

Creating great learning spaces

As you would already know as an educator, children learn not just from the people they are with but also from their environment. This is why the teachers of Reggio Emilia call the environment the 'third teacher'.

What makes a great learning environment or space? One that is predictable and yet contains the unexpected. Stimulating. Engaging and nurturing. One that children can impact on. One where children can master skills and face further challenges. One where children can access the resources they need, when they need them. One that is ordered. One that is organised with great storage. One that is beautiful. One that provokes wonder. One that, above all, supports learning.

As an In Home Care educator your learning space is the family's home and the places you can reach from the

home via excursions. You do not have the same luxury you would have in a centre based service to set a room up as you desire. Or the same capacity to make changes as if you were a Family Day Care educator working in your own home. But this does not mean that you cannot create great learning spaces. Your choice of equipment, materials and resources and where you choose to establish them in the home you are working in will impact how the children in the family learn. They will also impact how children behave and feel and how you as the educator behave and feel.



What Does the National Quality Standard say about environments?

Although In Home Care is not within the scope of the National Quality Framework, the National Quality Standard gives us ideas as to what makes a great learning space.

Standard 3.2 The service environment is inclusive, promotes competence and supports exploration and play-based learning.

Element - 3.2.1 Outdoor and indoor spaces are organised and adapted to support every child's participation and to engage every child in quality experiences in both built and natural environments.

Element - 3.2.2 Resources, materials and equipment allow for multiple uses, are sufficient in number, and enable every child to engage in play-based learning.

Element 3.2.3 The service cares for the environment and supports children to become environmentally responsible.



A family's home, your work space

Obviously working in a family's home can come with limitation. Space may be tight. Some families have too many possessions. Others have too few. Some houses may have a lot of medical equipment if a family member is ill or has a disability. Some houses may have limited outdoor space. Others may have outdoor spaces with areas that as an educator you may consider unsafe. Some houses may not be well ordered or may have different levels of cleanliness. It is important to remember that the house while you are there, is both the family's home and your work space. It needs to be able to function in both roles.

Obviously you cannot make changes to a family home without consultation, but similarly you need to carve out space and bring in the resources that you need as an educator.

Your job is to educate and care for children. To do this you need to be able to set up learning spaces, of the same quality you would set up in other early childhood settings.



Defining spaces

Because you are providing education and care in a family's home it is important that you work out how to delineate space or establish the boundaries of the space or spaces you are using. Obviously some spaces such as the kitchen will be both used by you to educate and care for the children and used by other family members.

Are there some spaces that you can use exclusively for your work with the children? A rumpus room or a lounge room? Can you use the back yard or porch, or sections of these? Some of this will be negotiated with a family over time. Some may be able to be established from when you first go into the family home.

There are many ways you can use however to delineate space for educational activities within bigger spaces.

Think about:

- The impact of using a rug on a carpeted area
- Erecting an umbrella outside
- Placing some artificial turf under a construction project
- Facing a chair away from the centre of a room
- Using child size tables and chairs to create a room within a room



All of these create boundaries around the space you are using for education and care.

Indoor spaces

As an educator you probably have lots of ideas for creating beautiful indoor learning environments but you need to work harder when space is shared with family life.

The things that are really important in shared spaces are establishing areas and having access to resources that support children to meet the learning outcomes of the Early Years Learning Framework and or the Framework for School Aged Care.

Consider:

- Tables and chairs for children to work at
- Places to relax and withdraw
- Places for creativity, for art, for music





- Places to explore and investigate for science activities
- Places to display children's work
- Places for pretend play and drama
- Storage spaces for resources so you can rotate what you set up for children
- Can you use the bathroom or laundry for STEM type activities?
- Will the kitchen table be your main work area?
- Can you section off areas of the lounge room for different activities?

Outdoor spaces

Outdoor spaces are more important than ever in the In Home Care environment because this is often a space away from other family members where you can create lots of engaging learning environments. The Early Years Learning Framework emphasises the importance of outdoor learning for children.

Remember that outdoor time is not just playtime – you can engage with the children in the outdoors and can establish learning environments in the same way you do indoors – sometimes even more.

The outdoors also enables specific sorts of learning to occur – learning about our environment, sustainability, weather and how plants, trees and grasses grow.



Think about:

- A musical space (drums/chimes/bells)
- A digging space (dirt patch/ sand pit)
- Stepping stones or trail made of tyres
- Quiet spaces to read or lay back and look at clouds
- Water play spaces with tubes and pouring instruments
- Art areas
- Cubby houses – permanent or temporary
- Tables and chairs to eat at or display new objects
- Secret spaces
- Spaces to use balls
- Using fences and the sides of houses as display areas
- Growing things in pots or other containers



Resources

Homes are rich with resources educators can use to create and use to learn with.

Consider resources already in the home:

- Children's existing toys? How can they be used in different ways than what the manufacturer planned?
- Sheets and blankets which can be used for cubby houses or forts
- Bathmats which can become building areas
- Bookcases which can become room dividers
- Plastic containers which can be used for loose parts
- Is there a garage or toolshed? What can you get from there?
- Chalk – can the driveway become an easel?
- Musical instruments – pots and pans make great drums

And resources outside the home

- Almost every neighbourhood (bar the very remote) has a second hand shop. What can you get from there for low cost?



- Is there an education and care service near you? Can you borrow some equipment or resources?
- Likewise for a school?
- Is there a toy library in your area?
- Two dollar shops - how can you get some money to buy resources?
- Is there a Family Day Care service nearby? Do they have resources you could borrow?
- Can the In Home Care service you work for lend resources or fund some small purchases?
- Is there a butchers shop nearby? Can you beg some butchers paper?
- Are you near bushland? What natural resources can you collect?

Want more inspiration?

Read



Lots and lots of ideas about different props you can use to spark children's creativity and learning and how you can reflect on the environment you already have.

www.ecrh.edu.au/docs/default-source/resources/ipsp/Create-the-perfect-play-space-learning-environments-for-young-children.pdf?sfvrsn=12

Watch



These 4 videos discuss how the physical environment can contribute to children's learning. They explore how our values and beliefs shape the environment we provide, indoor and outdoor learning, creating natural spaces and thinking about an environment from a child's perspective. Although produced for centre based environments there is lots to inspire the IHC educator.

www.ecrh.edu.au/resources/detail/index/talking-about-practice-environments-for-learning

Explore



Pinterest is a great place to explore and get inspiration for everything from storage solutions to ways to designate your own space.

www.pinterest.com/FDCconcepts/family-day-care-enviroments

Remember to consult your curriculums for inspiration

ihcsupportagency.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/my_time_our_place_framework_for_school_age_care_in_australia.pdf

ihcsupportagency.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/belonging_being_and_becoming_the_early_years_learning_framework_for_australia.pdf



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