

Everyday Learning at Home

Children learn best by being active participants in everyday activities like meal times, bath times, and playing with toys. Sometimes children with disabilities need help participating in a learning activity. We call this support an adaptation or modification. Adaptations and modifications involve changes to the space, materials, activity, or instruction to increase a child's ability to participate in an activity.

Watch a video of this Learning Guide

Learning Guide: Environmental Adaptations and Modifications

- Use adaptations that least interfere with your child's participation in an activity. Place materials and toys on low shelves so he can easily reach them. Be sure there is space for your child to move around—crawling, pulling up to stand, and walking. Remove objects that are a barrier or hazard. If your child uses special equipment such as a walker or wheelchair, it is easier to use on a smooth surface.
- Consider how a change to an activity could help your child be more involved in the activity. If your child has a hard time sitting still during story time, invite her to act out the story using her favorite doll, by turning the pages of a book when you say "next", or by giving her something to play with during the story.
- If your child struggles with stopping one activity and moving to another, you might introduce a timer that rings when it's time to end an activity. If your child has a difficult time putting toys away, try playing a specific song to let him know it's time to clean up toys or offer him "magical" clean-up gloves to wear.
- Notice how your child is using a toy or material during an activity. Adapting the material or toy may increase his participation in the learning activity. For example, if your child has a hard time holding a spoon, try wrapping tape around the utensil handle, to make it easier to grasp and feed herself.
- During story time you notice your child is having difficulty turning the pages of the book. By adding puffy stickers to the edge of each page your child will be able to slide her fingers between and turn each page.
- Remember to use an adaptation and watch your child to determine how well it helps him participate in the activity. You may see that your child needs more time to fully participate in an activity.
- Consider whether the instructions you give your child should be simplified. Begin by moving to your child's eye level and speaking slowly and clearly. Show your child what you want them to do, rather than just telling them. For example, show your child her toothbrush and pajamas to help her understand that "it's time to get ready for bed."
- Use photos or pictures to help a child understand what you are saying. For example, show your child a photo of her brother, the family car, or her brother's school to prepare her for picking her sibling up from school. Prepare your child for changes in an activity. Use "first, then" statements when moving from one step to another. For example, saying, "First we are putting on your coat. Then we are going outside to play."
- If the adaptation or modification has increased the ways in which he participates in the activity, could it also be used to support his participation in other activities? It may take a few attempts to find the "just right" support that works best for your child.
- Remember to reduce or eliminate the use of an adaptation when you begin to notice your child becoming more independent as part of engagement in the activity.

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

- The adaptation makes it easier to participate in an activity.
- Your child is participating in the activity for longer periods of time.
- Your child is exploring an activity or routines in new ways.

Learn more about adapting your home environment to promote learning:

- [ECTA Center](#)
- [Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center \(ECLKC\)](#)

A Quick Peek Ana is fascinated with crayons and markers. She enjoys holding them and comparing the colors. Her mother puts paper, markers, and crayons out for Ana to explore, but when Ana tries to draw, she becomes frustrated and throws her crayon. Mom knows drawing is an important early step in learning to write, so she continues to encourage Ana. One day she watches Ana during the activity and realizes Ana is unable to steady the paper and draw with the crayon at the same time. Each time Ana tries to draw, the paper moves out of her reach, so she quickly gives up. Fortunately, Ana's mom has an idea to tape the paper to the table to keep it still. This allows Ana to focus on holding and moving the crayon. Now Ana asks to draw throughout the day. Mom can see how Ana's participation has changed from engaging for 1-2 minutes to now drawing for 15-20 minutes at a time. She is excited to see that Ana has gone from drawing simple marks and scribbles to drawing lines, circles, squares, and other shapes.



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