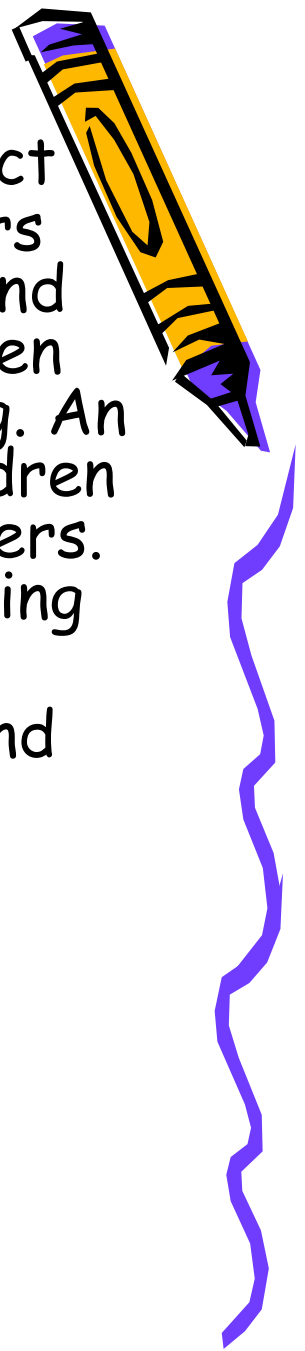


Chapter 2 The Learning Environment



The learning environment has a profound impact on how people feel, behave, and learn. Teachers use their knowledge of how children develop and learn to create an environment in which children are safe and comfortable and feel they belong. An effective learning environment also helps children develop independence and confidence as learners. This unit discusses three aspects of the learning environment:

- how to set up and maintain the classroom and appropriate physical environment
- how to establish a structure for each day
- how to create a classroom community.



Setting Up and Maintaining the Classroom

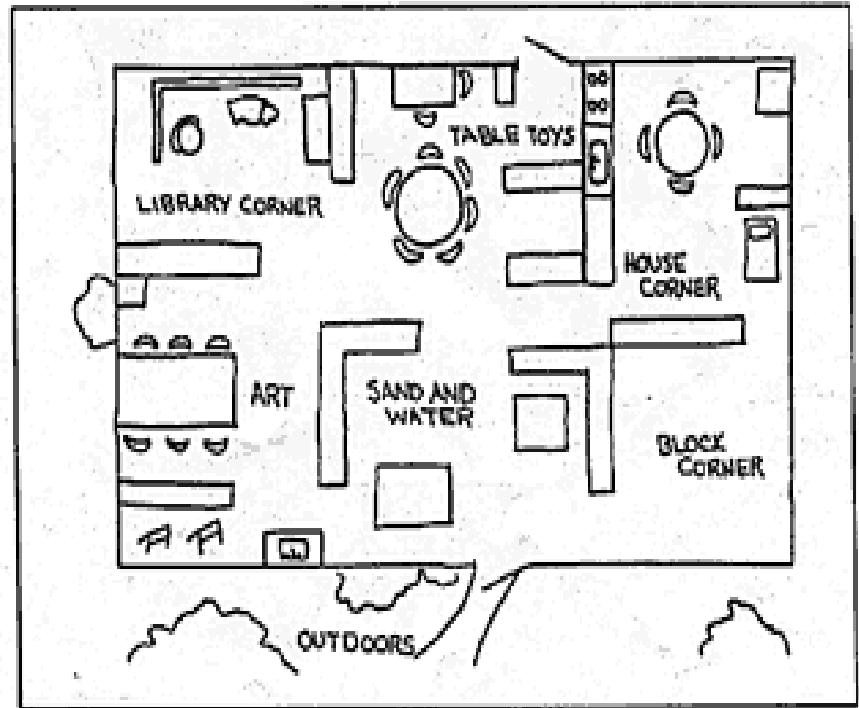


- The physical environment in your classroom has a profound effect on individual children, the group as a whole, and you. While you may have limited control over many features of the room, you do have options about how to organize furniture, what materials to put out, and what you can bring outdoors to make the total space available to you more interesting.
- A physical environment that is safe, attractive, comfortable, and well-designed helps children engage in the activities you offer. Such an environment can support your goals for children and free you to observe and interact with them in positive ways.



Setting Up and Maintaining the Classroom

The purpose of this activity is to give you an opportunity to consider how the arrangement of the room affects preschool children's behavior and learning opportunities.





- The physical environment sets the stage for learning and affects children's behavior.
- Think about a store where you hate to shop—a store that drives you crazy!
 - Visualize the store: what it looks like, how it smells, what you hear, how you act and feel when they are shopping there. What frustrates you as a shopper and what features of the store do you really dislike?
- Do these characteristics affect the way you feel and behave?
- Do any of these characteristics apply to preschool classrooms?



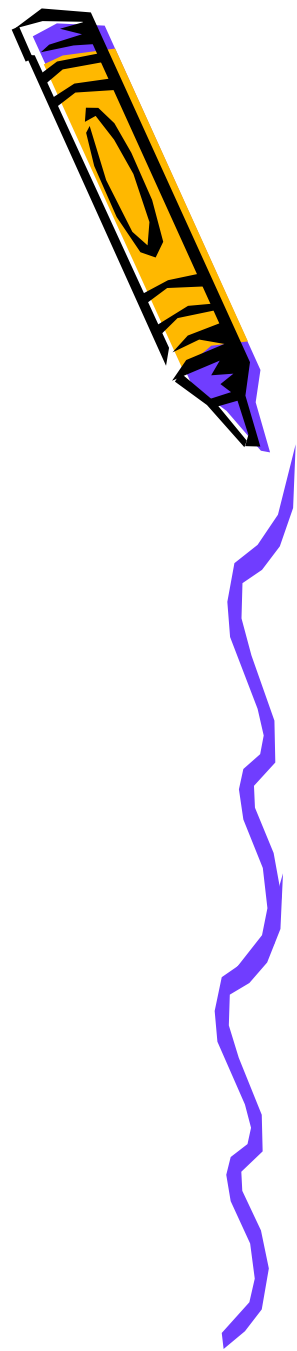
Pictures of Classroom Environments



- <http://treecitypreschool.com/pictures.htm>
- http://www.zebulonumc.org/class_pictures1.html
- <http://lobosfamilychildcare.wordpress.com/take-a-tour/> (Family childcare)



Establishing Interest Areas

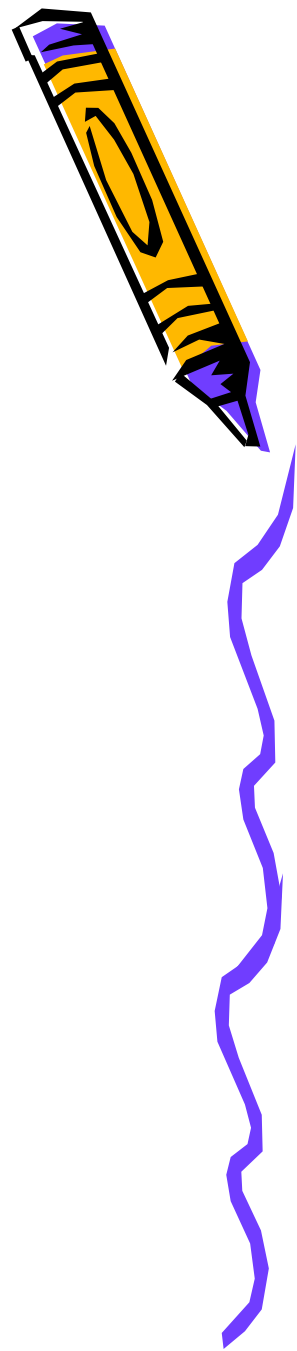


- Areas devoted to:
 - Books
 - Art Activities
 - Building area
 - Active engagement



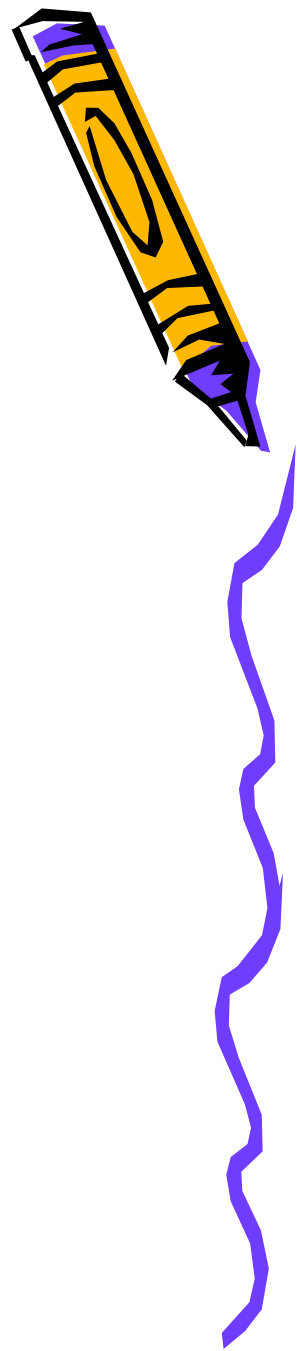
Other Aspects of the Physical Setting

- Group time
- Displaying art work
- Storage areas
- Adaptations for Special Needs

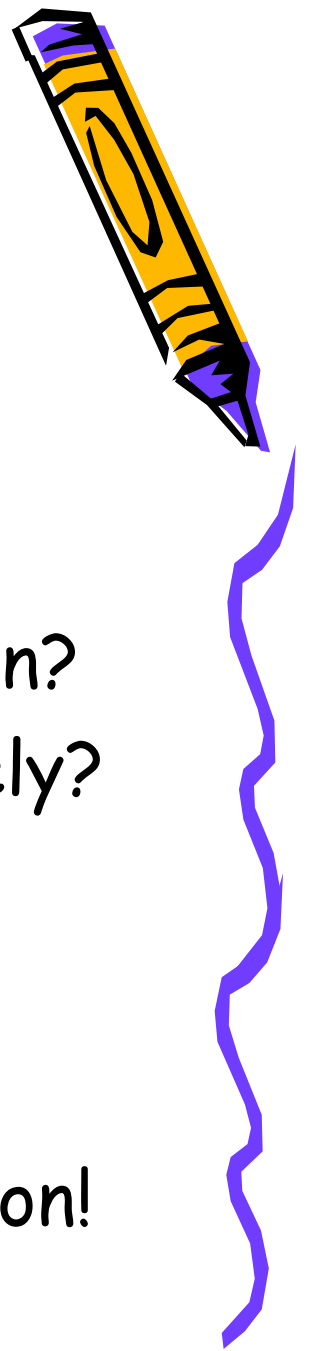


Caring for the Classroom and Children's Work

- Allowing children to care for the space will teach responsibility.
- Increase organization and independence.



Evaluating the effectiveness of the Physical Environment

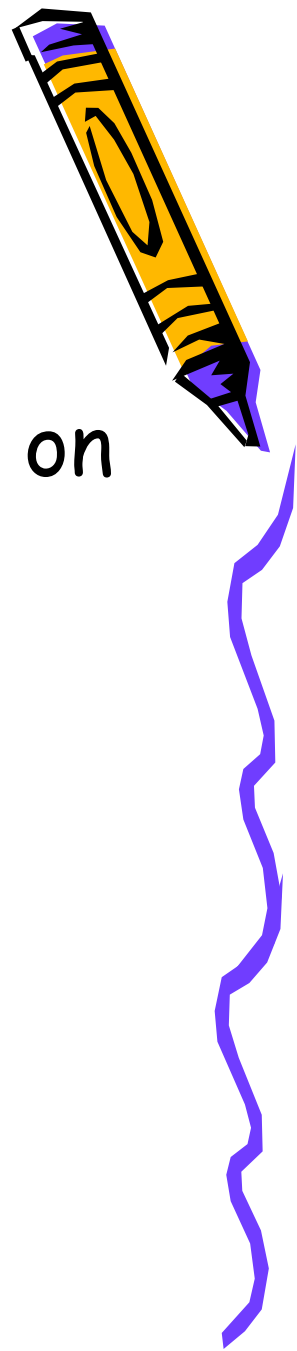


- A well organized classroom can be evaluated by the following:
 - Do children make choices on their own?
 - Are materials being used appropriately?
 - Are children actively engaged?
 - Experience Success when they play?
 - Behavior of the children?

Observation, Observation, Observation!



Video Observation Activity #2.0

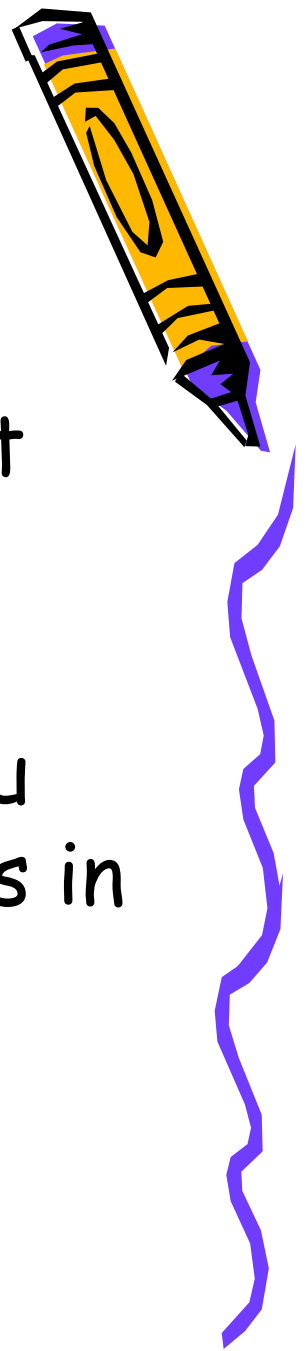


- Please watch and answer questions on Page 79.

<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel/modules.html>



Disruptive Behavior: Causes and Strategies



- Turn to page 81 and read the chart "Disruptive Behavior: Causes and Strategies."
- Think about your classroom. Do you see any of the disruptive behaviors in your classroom?



Teachers who are aware of the power of the physical environment arrange space purposefully to convey six positive messages to children and families:



- This is a good place to be.
- You belong here.
- This is a place you can trust.
- There are places where you can be by yourself when you want to.
- You can do many things on your own here.
- This is a safe place to explore and try out your ideas.



Summary

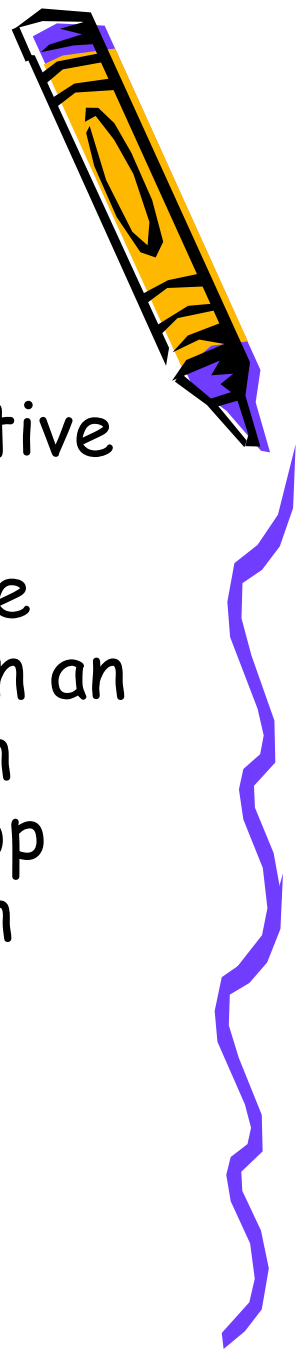


- The physical environment affects how children feel and behave.
- Preschool children like to have choices, to explore, and to do things on their own. They work better in small groups in well-defined areas. If we want children to grow and learn, and to begin to assume responsibilities for themselves and the classroom, we need to provide an environment that works.
- Teachers must continually evaluate the effectiveness of the classroom environment and make necessary changes.
- Meeting the needs of any child is about problem solving and revisiting situations to determine what did and didn't work.
- Children with disabilities are more like than different from other children.



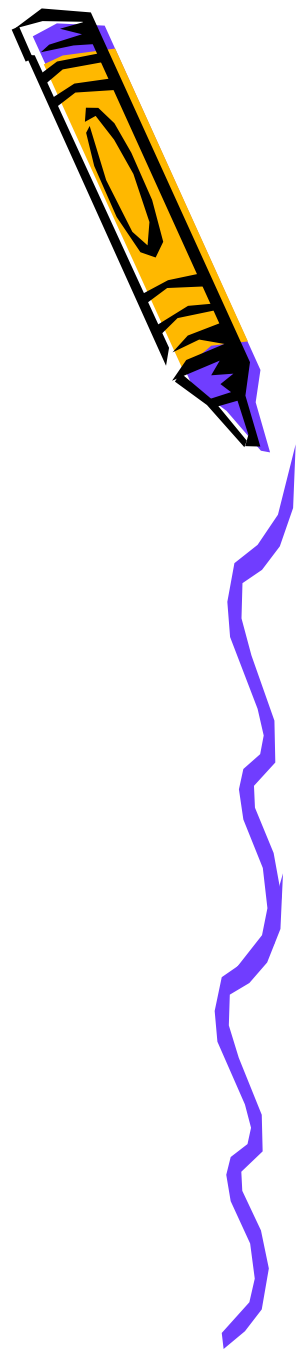
Establishing a Structure for Each Day

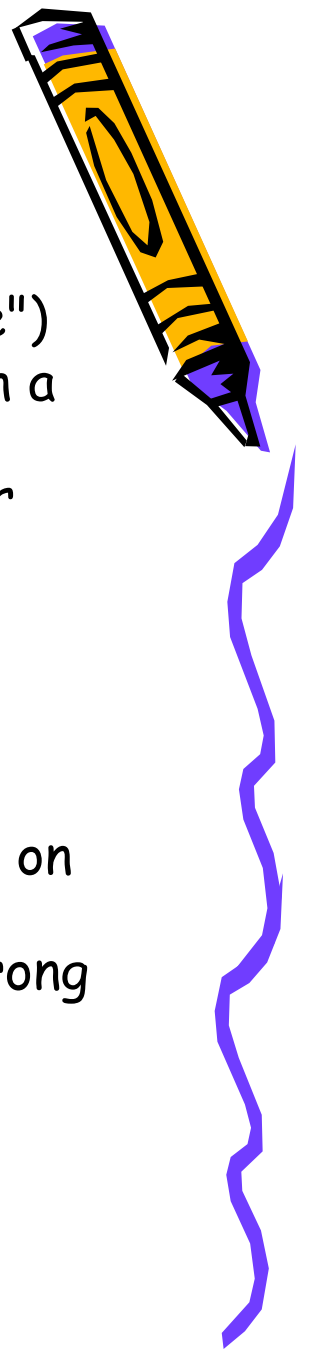
The second aspect of building an effective learning environment is establishing a structure for each day—the predictable use of time. When time is blocked out in an orderly and consistent fashion, children tend to feel safe and secure and develop increasing independence. When children don't know when things will happen, classroom life can seem chaotic.



Using What You Know About Children to Structure the Day

The purpose of this activity is to recognize the need for consistent daily schedules, to discuss the problems that come up during segments of the day, and their solutions.





- Some events take place every day:
 - Taking attendance
 - Large group meetings (sometimes called "circle time")
 - Small group time (work on a planned experience with a few children)
 - Choice time (children work in interest areas of their choice)
 - Mealtimes
 - Rest time
 - Transitions
- Each of these events can be a learning opportunity for children if they are well thought out and planned based on what you know about how children develop and learn.
- In this activity, you will think about what often goes wrong during these events and consider ways in which these problems can be minimized or eliminated.

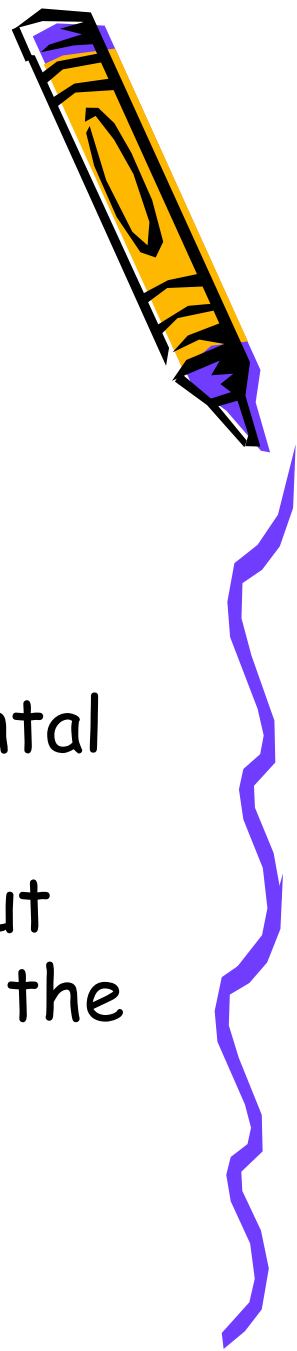




- Your group will have ten minutes to think about the difficulties you face during these event and record them in a column labeled "Challenges."
- 2nd Column will be labeled Strategies. Please list strategies and solutions to the challenges.



Summary

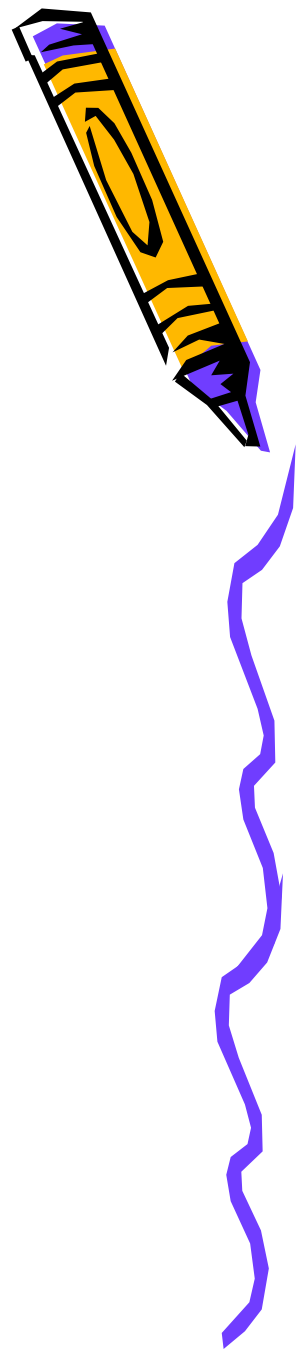


- Every event of the day offers opportunities for learning.
- Teachers who rely on what they know about young children—their developmental and individual needs and interests—are able to make appropriate decisions about the structure of the day and nature of the experiences they offer.

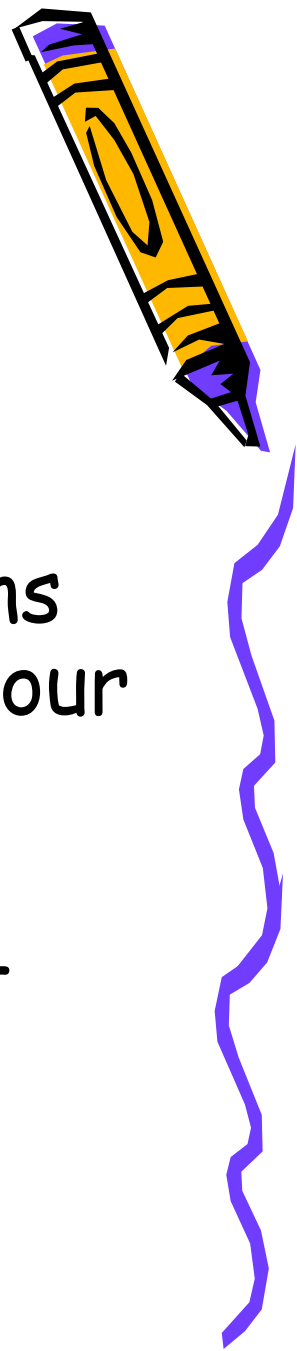


Your Planning

- What kind of planning do you do in your program?
- What is the value of planning?
- What do you consider in writing weekly plans?



Importance of Planning

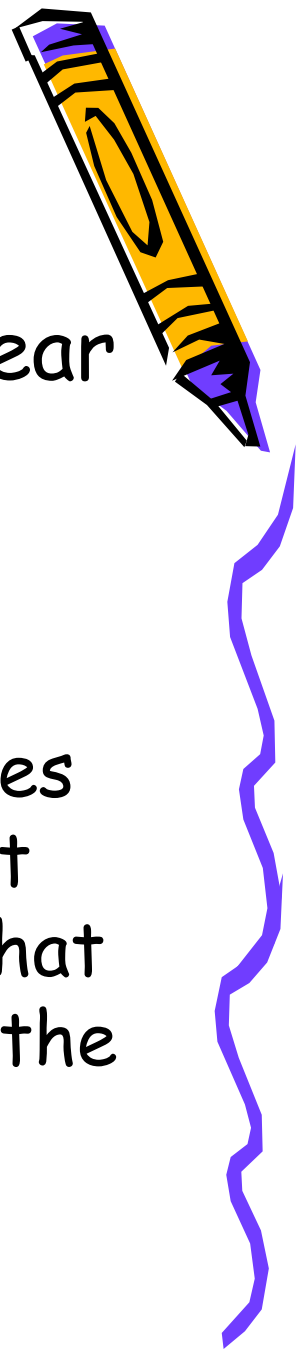


- Planning helps you know what materials you will need.
- Decisions are based on observations of children, a topic of study, and your goals for children.
- Plans often change based on what happens each day; planning doesn't mean you can't be flexible.

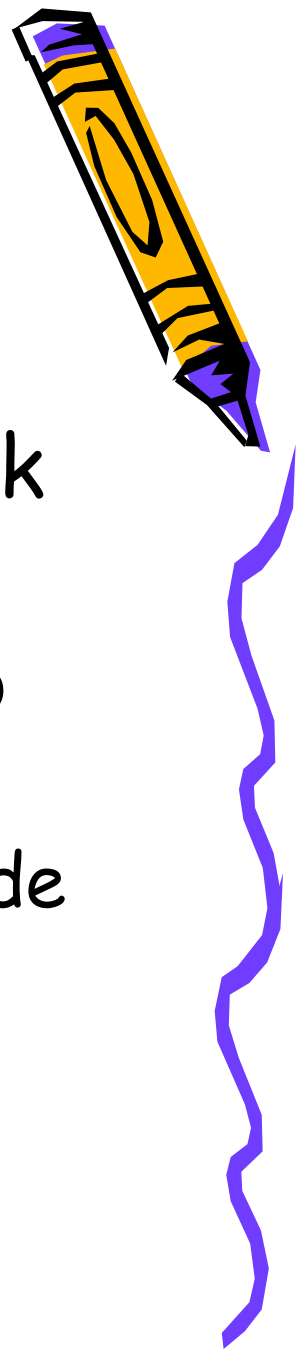


A Classroom Scenario

- New construction is taking place near your school. Your children are fascinated and are asking many questions:
 - What are they building and where does the wood come from? What does that tool do? What do those ropes do? What does that kind of truck do? How can the workers pick up those heavy things?



Plans Change



- Imagine that during the week the children notice that a cement truck is at the construction site.
 - You may want to change your plans to add experiences related to concrete.
 - What are some ideas you might include related to concrete?



Summary

- The Weekly Planning Form gives structure for planning each week and preparing materials and activities ahead of time.
- Teachers adjust the weekly plan to accommodate the children's changing needs and interests. These changes should be documented on the Weekly Planning Form and shared with families as appropriate.



Creating a Classroom Community

The third aspect of the learning environment is the classroom community. The developmental theory behind *The Creative Curriculum*® teaches that children learn best in the context of relationships. Because relationships with peers and teachers influence how children feel in school and how they learn, the social climate of your classroom is critically important.



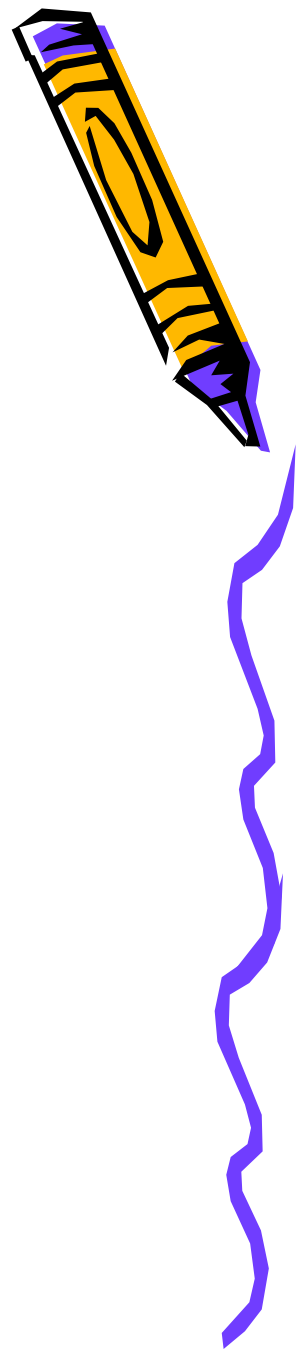
Creating a Classroom Community



- Relationships with peers and teachers influence how children feel in school and how they will learn.
- Community—a place where people feel safe, help one another and see themselves as part of a group.
- Learning about each other
 - All about me bulletin board



Learning about each other



- Find a person you have not worked with and share major events from the beginning, middle and future goals.
- For example, My name is.....





- Positive social relationships in preschool create the best environment for learning.
- Social problem-solving skills are taught directly by teachers.
- Teachers use a range of strategies for dealing with challenging behaviors and establishing classroom control.
- Positive relationships with teachers ready children's minds for learning.
- Each child needs to feel accepted and appreciated and have a friend.
- Children who lack friends during their early years are at risk for problems later in life.



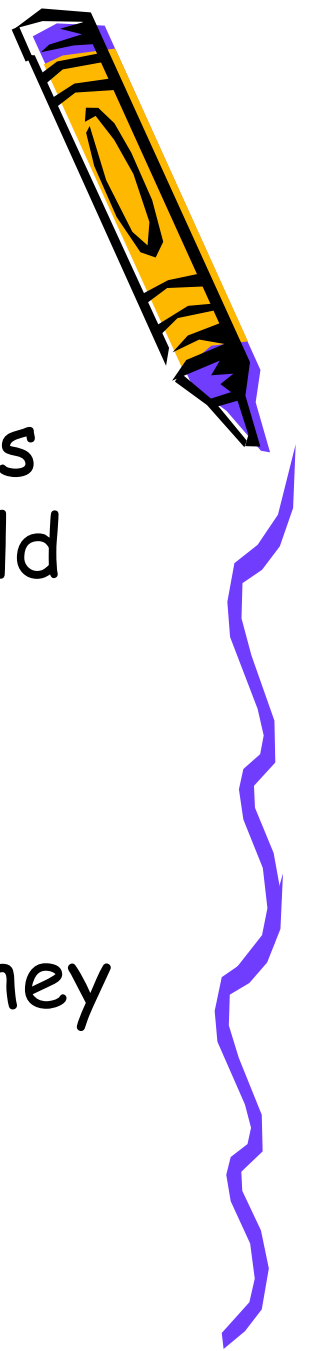
How do you learn about each child in your classrooms and develop positive relationships?



- Think of children who don't know how to make friends. What do you know about these children?
- For some children it is necessary to teach them how to make friends.
 - "Skills Children Need to Make and Keep a Friend" on page 106.



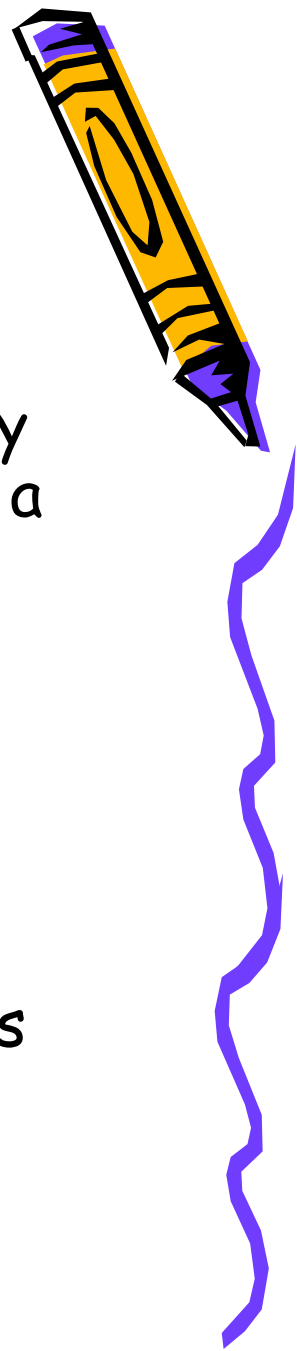
Summary



- *The Creative Curriculum*® teachers strive to make sure that every child has at least one friend.
- By coaching and teaching children specific skills, teachers can help children overcome the rejection they sometimes encounter.



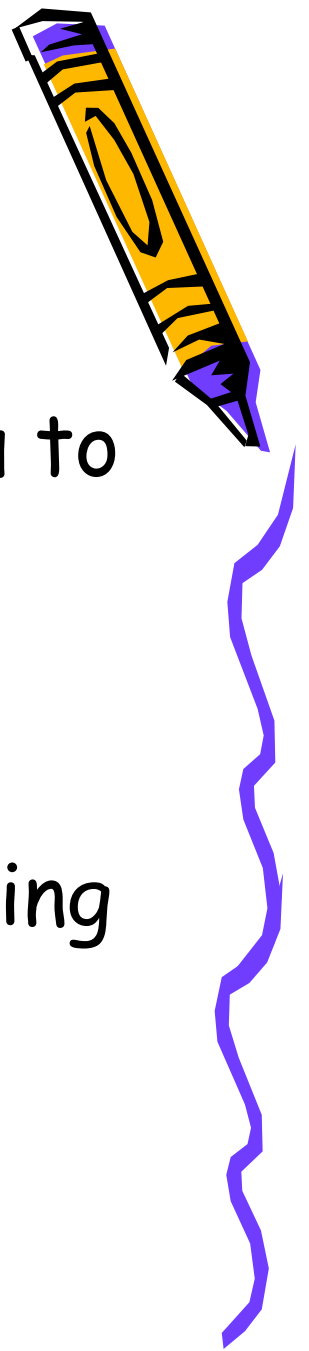
Developing Rules for a Classroom Community



- For children to feel safe and secure, physically and emotionally, a classroom community needs a few basic rules.
- Describe some of the rules you use in your classroom.
- Involving children in developing rules can give them a sense of ownership over the classroom environment.
- Pages 108 – 110 have important considerations about classroom rules.



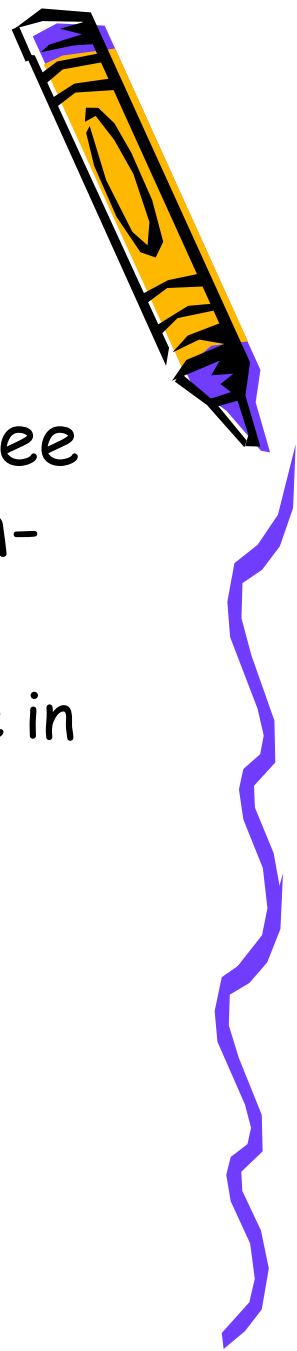
Conflict



- How often do children come to you to resolve a conflict?
- What kinds of conflicts come up between children?
- What are the advantages of teaching children how to solve conflicts?



Teaching Social Problem-Solving Skills

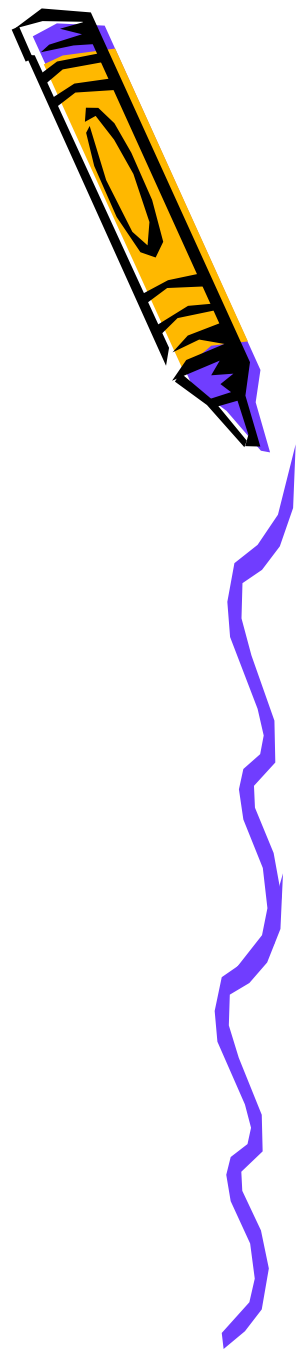


- Turn to page 110 and read the first three paragraphs on "Teaching Social Problem-Solving Skills."
 - Do you agree with the points that are made in *The Creative Curriculum®*'?
 - How do you encourage children to solve problems on their own so you don't have to continually mediate?



Steps for handling conflicts between children

- Pages 111 — 114:
 - Help children calm down.
 - Identify the problem.
 - Generate solutions.
 - Review solutions and choose one.
 - Check back.



Summary



- Conflicts are inevitable—they are part of life.
- Teachers who help children acquire the skills to solve social problems when they arise and involve children in solving group problems help them to learn how to live in a democratic community.



Responding to Challenging Behavior

The purpose of this activity is to provide you with practice in responding appropriately to challenging behavior from children.

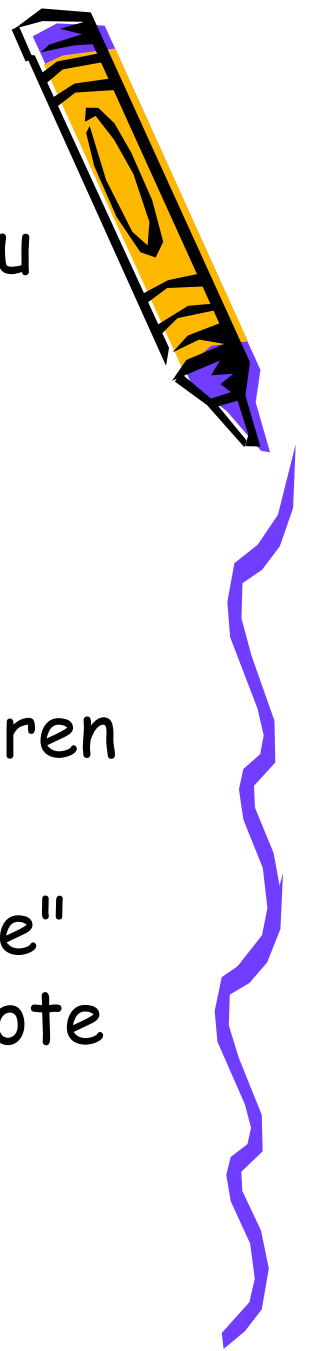


Have you ever said...?



- "Haven't I told you a hundred times not to do that?"
- "Don't you know better than that? You should know the rules by now!"
- "Instead of going outside, I want you to sit in the time out chair and think about what you just did!"





- How does hearing these things make you feel?
- When adults lose control, they lose the ability to discipline themselves or their children.
- Positive, secure relationships with children require us to maintain control.
- Discipline comes from the word "disciple" meaning "to teach." Our goal is to promote and teach self-control.



Summary



- In a classroom community, children learn how to relate positively to others and to make friends.
- Rules help children feel safe and comfortable so they can learn.
- Teaching children social problem-solving skills will help them get along in school and in life.
- Teachers use a repertoire of strategies for dealing with challenging behaviors and teaching self-control in the classroom.



Final Thoughts



- The learning environment is the starting point for implementing any curriculum.
- The physical environment sets the stage for learning and affects children's behavior.
- The daily routines and schedule bring order to the day and help children function as a group.
- Classrooms that function as a community help children relate positively to others and resolve conflicts peacefully.

