

Adapting Children’s Learning Opportunities

Children learn best by being active participants within their everyday environment—whether it’s watching and listening to a wind chime blow in the wind, or learning the steps to handwashing. The more opportunities children have to actively participate in everyday learning activities, the more opportunities they have to practice existing skills and explore new ones. Make sure that all children can access materials and activities within their daily environments.

[Watch a video of this guide](#)

Environmental Adaptations

- Watch children during everyday activities to identify each child’s level of participation. Start with the interests and strengths of each child. These are motivators that you can use to engage a child in a learning activity. A child who likes trains and follows instructions well, may be more engaged during the transition to other activities if the teacher invites the child to chug like a train going from one activity to another.
- Does a specific child have a difficult time engaging in an activity? Consider the barriers that may be preventing the child from fully participating. Barriers for a child may be things such as not being able to reach toys, having difficulty using an object in an activity, or having difficulty following the instructions for an activity. It is helpful to ask, “How is the child currently participating in the activity?” and “How could he be more engaged during this activity?” “What changes can support or increase the child’s participation in learning activities?” “Could I adapt the room, a toy or object, instructions, schedule, etc.?”
- Try to use an adaptation that least interferes with the child and/or the activity. When possible, use the least-intrusive adaptation along with the child’s interests to encourage his/her engagement in learning activities.
- When using an adaptation, observe the child to determine how well the adaptation permits access to and participation in learning activities. If the child is more engaged in a particular routine, could the same adaptation be used in other everyday routines to increase this child’s participation? If the adaptation did not help the child participate in the activity, what might be done differently? Recognize that it may take a few attempts to find what works.
- Remember to reduce or eliminate the use of an adaptation as the child becomes more independent. For example, you may place non-slip shelf liner on the table to support a child in steadying and stacking blocks. As the weeks go by, you might notice the child is stacking blocks on all types of surfaces, and no longer needs the support of the shelf liner.



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A Quick Peek

Javier, a lively 4-year-old, has just joined Ms. Daria’s preschool class. His favorite neighborhood playmate, Nora, has been a class member since the beginning of the school term, and she happily welcomes him. Ms. Daria notices that Javier participates eagerly in group activities when Nora is also part of the group. One day a set of colorful felt-tip markers captures their attention, and they join several other children who are drawing at a table in the school courtyard.

Nora quickly becomes absorbed in her artwork, but Javier is frustrated by the uneven work surface and being unable to steady his paper and use the marker at the same time. Soon he puts his head down and simply watches his classmates. Ms. Daria quickly devises a simple solution. She shows Javier how to use a wide three-ring binder with paper clips to hold the paper securely for him to see what he’s doing and to move his hands freely. Soon Javier is all smiles as he gets back to work, just like his best friend.

You’ll know the practice is working if...

- Adaptations increase children’s participation in learning activities
- Each child is actively participating in everyday activities and routines
- A child’s participation increases in an activity or routine

This practice guide is based upon the following *DEC Recommended Practices*: Environment 1, 3, 4, 5, 6. The DEC Recommended Practices are available at <http://dec-sped.org/recommendedpractices>

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