

Environments Affect Behavior

Look at these photos of infant-toddler classroom environments. Answer the questions that follow.



What messages does this environment send to the children in it?

Possible positive messages:

- *You can have fun here.*
- *You can express yourself here.*

Possible negative messages:

- *You cannot be by yourself here when you want to be.*
- *You cannot trust what happens here.*

What behaviors (positive and negative) would you expect to see in this environment?

Possible positive behaviors:

- *Smiling, laughing*
- *Active play with and exploration of objects*

Possible negative behaviors:

- *Screaming, crying, fussing*
- *Pushing, shoving, grabbing*

What emotions might children feel in this environment? How does this space help or hurt children's ability to meet their own physical and psychological needs for privacy, organization, personal space, and ability to move around? How does this ability (or inability) to meet these personal needs affect children's emotions?

Infants and toddlers in this environment might feel happy, frustrated, or overwhelmed. Although there are many opportunities for fun and active play, it may be difficult to move around, especially for children learning to crawl and walk. Also, there is no space for children to be alone when they want to be. The messiness and disorganization might make infants and toddlers feel like they do not know what to expect and cannot predict what will happen next. This environment could stress and overwhelm infants and toddlers. As a result, they may act more aggressively with each other and their teachers and/or withdraw from play.



What messages does this environment send to the children in it?

Possible positive messages:

- *You can trust what happens here.*
- *You can be by yourself here when you want to be.*

Possible negative messages:

- *You cannot express yourself here.*
- *You cannot do things on your own here.*

What behaviors (positive and negative) would you expect to see in this environment?

Possible positive behaviors:

- *Quiet play and exploration of objects*
- *Attentive listening*

Possible negative behaviors:

- *Crying, whining, fussing*
- *Clinging, self-soothing (e.g., thumb-sucking)*

What emotions might children feel in this environment? How does this space help or hurt children's ability to meet their own physical and psychological needs for privacy, organization, personal space, and ability to move around? How does this ability (or inability) to meet these personal needs affect children's emotions?

Infants and toddlers in this environment may feel calm and content or frustrated and constrained. The materials are not well organized; it may be difficult for children to find what they need and know where times belong. There is a nice display on the wall of the children engaged in reading, but parts of the classroom feel cold and impersonal. It is more adult-centered than child-centered. There appear to be few opportunities for infants and toddlers to access materials and toys on their own without adult assistance. The absence of pictures of family and friends and other home-like touches may make infants and toddlers feel like they cannot express themselves fully in this environment. The lack of warmth in this environment may contribute to feelings of discomfort and stress in some infants and toddlers.



How is this classroom environment similar to/different from the first two environments?

This environment is fun and provides many opportunities for play, like the first environment, but it is also well-organized like the second environment. This environment is more home-like than both of the first two environments.

What messages does this environment send to the children in it?

This environment sends many positive messages to children, including:

- *You can trust what happens here.*
- *You can be by yourself here when you want to be.*
- *You can have fun here.*
- *You can express yourself here.*

What behaviors would you expect to see in this environment?

This environment encourages numerous positive behaviors, such as:

- *Smiling, laughing*
- *Active play with and exploration of objects*
- *Attentive listening*
- *Children working alongside each other*
- *Development of autonomy (children doing things on their own)*

What emotions might children feel in this environment? How does this space help or hurt children's ability to meet their own physical and psychological needs for privacy, organization, personal space, and ability to move around? How does this ability (or inability) to meet these personal needs affect children's emotions?

This well-organized environment and accompanying predictable routines will help infants and toddlers feel calm and content. The home-like and child-centered aspects of this environment including pictures of the children's families and multiple materials, organized and at their level will make the environment seem familiar and will help infants and toddlers feel comfortable expressing themselves and doing things on their own as they are able.