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Adapting and Embracing the Environment: Fostering Participation for Children with Disabilities

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8 AM to 9:30 AM

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Adapting and Embracing the Environment: Fostering Participation for Children with Disabilities

Agenda

By the end of the presentation, participants will be able to

- Understand how the principal of universal design applies to environmental design
- Examine multiple areas of the environment for adaptation and accommodation
- Describe ways that teachers can monitor the physical environment for inclusive practices

- **WELCOME!**

- **UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING**

- **THE IMPORTANCE OF INDIVIDUALIZATION**

- **THE SCIENCE OF ADAPTING LEARNING**

- **ENVIRONMENTS**

- **SPECIFIC STRATEGIES FOR SUPPORTING YOUNG**

- **CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION**

- **CLOSING THOUGHTS AND REFLECTIONS**

Activity 1: Walk Through an Infant/Toddler Environment

(Adapted from "Child-Ready Checklist" *Child Care Plus+*, 1999)

- Purpose:**
- To help participants explore and analyze how the various areas of the environment and the things in them (including materials and equipment such as toys and utensils) can be adapted to be more safe, comfortable, appropriate, accessible, and easier to use for children with differing abilities.
 - For participants to experience what it would be like to be an infant with a particular challenge in a real life environment so they can analyze what modification might be needed to make it a space that is safe, healthy, comfortable, appropriate, and accessible for children with differing abilities.
- Materials:** ☆ An environment that currently is set up to serve infants and toddlers.
- Time Needed:** 30 minutes
- Preparation:** ✓ Tour the site first to be sure the "walk-through" will work. The site should not have children during this activity.
- Procedure:**
1. Take participants to an environment where infants and toddlers are cared for, one that is set up as if the infants and toddlers were about to arrive.
 2. Stand at the entryway and tell participants that you want them to experience this environment as an infant or toddler of a specific age who has a challenge. The idea is to see how well this environment works for that child, what challenges the arrangement of this environment presents to them, and what barriers they encounter.
 3. They are to imagine they are a child between eleven and thirty months of age who cannot move his/her legs. In pairs have them explain what age they are and what unique challenges they think they may face in this environment.
 4. Now have them go into the role-play walking them through it with the following directions:
 - a. You have just arrived at the beginning of the day. You are with a family member. Where will the family member put you? Imagine yourself either on the floor or in someone's arms or some place else. Put yourself physically at the level you would be if you were that child. Now look around this entry area. How is it different from your perspective as the infant or toddler with a physical challenge than it is for you the able-bodied adult?
 - b. I'm going to ask you some questions about how well

this entry area works for you.

Entry Area

- If you are old enough to store your own belongings, can you identify where the space is that is set aside for you?
- Can you reach the cubby or coat hook?
- Can you see activities in the other parts of the room?
- Because you have limited mobility, can you get from the entry area to other play areas without adult assistance?

Play Area

Put yourself in the play area now. You may need to imagine having assistance getting there. Stay in the role play and keep yourself at the level you would be if you were the child who cannot move his/her legs. Here are some more questions:

- Are there at least two toys available of interest to you? Can you get to them? Since you aren't mobile, can you reach/manipulate them?
- Assuming you can reach and touch a toy, can you make something happen when you manipulate it?
- Do you see any materials for pretend play that interest you? If yes, are they accessible to you?
- Are there sensory materials that interest you and are accessible? Do you have a way to explore these materials?
- Are there some kinds of "construction toys?" Can you get to them? Can you handle them?
- Are there some things that are appropriate for you and interest you but you can't get to them?
- Can you play here without adult assistance?
- If you need adult assistance, what kind do you need?
- Are there environmental adaptations that would further facilitate your playing in this space?
- Since you have limited mobility, do you feel protected from children who are mobile?
- Can you find a quiet area if you need it? Can you get there?
- Can you tell what is in the quiet area? Are there toys, books, stuffed animals or other materials that you can reach and hold, use, or manipulate?

Eating Area

- Now it's time to eat. How will you get to the eating area? Do you need adult assistance?
- Where will you be bottle-fed (if appropriate). Can you identify the place?

- If you eat solid food, where will you eat? If at a table, will your feet touch the floor? If not, is there a stool or footrest? Will you feel secure in whatever seating arrangements are available for you?
 - When seated, will you be eye-level with other children?
 - If you can see the eating utensils (cup, dish, spoon) are they appropriate sizes for you?
 - If you are able to self feed, can the utensils be easily grasped by you?
 - Can you get to the bathroom or diapering area without adult assistance?
 - Can you get up on the diapering counter by yourself or with assistance from an adult or do you need to be lifted up?
 - How easy it is for you to participate in your own hand washing? Is it the right size? Can you get up on it yourself?
5. After all participants have toured the whole environment, divide them into small groups and have them discuss their experience as an infant or toddler in the environment. Have them brainstorm solutions to the problems they encountered so that with adaptations, each would be able to participate to the fullest extent possible in the program. The changes may be as simple as placing the toys on lower shelves or adapting a toy to make it appropriate for a child's developmental needs. Tell them that the goal is to figure out adaptations so that the environment allows each child access to the play materials and settings.
 6. Choose one person from each group to report a quick highlight or two of this activity.
 7. Think of a typical environment set up for children ages 2-3. Think about what is in it and imagine a child in that room who is not mobile. What special environmental considerations would be needed to keep that child safe?
 8. Finish up by discussing what aspects of a family child care setting might work better for a child with limited mobility? What about a Center-based setting might work better for a child with limited mobility?

Expectation/Key Points to Make:

- Participants will gain insights into the experiences of children with disabilities in an environment that is set up for typically developing children.
- They are likely to discover such things as the difficulty of using a walker to get from one area to another, or that there are no appropriate toys within reach of a child who can't get

to them himself.

- Individualized care means that the environment works for every child in it, including those with disabilities and other special needs.
- Often modifications are needed to make an environment safe, healthy, comfortable, appropriate, and accessible for children with differing abilities. Creative solutions can be found to barriers and challenges within a given environment.

Special Considerations:

Alternatives:

An Imaginary Walk Through an Infant-Toddler Environment. Do the same activity as a guided imagery where participants are asked to think of a specific environment where infants and toddlers are cared for, one that they are very familiar with (only works for groups who have experience in infant-toddler care). Tell them to think of a child between eleven months and thirty months who cannot move his/her legs. Tell them to imagine it is the beginning of the day and the environment is set up for the children as they enter. During your walk through the environment, be sensitive to what the child can see, reach, and explore. Tell them to imagine themselves at the level of the child at all times. Use the questions above to “tour” them through the imaginary environment.

Using images to analyze an Infant-Toddler Environment. Use photographs or a video tour to explore an Infant Toddler Environment. In this variation of the walk-through, the participants analyze photographs of environments in terms of a specific child with a challenge. Even better would be to walk a video camera around a program at different levels (ankle level, knee level, waist level, shoulder level) to see the different perspectives and relate those to children of differing stages and abilities.

The imaginary walk is harder than the other two versions and tired participants may fall asleep! If you don't have a real environment to walk through, the other alternatives will work.

