



Ways to Adapt our Environment at PPRS for Activities

The essence of the experience of activities is not defined by the whim of the staff, but through careful observation of each individual and knowledge of the developmental progression: what is the next step for this person on the path to achieving positive outcomes in our PPRS environment.

There are several supports that need to be taken into consideration for an appropriate environment as per the Head Start Curriculum Requirements while working with children with special needs. There are environmental supports, material modifications, modifying the activity, using the person's perspective and peer and adult supports. All of these supports help to assist in having wonderful learning opportunities, tailored to their needs while at PPRS.

Environmental Support: Altering the physical and social environment and the timing of activities to promote a child's participation, engagement, and learning. If a child...

- Has difficulty putting toys and equipment away during clean up time, use pictures or symbols on the shelves and containers. Make clean up a matching game.
- Has difficulty playing near peers, plan cooperative small group activities with engaging and highly motivating materials so that the child is in proximity with peers while engaging in fun activities such as creating murals and building cooperative block structures.
- Has no play partners, build friendships by seating the same peer next to the child every day at a planned activity such as small group or circle time.
- Does not participate in learning centers during free choice time, create a picture schedule for the child. The picture schedule can have pictures or symbols representing the various learning centers organized in a certain order; 1. Art 2. Dramatic play, 3. Blocks..The child should be taught to refer to his/her schedule each time he/she finishes one activity and goes onto the next. She can also refer to her schedule when it is time for her to join an adult in a center in order to learn how to play there.
- Has difficulty making transitions, just before the transition provide the child with a picture or symbol representing the area or activity that the child should go to next. The child could even take the picture or symbol card with him to the next area.



- Quickly finishes with an activity and then has difficulty waiting for the next activity, open one or two quiet centers (such as the book area or computer) after the activity and allow her to leave the activity and go to one of the open quiet areas.

Materials Modification: Modifying materials so that the child can participate as independently as possible. If a child:

- Has difficulty standing at an art easel, lower the easel, give the child a chair, or use a table easel.
- Cannot reach the pedals of a tricycle with her feet, tape wooden blocks on to the pedals.
- Cannot reach the ground sitting in a regular child-size chair, place a stool under the table so that he can rest his feet on it and stabilize his body. This stability helps children more easily use their fine motor skills.
- Encounters difficulty using two hands to act on materials, stabilize materials using tape, Velcro, nonskid backing (such as bath mat appliqués) and clamps.
- Has difficulty with a skill or response required by a toy, modify the response. For example, if a child has difficulty turning the pages of a book, glue small pieces of sponge or Styrofoam to each page; this will separate each page, making it simpler to turn the page.
- Does not choose the art center because actions such as gluing and pasting are still too difficult or unsettling, use contact paper or other sticky paper as the backing for collages. The child only has to put things on the paper. ,
- Has a hard time grasping markers and paint brushes add a piece of foam around the markers and paint brushes to make them easier to hold.
- Has difficulty cutting on a line, broaden the line with a thick marker. Or, go over the line with glue, allowing enough time before art for the glue to dry. This raised surface will allow the child to get extra sensory feedback while her scissors rub against the dry glue.
- Shows minimal interest in the wooden blocks, wrap some of the blocks with colorful, shiny paper.
- Is not yet interested in books include photograph albums with pictures of the children. Make photograph albums of field trips, class activities, and the child's special interests.



Modifying the Activity: Simplifying a complicated task by breaking it into smaller parts or reducing the number of steps. If a child:

- Is easily distracted when playing with manipulative toys such as puzzles, beads, and such, hand the pieces to the child one by one. Gradually increase the number of pieces the child has at one time.
- Is overwhelmed by activities such as cooking projects, craft projects, and table games, and is rarely successful, break down the activity into its parts. Describe the steps in clear terms, "First we do (x) then we do (y)." Draw pictures of steps to make it even clearer.
- Has difficulty understanding stories, use objects or flannel board pieces that represent characters or objects in the story. The child may make connections between the physical objects.
- Has a long walk from the car or bus to the classroom, and then dawdles, complains, and sometimes stops and drops to the floor, put photos, posters, or other interesting displays at strategic points along the way. Encourage the child to go to the next spot and describes the achievement, "You got to the baby elephant picture< can you find the baby lion?"
- Has difficulty with projects that have multiple steps, prepare the activity with the individual child in mind. Some children may do the entire project. Others may receive projects that have been started and then they finish the last two or three steps. Consider extending the project over several days if children's interest will be maintained.

Using Client's Preference: Identifying and integrating the child's preferences for materials or activities so that the child takes advantage of available opportunities. If a child:

- Has tantrums and tries to leave larger group times such as morning circle, let the child hold a favorite, quiet toy such as a teddy bear or blanket. Divide the children into smaller groups so that it is easier for individual children to stay focused and participate.



- Has difficulty making transitions from one area or activity to the next, allow him to carry a favorite toy from one activity to the next. Alert the child that transition time is approaching and describe what will happen next.
- Does not come readily to circle time or other large group activities, begin large group time with a favorite activity such as blowing bubbles or singing that child's favorite song.
- Has difficulty engaging in new activities or learning centers or stays with one activity only, incorporates the child's favorite toy into the learning center that she rarely goes to. For example, if the child loves cars but never goes to the water table area, create a "car wash" in that area.

The above ideas reference examples of adapting a classroom. We believe that these same examples can be taken into the home or anywhere. The important concept to remember is that everyone can access their environment, they perhaps just need assistance to do so. It is important at times for caregivers to "think outside the box", how can we help this individual in their environment?