



Create the Perfect Play Space

Learning Environments for Young Children

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Disclaimer

This resource is based on the most current information available in October 2012.

In developing this resource we have referred to legislation and regulations, sought advice from professional organisations and reviewed contemporary research. This document should be used as a guide to compliment and develop service's existing practices, policies and procedures. Services should always check the currency of information at the time of use and consider the information in this booklet in the context of their particular service.

This booklet can be accessed online at:

www.pscalliance.org.au



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About the *How To* series

The **How To** series has been created to offer professionals working in the education and care sector in Australia practical support to implement the National Quality Framework. The **How To** series consists of seven booklets promoting key areas of quality provision. Throughout each booklet, there are references to national legislation (the Act and Regulations), the National Quality Standard, the Early Years Learning Framework (Belonging, Being and Becoming) and the Framework for School Age Care (My Time, Our Place). The **How To** series can be used by a variety of professionals working in education and care services across Australia.

The introduction of the National Quality Framework marks a significant change in the way we, as a community, see children and their place in society. All professionals working in the education and care services are responsible for continuous improvement to ensure the best possible outcomes for children.

Whāia te iti kahurangi - Ki te tūohu koe, me he maunga teitei.

'Pursue excellence – should you stumble, let it be to a lofty mountain' (Māori proverb)



Introduction

A rich and varied environment supports children’s learning and development. It gives them the confidence to explore and learn in a secure and safe, yet challenging, indoor and outdoor space. (Hodman, 2011)

Children’s learning experiences come from their interaction and engagement with their environment and the people around them. Children need warm and trusting relationships in predictable, safe, stimulating and nurturing environments. Your environment, your set up and use of space, your choice of equipment, materials and resources all contribute to children’s learning outcomes and engagement with your curriculum.

Your service has a unique environment that includes the built environment (the building and fixed structures), the natural environment (the outdoors, your climate), your equipment, furniture and furnishings, as well as the materials and resources that you use and provide. It is important to consider *how* this environment and everything in it can best support children’s learning and development.

How can this resource help you?

This booklet will provoke thought about creatively and achievably using your existing space, materials and resources to provide quality inclusive play opportunities and learning experiences for children in education and care settings (EC). It also provides low cost ideas and suggestions to make your environment more engaging. Use the activity suggestions and reflections throughout this booklet as part of your self-assessment to inform the Quality Improvement Plan for your service.



Definitions

Learning outcome

A skill, knowledge or disposition that educators can actively promote in early childhood settings, in collaboration with children and families. (EYLF, p.46)

Environment

Your location and the building from which you operate, all fixed structures, furniture and furnishings as well as equipment, materials and resources provided in your service. It includes indoor and outdoor spaces for children as well as common areas for staff, families and children.

Abbreviations and Acronyms used in this booklet

ACECQA - The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority established under the National Quality Framework www.acecqa.gov.au

Legislation - In this booklet, the term legislation encompasses the Education and Care Services National Law Act (2010) and Education and Care Services National Regulations (2011) as applied in each State or Territory through an applied law system. Explained further on the ACECQA website www.acecqa.gov.au

Law/Act - Education and Care Services National Law Act (2010)

Regulations - Education and Care Services National Regulations (2011)

NQF - National Quality Framework www.acecqa.gov.au

NQS - National Quality Standard www.acecqa.gov.au

EYLF - Early Years Learning Framework (Belonging, Being and Becoming)

FSAC - Framework for School Aged Care (My Time, Our Place)

QIP – Quality Improvement Plan, required as part of the National Quality Framework

What do children need from their environment?

The physical indoor and outdoor space for children should provide;

- ✓ A sense of *belonging*;
- ✓ Emotional security;
- ✓ Space;
- ✓ Safe risk taking opportunities;
- ✓ Challenge;
- ✓ Stimulating resources and materials (inclusive of all children's needs);
- ✓ Experiences based on children's interests and abilities; and
- ✓ Displays (that are meaningful to the children).

All of which are designed to promote children's holistic development. A truly empowering environment for children should support their learning and development across each of the *five learning outcomes* in the EYLF (Belonging, Being and Becoming) and FSAC (My Time, Our Place). Both learning frameworks place significant emphasis on *environments* for children as this is one of the key *practices* outlined in the EYLF and FSAC.



National Quality Framework

All licensed services must provide a safe environment and the legislation establishes the **minimum essential requirements** to do so. For information about regulations in your State/Territory, see www.acecqa.gov.au/regulatory-authorities.

National Quality Standard

The National Quality Standard (ACECQA, 2011) Quality Area 3 sets the quality benchmark for the physical learning environment for children. Once you know and understand this benchmark, you can identify the unique strengths of your environment, and plan for any improvements.

NQS – Quality Area 3: Physical Environment

Standard 3.1 The design and location of the premises is appropriate for the operation of a service.

Element - 3.1.3 Facilities are designed or adapted to ensure access and participation by every child in the service and to allow flexible use, and interaction between indoor and outdoor space.

Standard 3.2 The environment is inclusive, promotes competence, independent exploration and learning through play.

Element - 3.2.1 Outdoor and indoor spaces are designed and organised to engage every child in quality experiences in both built and natural environments.

Element - 3.2.2 Resources, materials and equipment are sufficient in number and organised in ways that ensure appropriate and effective implementation of the program / curriculum and allow for multiple uses.

Learning frameworks – Belonging, Being and Becoming (EYLF) and My Time, Our Place (FSAC)

Both learning frameworks have five learning outcomes for children that promote a holistic approach to supporting children's learning and development. The principles and practices of the frameworks are built on current theory and beliefs that:

- Children are capable and competent.
- Children actively construct their own learning.
- Learning is dynamic, complex and holistic.
- Children have agency. They have capacities and rights to initiate and lead learning and be active participants and decision makers in matters affecting them.

The frameworks provide information about the environments that best support children's learning.

Belonging, Being and Becoming (EYLF)

Practice: Learning Environments

Environments that support learning are vibrant and flexible spaces that are responsive to the interests and abilities of each child. They cater for different learning capacities and learning styles and invite children and families to contribute ideas, interests and questions. (EYLF, pg.15)

My Time, Our Place (FSAC)

Practice: Environments

Educators can support engagement by allowing time for meaningful interactions, by providing a range of opportunities for individual and shared experiences, and by finding opportunities for children to go into and contribute to their local community. (FSAC, p.15)

Supporting the learning outcomes

The EYLF and FSAC *learning outcomes* are outlined in **Table 1** below. As a team, reflect on how your environment currently promotes elements of the five *learning outcomes*. (Give examples). Think about the lay out (defined spaces), displays, atmosphere, materials and resources; and working in consultation with children and families.

TABLE 1

Learning outcome	How does your environment supports this	Potential learning for children
<p>OUTCOME 1: Children have a strong sense of identity</p>		
<p>OUTCOME 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world</p>		
<p>OUTCOME 3: Children have a strong sense of well-being</p>		
<p>OUTCOME 4: Children are confident and involved learners</p>		
<p>OUTCOME 5: Children are effective communicators</p>		

The environment and your curriculum

Environments for children are an integral part of your curriculum and they should complement each other. Similar to curriculum planning, it is essential to think about child development theory and practice as this reminds you about all the various ways in which children learn and develop. In turn, this enables you to design a stimulating, appropriate environment for children at your setting. The list below summarises the importance that key theorists place on environments for children.

What do theorists tell us about environments?

Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) believed that educators and other children could use '**scaffolding**' to build on the child's current knowledge. This means helping them with **open-ended** questions and resources to get to the next piece of knowledge, as they are ready for it. Vygotsky emphasised the importance of input from **families, communities** and other children in early education. (Mooney, 2000). He also believed that the social and cultural environments in which children grow up in played a key role in a child's learning. The EYLF and FSAC supports much of Vygotsky's thinking.

Rudolf Steiner's (1861-1925) approach is based on providing children with suitable environments, with lots of natural resources and sensory experiences. In Steiner settings, there is usually no plastic, brightly coloured toys or resources but rather natural resources such as wood, sheep fleeces and beeswax crayons. The resources are chosen because they can be used in a variety of ways (open ended) and so are encouraging of exploration and discovery. He also emphasised **creativity, imagination and practical experiences** in children's play. (Hodgman, 2011)

Reggio Emilia's (1945- present) approach puts the **natural development** of children, as well as the close **relationships** with their families and their environment, at the centre of their philosophy. The focus on the environment is so great in this approach that they refer to the **environment as the "third teacher"**. A typical Reggio Emilia environment for children will include lots of light, mirrors, plants and other natural materials and photos (that are meaningful to the children). The environment is designed to engage children with displays and photos of their work with captions of discussions between adults and children. There is a real community feel to the environment with shared spaces and materials. (Hodgman, 2011).

Maria Montessori (1870- 1952) believed that children should have access to **real materials** that are **sized appropriately** to them. She believed children should be able to **choose** their resources as and when they need them. Environments should be **neat, aesthetically pleasing, organised** and not overwhelming with multitudes of toys. She also suggests **free flow learning** between the indoor and outdoor environments. (Mooney, 2000).

Key considerations

There are a number of key considerations for creating and maintaining a positive environment for children and some are listed below:

- ✓ Providing an environment that supports children's health and safety is paramount.
- ✓ The thinking behind your environment – how is it reflective of your philosophy (values and beliefs). Consider the **key messages** you want to convey through your environment.
- ✓ The **lay out** of your environment will affect how children play and learn. Small spaces allow for quiet, small group play and individual play. Large, open spaces encourage large muscle, loud play.
- ✓ How you **choose and display resources** will define how the children play with and use them. Choose resources that are flexible and allow open - ended experiences for children.
- ✓ **Use what you have.** Think about your current resources, materials and equipment and try to use them in new and different ways.
- ✓ **Be realistic.** Your built environment (the size and shape of your rooms and outdoor play areas), location and climate will set some boundaries on what you can achieve. A good environment makes the best use of your available space and resources.
- ✓ **Engage your families.** Think about resources or materials that may be available from your families. Their active participation in providing natural or recycled materials will increase their involvement in your service.
- ✓ Demonstrate **cultural diversity and respect for other cultures** in your environment by using and displaying resources and materials from local communities and other countries. The *Cultural Connections Booklet* (Child Australia, 2012) has some great ideas and references that will give you more inspiration.

Features of a good environment

“Learning environments are welcoming spaces when they reflect and enrich the lives and identities of children and families participating in the setting and respond to their interests and needs.” (EYLF p.15)

Good learning environments provide:

- ✓ Well defined spaces for
 - quality interactions with educators and children.
 - exploration and investigation.
 - relaxation.
 - noisy and rough and tumble play.
 - creativity.
 - small group play.
- ✓ Adequate and meaningful resources, materials and equipment that:
 - reflect the interests, needs, lives and identity of the children.
 - support open ended experiences to build and extend children’s learning.
- ✓ Welcoming spaces for families.
- ✓ Opportunity for risk taking and challenge.



Good environments reflect your service’s philosophy and are aesthetically pleasing. Think of your environment as “the third teacher” because children’s engagement and interaction with their environment helps them construct their own learning.

When you set up your rooms and outdoor areas, choose resources, equipment and materials; and plan experiences for children to explore and discover. Give serious thought to how your environment promotes children’s learning, development and overall well - being.

Your service environment

Aesthetics

Think about the impression that your service creates for children, families and staff. What do you notice on entry to your service? What does it look, sound and smell like? Ask your children and their families about their impressions of and feelings about the aesthetics of your service.



"The physical environment for children can directly affect the quality and quantity of play, which in turn affects their development."

(Informedesign.org - cited in 2012)

QIP TIP

Use feedback from families (and children where possible) to help you identify strengths and weaknesses of your environment. (See NQS QA 3 and 6). One idea could be to ask them about a specific element of your environment. For example, 'do you feel a sense of *belonging* in this environment, what could we do to make it better?' (Include this information in your QIP)

Consider the **colours**, **décor** and **arrangement** of the common spaces. The shared areas of your service, including the entrance, foyer, halls and walkways, and office should be warm and welcoming and for both families and staff and be an observable reflection of your service's philosophy. Whilst you are unlikely to be able to shift walls, or change the shape of the built environment, you can create an aesthetically pleasing environment through your choice of colours, furnishing and display materials.

Framed photos of the educators and some art works by the children can personalise the space and provide information about the educators. A lounge or comfortable chairs can be a place for conversations with children, families and other people entering the setting.

Walls that are crowded with information can be overwhelming and make it difficult for families to know what information is new or important. Excessive use of bright primary colours can detract from a calm and nurturing environment.

Your indoor environment

Reflecting on your room (built environment)

Consider the size and shape of your room, store areas, bathrooms and laundry areas. How can you make the best use of your available space and create a free flowing yet safe area for children?

- How can you arrange your furniture to create separate play spaces?



- Is there adequate light in your room?
- Can children see outside?
- Can you make it darker at rest times using curtains, blinds, shades or room dividers?
- Can you use natural light to improve your environment? For example coloured beads, prisms, glass crystals and coloured bottles of water can reflect light to create colours and rainbows in your room.

- How many colours are in your room? (Walls, displays, equipment, resources, furniture). Too many bright colours in one space can be overwhelming for children. Calmer, natural colours can help soothe children and adults. Consider using light coloured fabrics for table and wall coverings or as hanging dividers in the room.



- Is there an adult sized chair or couch for educators and families to sit comfortably with the children?



Provide a variety of spaces

Create small divided places for children to play to keep the atmosphere calm, provide opportunity for small groups, and encourage focused and engaged play. Think about defined spaces for:

- ✓ Creativity
- ✓ Quiet reading and relaxation
- ✓ Construction
- ✓ Hiding
- ✓ Pretend play
- ✓ Noisy play

Shelves, room dividers, sheer curtains, mats, tents and other visual dividers can define play spaces and guide children where one area ends and another begins.

Organise your space and resources

- ✓ Have a defined and predictable meals space, sleeping space and playing space
- ✓ Position materials, resources and equipment so that children can reach them independently



Display material thoughtfully

- ✓ Think about what you display and why – too much can be visually overloading
- ✓ Ask children *if* or *how* they would like their work displayed
- ✓ Display children's work at their eye level (not the adults)
- ✓ Photographs, portfolios and displays allow children to revisit their experiences and share them with families

Resources, materials and equipment

- ✓ Have a diverse range of materials and resources available at all times
- ✓ Include open ended items so children can use them in a variety of ways



- ✓ Ensure duplicates of popular items
- ✓ Incorporate natural materials both indoors and out
- ✓ Check all items are in good repair and discard broken equipment



Your outdoor environment

“Outdoor learning spaces are a feature of Australian learning environments. They offer a vast array of possibilities not available indoors. Play spaces in natural environments include plants, trees, edible gardens, sand, rocks, mud, water and other elements from nature. These spaces invite open-ended interactions, spontaneity, risk-taking, exploration, discovery and connection with nature.” (EYLF P.15)

Outdoors

As well as more traditional outdoor play equipment, think about including:

- ✓ Stepping stones
- ✓ Different textures (tiles, rocks, stones, shells)
- ✓ Paths
- ✓ Poles and pipes
- ✓ Logs for balancing and climbing
- ✓ Climbing frames

Provide a variety of spaces

Just like your indoor environment, your outdoor spaces for children can have separate play spaces to allow children to play individually or in small groups, and engage in quiet or loud play scenarios. Some spaces you may like to provide include:

- ✓ Cubby houses/ tents
- ✓ A sensory garden
- ✓ A space for sustainable water play
- ✓ Places for children and adults to gather and for group discussion
- ✓ Spaces for gross motor play and ball games
- ✓ An outdoor eating space
- ✓ Spaces for push and pull along toys
- ✓ Quiet spaces (make a mia mia from sticks, a cubby from recycled sheets or curtains, using pots to surround a secret garden, or bamboo poles to separate a little space)

Connection with nature

The outdoor environment will change with the seasons and provides opportunity for children to be in touch with nature, and experience the weather and the climate. A rainy day does not have to mean the children have to remain indoors – raincoats and gum boots can be the start of a great adventure. Shaded areas are important for children to play outside safely on hot days. Consider real rather than artificial grass.

Assessing your environment

Assess your environment from a child's perspective. Draw a map of your outdoor learning environment as it is currently set up. Get down to the children's eye level (or make it an activity with the children) and ask yourself:

What does it look like?

What spaces are there?

Is there somewhere to go to play quietly?

Is there somewhere to go to be noisy?

Is there somewhere to run and jump?

Is there something to climb?

What else can you do outside?

Is nature part of your outdoor world?

If you were a child, would your environment be appealing? How can it be improved?

Environments for school age children

Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) services vary greatly in the space they have available. Some have a dedicated room or space and can leave equipment and resources in place. Others share use of spaces and have to pack up every day. Many have limited storage space. You need to be creative and “think outside the box” to create an engaging OSHC environment. For example, in a hall, separate spaces could be defined with decorated sheets, curtains, mats or dividers that can be moved easily.

The FSAC suggests ‘collaborating with children’ to plan experiences, design the environment and choose resources and materials. The children will have plenty of ideas on how to create and define separate spaces and should be actively involved in developing their own environment.

While the ideas in this booklet all apply in the OSHC setting, there are some extra considerations in planning good environments for school aged children. Think about:

- ✓ **Social places** for small and large groups.
- ✓ **Places to reflect on learning and view work** so children can revisit past achievements to reflect and then build on their work.



- ✓ **A construction place** to build structures over time, and make larger, stronger creations that improve on previous sessions.
- ✓ **A seniors place** - Older children may be reluctant to attend OSHC as the age difference between young children and the older children is apparent to them. A dedicated space for older children can make a big difference particularly if they can be responsible for the decoration of the space, and its contents. There might be space on the walls for music posters, magazines they like to read and music they enjoy.

Thinking about my OSHC environment

How is children's identity and culture reflected in your environment?

How does your environment support children to develop relationships with their peers?

How is children's well - being and development supported in your environment?

What are its strengths? What can you improve?

Some practical ideas

Resources and materials

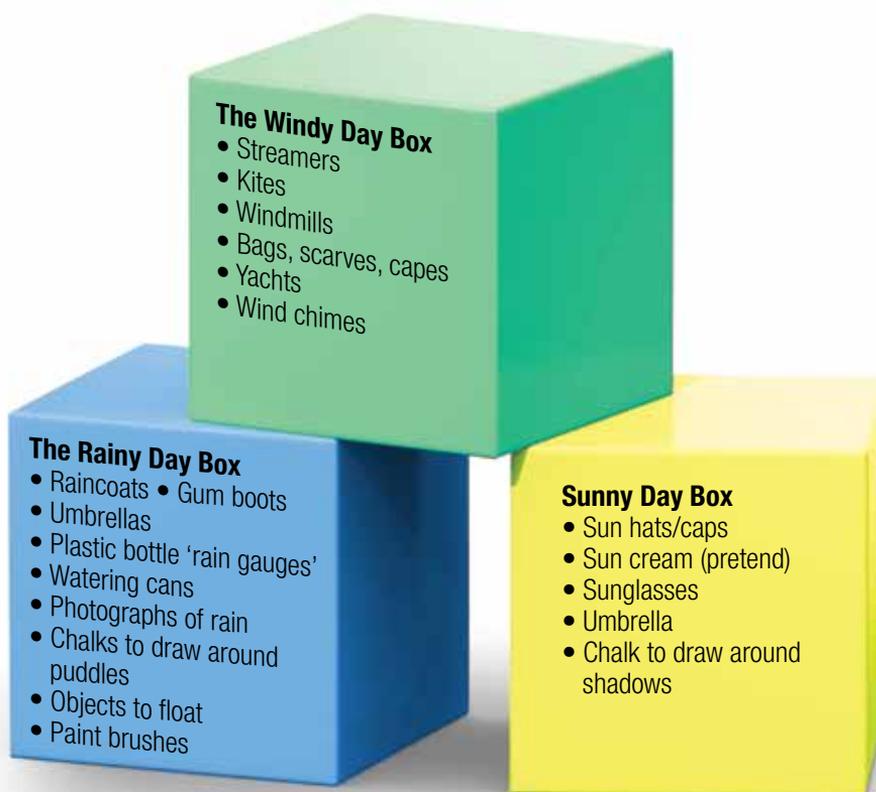
Materials enhance learning when they reflect what is natural and familiar, and also introduce novelty to provoke interest and more complex and increasingly abstract thinking. (EYLF p.16)

- ✓ **Use everyday items** from around the home. Children enjoy real things as they feel capable and grown up.
- ✓ Combine resources to stimulate creative play. For example, add animals to the blocks. Instead of building towers, they may build a zoo.
- ✓ **Have multiples of popular items.** See what materials and resources are most popular and have multiples of preferred items.
- ✓ **Choose "loose" rather than fixed resources,** equipment and materials that can be flexibly used, and which are easily moved from place to place.

Natural resources can be used on their own or in combination with traditional material. Ensure that any natural materials used are non-toxic. Add nature to your environment with:

- Leaves, nuts, bark, sticks and pebbles; for example, add leaves in your art/craft area; put pine cones and sticks with your blocks
- Plants and trees (in pots if necessary)
- Water, sand, clay
- Logs for balancing, climbing and sitting
- Herb or vegetable garden
- Plant seeds, sunflowers or sprout carrot tops
- Branches for hanging displays

Create prop boxes around interesting topics for indoor and outdoor use (assembled in advance or with the help of the children). Some examples of prop box topics include:



Baskets

Baskets are a natural, attractive way to display resources and materials. If you have limited baskets, store resources in containers and move them into a basket when needed.

Ideas to explore

- ✓ **Discovery:** Gift boxes, large boxes, containers, buckets, old handbags and secret doors are great for discovery play. Use mirrors so children can see themselves from other angles and perspectives
- ✓ **Sensory** experiences – touch, feel and smell with:
 - Fabrics, papers, leaves, plants, timbers and different textures
 - Sand, dirt, flour, water both inside and outdoors
 - Scented play dough, mint and herbs
 - Finger and feet painting, water play, sand and dirt experiences

- ✓ **Movement:** Explore gravity, speed, pendulum motion and trajectories, and other forms of motion. Provide balls of different sizes, pipes, tubes, scarves, beanbags and allow children to explore by throwing and dropping
- ✓ **Hiding:** Cover a table with fabric, make cubbies from sheets and chairs, use tents, tunnels and reuse cardboard boxes to create a space where children feel hidden, but can still be adequately supervised
- ✓ **Action and reaction/Cause and effect with:**
 - fabrics, papers, leaves, plants, timbers and different textures
 - sand, dirt, flour, water both inside and outdoors.
 - scented play dough, mint and herbs
 - ropes and pulleys
 - balance scales
 - tubes and pipes
 - balls
 - dough, cooking and baking
 - water and ice painting
 - bouncy surfaces
 - loose parts



- ✓ **Sound:** Make noises and sounds in productive, creative ways with commercial and home-made instruments, drumming on boxes and pipes, using their voices to sing and experiment with animal sounds and different tones

Useful idea

Some services have a noise level sign or traffic lights to visually set the noise level in the room for different times of the day. You could set it at a high level for indoor play times and at a low level for rest times.

- ✓ **Different levels:** Provide children opportunities to climb and challenge themselves. Raised decks, steps, stairs, ladders, boxes, stepping-stones and stilts allow children to get higher off the ground
- ✓ **Construction:** Materials can include:
 - Blocks, Lego, mobile, meccano
 - Recycled materials
 - Paper mache, clay, wire
 - Plaster, timber, bricks
- ✓ **Music:** Include music in inside and outside learning and play experience. Increase your resources by using everyday items and making percussion and wind instruments including:
 - Pots and pans
 - Shakers made from bottles
 - Wind chimes
 - Pipes from a variety of materials including copper, PVC, bamboo
 - Metal bowls and old utensils and cutlery



Care for the environment and sustainability

Environments and resources can also highlight our responsibilities for a sustainable future and promote children's understanding about their responsibility to care for the environment. They can foster hope, wonder and knowledge about the natural world. (EYLF, p16)

You play a vital role in teaching children about their environment and your choice and use of sustainable materials and resources is another way to support their learning.

✓ **Water**

Water is an important resource and play experience for children. Making water available in limited quantities, for example a container per child, helps children learn that they need to use it wisely, and provides opportunity for intentional teaching about conservation.



- ✓ **Recycled materials** can include:
 - plastic containers and bottles
 - cooking utensils and pots and pans
 - old household items (wrapping paper, wallpaper, ribbon, decorations)
 - fabrics, wool and sewing items



- office paper, wall paper, newspaper, and cardboard
- home decorating materials such as tiles, carpet samples, fabric samples, door handles, old curtain rods and rings and wall paper
- building materials: such as timber off-cuts, bricks and stones

Technology

The FSAC states that school age children should be provided with access to digital technologies which can enable children to locate global connections and resources, and encourage new ways of thinking.

Planning your everyday environment – who to involve

Children

Watch the children play. Note how they use spaces and what equipment, materials and resources they prefer. If they regularly move equipment and resources to use them in a different area, make changes based on their play. For example, what emerging interests, abilities and strengths can you see, how might your environment support this further?

Staff

Include all educators in your room in planning your indoor and outdoor play environment and choosing resources, equipment and materials to build understanding of how your environment supports children's learning.

Families

Invite feedback, suggestions and ideas from parents. Work in partnership with families to ensure their culture is reflected in the setting.

Educators can encourage children and families to contribute ideas, interests and questions to the learning environment. (EYLF, p.16)

Community

You can source specific skills or expertise from your local community, for example a local community garden or permaculture project. Get input and ideas from organisations such as Kidsafe / Sunsafe or your local Inclusion Support Agency to ensure that play spaces are inclusive, safe and multifunctional. The wider community and families can also be involved by donating resources and recyclable materials.

Managing risk in your environment

Injury prevention and children's safety are important considerations that must be balanced with children's need to be challenged and take risks in their learning journey.

Children develop their autonomy, inter-dependence, resilience and sense of agency (FSAC Outcome 1.2)

A risk assessment of your environment and the experiences you provide will help you know where the risks lie. You can then plan to manage the risks and teach / role model to children on how to play safely. (See pages 172 and 173 of the *Guide to the National Law and Regulations (2011)* for Risk Management template). However, it is always important to consider the benefit to children's learning and development before deciding to eliminate certain 'potential' risks. You can then decide whether the risk posed could be managed first, for example, with good active supervision or one to one access only. Children can learn to better understand the opportunities and challenges in the world around them, and how to be safe.



Thinking about my setting

Identify the strengths of your environment against NQS Quality Area 3 and consider any areas for improvement. This self-assessment will help you to develop your Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) and give you a starting point in promoting your environment further.

QA3 Physical environment

Standard	Elements	Strengths	Area for improvement
<p>3.1 The design and location of the premises is appropriate for the operation of a service.</p>	<p>3.1.1 Outdoor and indoor spaces, buildings, furniture, equipment, facilities and resources are suitable for their purpose.</p> <p>3.1.2 Premises, furniture and equipment are safe, clean and well maintained.</p> <p>3.1.3 Facilities are designed or adapted to ensure access and participation by every child in the service, and to allow flexible use, and interaction between indoor and outdoor space.</p>		
<p>3.2 The environment is inclusive, promotes competence, independent exploration and learning through play.</p>	<p>3.2.1 Outdoor and indoor spaces are designed and organised to engage every child in quality experiences, in both built and natural environments.</p> <p>3.2.2 Resources, materials and equipment are sufficient in number, organised in ways that ensure appropriate and effective implementation of the program and allow for multiple uses.</p>		
<p>3.3 The service takes an active role in caring for its environment and contributes to a sustainable future.</p>	<p>3.3.1 Sustainable practices are embedded in service operations.</p> <p>3.3.2 Children are supported to become environmentally responsible and show respect for the environment.</p>		

Conclusion

Creating appropriate environments for children is integral part of the National Quality Framework as evidenced by Quality Area 3: Physical Environment. Providing good learning environments for children is also one of the key *practices* educators need to demonstrate in their implementation of the learning frameworks (the EYLF and FSAC).

Your environment must be inclusive and promote children's competence; independent exploration and learning through play (NQS Standard 3.2). Reflect on your environment. Assess what is good about it and think of ways to improve it. Use your Quality Improvement Plan as part of an ongoing cycle to develop a better learning environment for children.

Put thought and care into the way you design and set up your learning environment and involve children in your planning. They should play a key role in deciding how their environment is set up, where resources are placed and how they are used.

Be creative in making the best use of what you have and plan for:

- ✓ Well defined spaces
- ✓ Adequate and meaningful resources, materials and equipment
- ✓ Welcoming spaces for children and families
- ✓ Opportunities for risk taking and challenge

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Useful Websites

ACECQA – www.acecqa.gov.au

Child Australia – www.childaustralia.org.au

PSC Alliance – www.pscalliance.org.au

For a list of poisonous plants, visit;

- www.agric.wa.gov.au/content/hort/flor/flodpw/Harmfulplants.pdf or contact the relevant government department in your jurisdiction.
- For a risk assessment tool, see www.cscentral.org.au/national-quality-framework/resources.html
- www.kidsafeact.com.au for factsheets on harmful plants

Professional Support Coordinators National Alliance
www.pscalliance.org.au

Australian Capital Territory
Communities@Work
www.actpsc.com.au

New South Wales
Children's Services Central
www.cscentral.org.au

Northern Territory
Child Australia
www.childaustralia.org.au

Queensland
Health and Community Services Workforce Council Inc.
www.pscq.org.au

South Australia
Lady Gowrie Child Centre
www.pscsa.org.au

Victoria
Gowrie Victoria
www.gowrievictoria.org.au

Western Australia
Child Australia
www.childaustralia.org.au

Tasmania
Lady Gowrie Tasmania
www.psctas.org.au