



Inclusion is welcoming and engaging environments

Environments in children's services should be inviting, welcoming and engaging. How the indoor and outdoor environments are designed, resourced and staffed impact on the experiences of children, families and educators. It is imperative that educators organise indoor and outdoor spaces that reflect the lives of children who attend the program, mirroring their needs and interests.

The environment should be organised considering the program context. Considerations may include:

- Size of the indoor and outdoor spaces
- Number and age of the children
- Daily routine
- Weather/climate
- Interests of families and educators
- Resources available

Educators can ask questions about how spaces are used and why certain areas may be under/over used.

Some questions to promote reflection

- Why is the sandpit not being used?
- Do we need new sand, new buckets?
- How often are educators positioned in the sand pit?
- Is the sandpit cleaned and well maintained?
- Is the space inviting, interesting and inspiring?

- Why don't the children read books outside?
- Are the books used outside just those that have been worn out and discarded from indoors?
- Is there a place outside to sit and read that is inviting and comfortable?
- How often do educators sit with children to read, talk, laugh and just be?

Both indoor and outdoor environments benefit from having permanent places and spaces that are not changed on a daily basis, but remain the same over time instilling consistency and confidence in children. Children know where to go to find what they need and can extend on their play from previous days.

Evaluating your environment

Is there a place and space to:

- Be quiet and reflective?
- Be active and vigorous?
- Meet and connect with others?

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- Encounter, interact with and appreciate nature?
- Take risks and try out ideas and theories?

Does the environment:

- Provide opportunities for conversations between children, educators and the community?
- Promote opportunities for children and educators to think, explore, discover and problem solve?

The environment should be a place where everyone feels welcome. How does a new person feel when entering the space? Do they feel welcome, engaged, connected? This sense of being connected impacts on our sense of belonging. The environment begins at the front gate and ends at the back fence. It is important to consider all aspects of the environment as impacting on the child's sense of belonging.

The environment should:

- Have an air of freshness and serenity
- Be clean, well maintained and organised with no clutter or visual barriers

- Reflect cultural elements that are important to the community
- Promote a sense of wellbeing, tranquility, wonder and delight
- Reflect choices made by children, their voices and their experiences
- Reflect the richness of the relationships that have developed over the years
- Respect and value childhood
- Provide rich memories for life (Semann & Shepherd, 2008)

Key Points

- The environment should be welcoming and engaging
- The environment should be reflective of the community
- Permanent areas allow children and staff to find stability and reassurance
- Evaluate the setting and ask questions about how the space is used

If teams are unsure or have any further questions they can contact the *ACT Inclusion Support Agency (ISA)* for further assistance on **6287 3330** or via email **inclusion@commsatwork.org**

Developed by Semann & Slattery for the ACT Inclusion Support Agency.

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