

# Supportive Environments in Out of School Care

## What is a supportive environment?

A supportive environment in out of school care is one that empowers children and fosters engagement and expression. Engagement and expression involve creating or doing something with the world around us for an extended amount of time. Children need uninterrupted time in their day to create. They also feel empowered when they know what is expected of them and they have choices about their day. The activities and routines you plan, along with the physical environment you design, can all support children's independence and development.



## Why are supportive environments important?

When children are provided with the space and time to follow their own interests in exploration, play, and creative expression, they

cannot help but be fully engaged. Children in the middle years deeply appreciate the opportunity to make decisions about their experiences. For example, planning an activity, participating in a community event, helping others, or engaging in joint decision making



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about the program are all highly motivating for children. As educators listen and respond to children's interests and life experiences, they build connections with these children and their families which fosters a sense of belonging.

The physical environment can be designed to support children's regulation, development, and learning. If children are exhibiting challenging behaviours, it is often their way of communicating that the physical environment is not meeting their needs. For example, loud or continual noise or bright lighting can be overwhelming to many children. Well-designed spaces that promote regulation, support independence through visuals and access to materials, and build upon children's interests in meaningful ways, will help children

feel supported and exhibit less challenging behaviour.

## What can educators do to establish supportive environments?

- Create a predictable daily routine and establish routines within routines whenever necessary (i.e., the snack time routine will have specific steps).
- Use visuals (i.e., visual schedule, room expectations, bin and/or cubby labels, etc.) to support children during routines, transitions, and activities.
- Ensure visuals and other posters include words and images.



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- Minimize the number of transitions for the children.
- Actively listen to children's voices as they express themselves in different ways (i.e., through their creative expression, interests, and their peer groups).
- Ensure children can independently access a variety of materials that are motivating to them.
- Offer plenty of opportunities for children to research and co-create activities or projects.
- Plan for outside time and opportunities for physical activity. Consider having the physical activity near the beginning of the afterschool schedule for children to release energy and be active after the school day ends.

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## References

- Gordon, Mary & Lisa, Bayrami. (2018). The Power of Positive Relationships. In *Think, Feel, Act: Empowering Children in the Middle Years* (pp. 37-46). Queen's Printer for Ontario.
- Wien, Carol Anne. (2018). Environments that Support Engagement and Expression. In *Think, Feel, Act: Empowering Children in the Middle Years* (pp. 4-14). Queen's Printer for Ontario.

## Helpful Resources for Educators and Families

### Creating a Quality School-Aged Child Care Space

[https://www.lisc.org/media/filer\\_public/06/51/0651584f-6cc6-489d-be01-5a510edd20a5/2011\\_cick\\_school\\_age\\_guide.pdf](https://www.lisc.org/media/filer_public/06/51/0651584f-6cc6-489d-be01-5a510edd20a5/2011_cick_school_age_guide.pdf)

### Cultivating Creative Expression in School-Age Children

<https://www.virtuallabschool.org/taxonomy/term/11801>

### Provincial Activity Guidelines for After School Programs in Alberta

<https://everactive.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Designed-Provincial-Activity-Guidelines-for-After-School-Programs-in-Alberta.pdf>

### School-Age Cognitive Development: Support Through Interactions, Environment and Materials, Experiences, and Activities

<https://www.virtuallabschool.org/taxonomy/term/11586>

### School-Age Learning Environments: Indoor & Outdoor, Materials, Schedules & Routines

<https://www.virtuallabschool.org/taxonomy/term/11686>