environment, adults and peers. During this time, invite parents to stay for as long as they would like to. This will help both the parents and the infants to move through any separation anxiety. After this, encourage parents to visit the room and to observe whenever they want to. Also, make it a practice to speak to parents as they drop off or pick up their children in order to build and maintain a relationship with them.

RESOURCES:

Debé, Carol. Mothercraft Infant Resource Manual. 2007

Visit cmascanada.ca for more resources to support your work with newcomer families



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