

Environments Affect Behavior

Look at these photos of preschool 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, children working together*

Possible negative behaviors:

- *Yelling, screaming, crying*
- *Pushing, shoving*

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?

Children in this environment might feel excited, happy, frustrated or overwhelmed. Although there are many opportunities for fun and active play, it may be difficult to move around and there is no space for children to be by themselves. The messiness and disorganization might make children feel like they do not know what to expect and cannot predict what will happen next. This could create stress for children and, as a result, they may act more aggressively with each other and with their teachers.



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*
- *Attentive listening*

Possible negative behaviors:

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

What emotions do 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?

Children in this environment may feel calm and content or frustrated and constrained. The environment is well-organized, implying there are predictable routines and that children will know what to expect at school. However, the classroom feels cold and impersonal. It is more adult-centered than child-centered. There appear to be few opportunities for children to access materials and toys on their own without adult assistance. The absence of pictures of family and friends, children's artwork on the walls, and other home-like touches may make children feel like they cannot express themselves fully in this environment. Children may struggle to develop peer relationships and independence from adults in this type of environment.



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:

- *Attentive listening*
- *Smiling, laughing*
- *Active play*
- *Children working together*
- *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 children feel calm and content. The home-like and child-centered aspects of this environment will make it seem familiar and will help children feel comfortable expressing themselves and doing things on their own as they are able.