



Natural Learning Environment Practices

Young children with developmental delays and disabilities as well as those who are typically developing learn new skills and practice existing ones by participating in everyday activities with the important people in their lives. Natural Learning Environment Practices used by early childhood intervention providers to support children's learning include three research-based characteristics to ensure success.

Activity Settings

The child's real-life activities in the home (i.e., meals, dressing, walking to the mailbox), community (i.e. grocery shopping, swinging at the park, going for a walk), and preschool/child care (i.e., circle time, snack, art) are the contexts for intervention because they provide frequent opportunities for the child to learn and practice a variety of skills even when the early intervention practitioner is not present. Ensure caregivers know how their typical activities provide opportunities for learning.

Child Interests

When children are interested in a particular object, person, or activity, they pay attention for longer periods of time, and this provides more time to practice new skills. The same interest can often be used in multiple activities (i.e., water at bath time, water for dishwashing). Sometimes a child's interest can even be used to help them participate in an activity they may not ordinarily like to do such as toothbrushing or taking a bath. Ensure caregivers know how to recognize child interests and use them to help the child learn new things.

Caregiver Responsiveness

Parents, grandparents, childcare providers, teachers, and siblings are the important people in a young child's life. The ways in which a caregiver responds and interacts with a child can have a powerful effect on learning. Ensure caregivers know how to: Invite the child into the activity by getting the child's attention and creating a setting in which the child will want to participate. Engage the child by joining in the activity and letting the child know that the caregiver hears and understands what the child wants and is doing. Teach by supporting the child to use existing and learn new skills as part of the activity.