



Guide to MODIFYING ACTIVITIES AND ENVIRONMENTS



SCHOOL of EDUCATION
and HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
CASTL

WHAT IS IT?

Modifying Activities and Environments is a set of techniques to increase children's on-task behaviors. This includes:

- Planning activities to meet each child's learning needs.
- Adapting and modifying tasks to maximize active engagement.
- Organizing the classroom to minimize distractions.

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

- ◆ A child is struggling to complete the task of making a pattern out of shapes. The teacher adapts the task to meet the child's need. They provide patterning cards and encourage the child to choose one to copy.
- ◆ Children are playing with one another's shoelaces and elbowing each other during whole group time on the rug. The teacher moves the adjacent shelves back and encourages children to spread out to better keep hands to themselves.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Children are more likely to engage in learning when classrooms are well-organized, and when they offer interesting, culturally-relevant activities. This is especially important for children whose behaviors you may find challenging. You can provide support by adapting activities and/or environments to meet their needs.

Tips for Modifying Activities and Environments

Make sure activities are developmentally and culturally appropriate by including...

- Movement.** Preschoolers cannot be expected to stay seated for more than 20 minutes.
- Child Interest.** Consider the unique needs and interests of children in choosing content.
- Child Culture.** Be mindful of children's traditions, mannerisms, and interaction styles when choosing content and instruction type. Learn from children and their families about their cultural backgrounds, rather than making assumptions.
- Choice.** Allow choice whenever possible. Choices increase feelings of autonomy and help children feel included and part of the decision-making.

Be ready to adjust the activity to meet children's needs by...

- Adapting.** Add more support and guidance for children who may struggle. Add greater challenge for those who are more advanced or get bored easily.
- Engaging.** Keep children engaged by staying close by and asking open-ended questions. Watch for cues or signals that a child has reached their limit and needs a brief break.

Minimize distraction in your classroom by...

- Organizing.** Make sure classroom materials are well-organized, labeled, and easy to reach. Remove or cover materials that may be distracting.
- Rearranging.** Reduce wide-open spaces, and redirect "traffic patterns." Label and discuss boundaries and off-limit spaces.



TIPS FOR MODIFYING ACTIVITIES AND ENVIRONMENTS

1. **Make sure activities are developmentally and culturally appropriate by...**

- Considering children's cultural backgrounds, interests, and strengths.
- Making sure they are not too hard *or* too easy.
- Varying topics, activities, and materials from day-to-day.
- Allowing movement when appropriate (no more than 20 minutes of sitting).
- Offering choice when appropriate.

2. **Adapt and modify tasks to maximize active engagement as needed by...**

- Monitoring engagement level.
- Providing chances for children to get involved.
 - Ask open-ended questions, provide choices, and encourage peer discussion.
- Modifying and adapting activities as needed.
 - *Support* by simplifying, shortening, or scaffolding the activity.
 - *Challenge* by increasing difficulty or having an alternative activity.

3. **Organize the classroom to minimize distractions by...**

(see *Zoning to Maximize Learning* handout)

- Reducing wide-open spaces.
- Labeling and discussing boundaries and off-limit spaces.
- Keeping classroom materials neat and clutter-free.
- Redirecting "traffic patterns."
 - Place footprints or arrows on the ground to tell children where to go.
- Strategically seating or placing children in line.
 - Seat a child who may get easily distracted near the teacher or place them at the front of the line.

RESOURCES THAT SUPPORT MODIFYING ACTIVITIES AND ENVIRONMENTS

**Modifying Activities and
Environments**

[ECE Resource Hub](#)

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Zoning to Maximize Learning

[Available as PDF](#)

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**Universal Design for Early
Childhood Environments**

[Available as PDF](#)

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