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Planning for Activities That Allow For Differences, Preferences and Abilities

Each child is a unique person with an individual pattern of timing and growth. Children also have individual personalities, temperaments, learning styles, experiences, and family and cultural backgrounds. A developmentally appropriate program adapts for inevitable individual variation among children. This is done by providing a variety of materials and activities that support children's individuality and meet their developmental levels.

When planning activities for your center, please keep in mind that:

- ◆ The developmental range in a same-age group may be two years or more
- ◆ You may have individual children with other in-

terests or skills outside the age range of the group, and

- ◆ You may have children with special needs who require modifications to the activities in order to do certain activities.

In addition, children differ in how comfortable they are with different activities. You will need to be sensitive to cultural and individual differences in your children's preferences and learning styles.

- ◆ Some children learn well by listening. Others need to do something before they understand fully.
- ◆ Some children can sit still for long periods of time. Others need to be free to move about.
- ◆ Some children want to be able to do an activity perfectly before sharing their accomplishment. Others are more comfortable with the trial and error approach.
- ◆ Some children are very outgoing and outspoken with adults. Others are uncomfortable when an adult is speaking to them or watching them.
- ◆ Some children do not like being told what to do. Others need to hear exactly what is expected of them.
- ◆ Some children play comfortably in a group. Others prefer to play alone.
- ◆ Some children cannot wait to crawl into your lap. Others are uncomfortable with being touched.

Children need opportunities to repeat activities. With repetition, children gain increased confidence, skill and feelings of achievement. However, repeating an activity should be the child's decision, not the caregiver's.

Children learn best when they choose activities they find meaningful. As a caregiver, you should:

- ◆ Prepare the environment with a variety of interesting and culturally relevant activities that cover a range of skill levels
- ◆ Help children choose activities they are likely to find challenging and satisfying
- ◆ Listen and observe as children play with materials
- ◆ Rotate materials to maintain interest

- ◆ Help children's further exploration and learning by
 - Asking meaningful questions
 - Talking about logical relationships
 - Making suggestions
 - Adding more complex materials or information to extend children's thinking, and
- ◆ Avoid taking control of the play by letting children take the lead.

Young children do best working and playing in small groups. Total group instruction is not an effective way of teaching children or solving problems. Most conversations should be with individual children or small groups. Make sure that:

- ◆ Caregivers have many opportunities throughout the day to speak and relate with each child individually, and
- ◆ Children have many opportunities to express their own thoughts and opinions to caregivers and to each other in a variety of ways.

In order for lead caregivers for each group of children to prepare activities that are interesting and age appropriate, they need time to:

- ◆ Plan activities ahead of time, consulting with the program supervisor as necessary
- ◆ Coordinate with other staff members about their contributions to the curriculum
- ◆ Make sure all materials and equipment are prepared in advance and are in good working order, and
- ◆ Practice the activity, so the presentation to the group will be smooth and engaging.

Note: *There are disadvantages in making your own sample to show children. They may feel the purpose of the activity is to make something that looks like yours. Children can be disappointed in their own product compared to yours.*

Storing and Displaying Materials

Having an organized method of storing and displaying materials will increase the quality of the program you offer. It will:

- ◆ Set an example of care and respect for the materials
- ◆ Result in fewer pieces being lost or broken
- ◆ Cut down on the time staff spend helping children find an activity or its missing pieces
- ◆ Allow staff to group materials into areas, such as language, manipulatives, building, housekeeping, etc., and
- ◆ Allow children to feel more independent and competent.

Note: *You may want to choose some container other than the original one to put out on the shelf. Open bins, baskets, or trays are often sturdier and allow children to see the pieces they want rather than dumping the entire contents on the floor or table.*

Containers and accessible storage shelves should have labels to encourage self-help. Ideas for labeling include:

- ◆ Putting a colored dot on a basket and the same colored dot on the shelf where it belongs, and
- ◆ Drawing the outline of an object such as a hammer on the pegboard showing where the hammer should hang. As a language experience, write the name of the toy where it should be placed.

You need to have different levels of storage if multiple age groups share an area at different times of the day. Store materials with sharp, small, or otherwise dangerous parts out of reach of younger children and ensure older children pick up all small toys and put them away.

Materials should be rotated to maintain interest and meet specific individual children's needs.