

Arranging the Environment

What is it?

Arranging the environment refers to the way we set up the *physical* and *social* environments, and the way we use *daily routines, activities, and transitions* to support interaction and communication between children and adults.

Routines are regularly occurring, familiar activities a young child experiences during a day.

Transitions are the times of change that occur in a child's day, such as when children move from one experience to another – for example, from indoor play to outdoor play, or from nap to snack.

Schedules can be thought of as predictable sequences of activities and transitions that make up a child's day.

PC TALK Strategy Video
Arranging the Environment



<https://talk.ku.edu/tools/videos/>

Why is it important?

Arranging the **physical** environment:

- helps facilitate learning and social interactions, such as back-and-forth communications;
- encourages children to initiate communication about things they need, want, or find interesting;
- makes it easier for children to see, feel, and find things to talk about.

Arranging the **social** environment:

- gives children opportunities to practice communication by building in time for play and social interaction and limiting screen time;
- prevents overly loud, busy, or disorganized environments that make it difficult for adults and children to have warm, engaging interactions and conversations.

Predictable schedules & routines

help children know what to expect and be comfortable and confident as they practice communication.

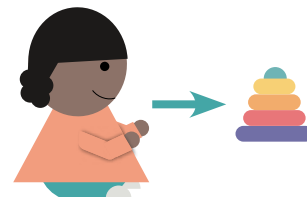
Transitions can be challenging for children. Explaining what is next or using a familiar song or game can help children move more easily from one activity to another and provide opportunities to practice communication.



Arranging the Physical Environment

Whether you are a parent or caregiver at home or a childcare provider at a center, arranging the areas where children play and go about their daily activities can help support growth in children's communication.

Display toys and materials at **children's eye level**. They may then choose toys of interest to them and be more likely to talk about these preferred toys.



Place some preferred toys **out of reach**, but **within view**, so that children communicate their requests for toys. Watch for children looking, pointing to, or talking about these toys, and respond to their requests.



Center Tips

- ✓ Arrange play areas, such as block building, books, art, or dress up, in ways that encourage play and interaction
- ✓ Partially set up a play area, such as a dress up or play house area, to give children a "starter" activity to expand and talk about
- ✓ Label shelves and containers with pictures of the materials so children know where materials belong to help promote communication and early literacy, as well as independence

Keep toys and books **organized** using shelves, bins, baskets, or boxes that children can access. This helps children find what they want.

Display pictures of children, family members, and caregivers on the wall at children's eye level to promote interest and communication.

Rotate toys so that children have opportunities to play with a variety of toys. Organize bins of toys that you can bring out or put away every few weeks. Even putting 1 or 2 toys away for a little while and then rotating them out with other toys can keep play interesting.

Keep household items that children should not have access to, such as breakables, **out of reach**. This reduces the need to redirect the child, or say "no."

Environment

Organize and plan
to promote
communication &
interaction





Arranging the Social Environment

Adults can support adult and child interactions and communication throughout the day. Both at home and at childcare, support communication and relationship building by building opportunities for communication into the social environment.

Plan activities that encourage children to interact and play together. Activities such as building blocks and musical instruments, encourage children to engage in social interactions and play.

Modify activities you typically engage in to promote social interaction. Even when children are too young to engage in cooperative play, you can start to build in opportunities to observe and practice communication.

Listen and respond to children's attempts to communicate so you can encourage them to talk. During your pauses, watch and listen for child attempts to communicate – this might include words and sounds, but also looks, reaching, or kicking feet to show excitement.

Position yourself and young children so you are facing each other and you are at the child's eye level, whenever possible.

Create fun pairings of sounds or phrases with specific actions so they become **predictable**. If a child puts a hat on your head, let the hat fall off and say, "Off." If a toddler is cleaning up by putting farm animals into a box, say "Good night horse, good night cow," etc. Repeat the routine several times to allow the child to predict and imitate the phrase.

Use community outings to provide new opportunities for communication. Show children how you greet the cashier in a store. Look for an opportunity to interact with the librarian, or with other children at the park, and **model** positive communication and interaction.



Center Tips

Consider ways you can encourage children to notice and observe others

- ✓ Position infants and non-mobile children so they can observe and interact with one another
- ✓ During book or circle times, ensure infants can observe older infants and toddlers and see how they are communicating
- ✓ Greet friends, using their name, as they join circle time in the classroom
- ✓ When planning activities, build in opportunities for communication and interactions
- ✓ Plan ways to introduce new vocabulary and provide opportunities for back-and-forth interactions between peers, as well as adults and





Environment: Schedules & Routines

Consistent and familiar activities that happen around the same time and in a similar way each day provide a sense of security and predictability to young children. They help build trust so children can experience and practice communication throughout their day and in a variety of activities.

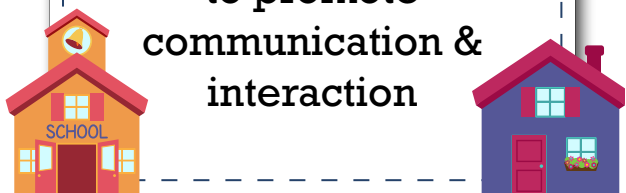
Schedules

- Use the PC Strategies to talk about the series of activities that will take place throughout the day. Refer to the daily schedule often. "First we will read books, and then we will have a snack."
- Refer to things that happened in the past as you talk about the daily schedule. "Remember, yesterday we went outside after naptime."

To help children who are learning the primary language of your classroom or children who do not understand many words, create a visual schedule with pictures. For younger children, or for children just learning about schedules, you can have a two-picture schedule, showing what is happening now and what is happening next.

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Center Tips

- ✓ Plan a general schedule that all caregivers are aware of and follow
- ✓ Build flexibility into the schedule to respond to individual child needs
- ✓ Create familiar routines all caregivers in the room can follow
- ✓ Talk about the activities of the day and what is happening next with the children

Routines

- Establish familiar routines to help children anticipate, prepare for, and talk about upcoming activities. For example, plan a naptime routine around "books, cuddles, and bed." The routine may include the use of some clearly marked opener/closer, such as a song.
- Build in routines throughout the day that are familiar and predictable, even if your day does not follow its usual schedule.
- Introduce surprises during routine care activities such as diapering and dressing. Place clothing items in silly or unexpected places, such as placing a mitten on the child's foot, or a shoe on the child's hand. Ask, "Is this where we put the mitten?" This is likely to draw comments from the child and keep the child interested in the activity.



Environment: Tips for Smoother Transitions

Transitions can be challenging for children. Explaining what is next or using a familiar song or game can help children move more easily from one activity to another and provide opportunities to practice communication.

Give a warning when a transition is about to happen. “In two minutes we are going to clean up. Then, we will have lunch.” Children will be better prepared to stop their activity, clean up, and move on to the next activity.

Use a visual to show children what is next or what they should be doing. Hold up a cup if it is time to transition to lunch. Show them a bottle of soap or a picture of hand washing if they are getting ready to wash hands.



Talk about the positive behaviors you see during transition. “Daniel is waiting at the door.” “Mel knows just where to go for diaper change.”

Reduce “wait time” during transitions by being prepared and announcing the transition at the right time. If children must wait, provide an activity to do while waiting. Look at books, encourage children to talk about what they want to do when they go outside, or involve them in transition activities, such as cleanup or putting on shoes.

Sing familiar songs during transitions between activities. Use these songs to teach language. For example, “Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes” or the “Clean Up” song can become a familiar “cue,” but also

provide children opportunities to engage in communication with adults and peers.



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Some children may need extra time to transition due to physical or social-emotional needs. Think about how other caregivers or children can help. Have a plan that everyone is aware of.

Environment: Books

Build a love of reading from an early age by being strategic about how you place and use books.

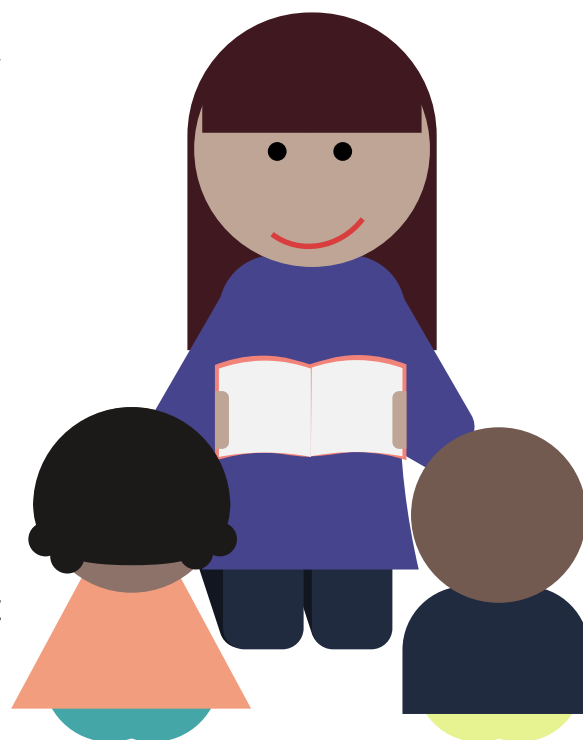
Display books so children can access them independently and request favorites.

Create a cozy, quiet book reading area to encourage time with books. Add pillows, blankets, and stuffed animals to make it a cozy, inviting area.

Have books available for children to look at on their own throughout the day. Place books on low shelves that children can reach independently.

Let infants play with books, chew on them, or bang them.

Include a variety of books, with some that are repetitive and predictable (e.g., "Brown Bear, Brown Bear"). When children learn what to expect next, they may be more likely to participate in book activities.



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Plan to have book time every day.

Structure book time so it is a time to practice communication. Give choices about the books you will look at. Ask open-ended questions about the characters, the story, and the pictures. Label what you see in the pictures. Encourage discussion and turn-taking. Book time should be engaging, and not just "listening" time.



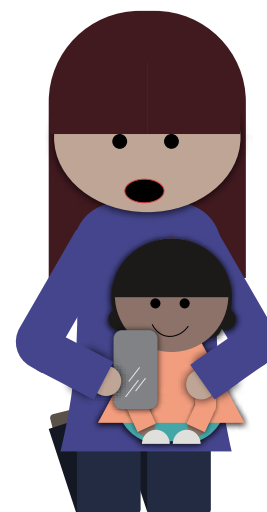
Environment: Technology Tips

Technology is everywhere, but pediatric professionals encourage us to limit screen time for young children. If you have questions about technology and your child, your pediatrician is there to answer your questions. Here are some ideas to help you navigate technology and young children.

If screens are used, use them in a way that **promotes engagement** and communication.

Use screens **together** with children, rather than leave children alone with screens.

Talk about the shows your child watches, or the games they are playing, and use these opportunities to encourage communication.



Only use apps or videos that are **age appropriate**, and use them as learning opportunities – engage with your child, talk about what you see, and ask questions.

Turn off the television, turn music down, and put electronics away during book time and throughout the day. This will help to reduce distraction and help adults and children focus on each other, and on communication.



Use technology such as tablets, phones, and computers **infrequently**. When you do use them with young children, do so in ways that encourage interaction and communication between adults and children. Play age-appropriate games with your child and talk about the game as you play together. Look at family pictures and talk about who you see.