Topic 8: Quality Basic Care Environment

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this topic, you should be able to:

1. Discuss the importance of basic care needs that should not be excluded from physical environment;
2. Practice a well-maintained and well-thought-of environment to protect children from illness and injury; and
3. Create a healthy and safe social aspect of physical environment.

Topic Overview

Early childhood educators must understand the importance of a well-established daily routine of basic care for young children. The basic routines during greeting and departing, rules during meals and snacks, when to have a nap and rest as well as toileting and diapering are very crucial to be met by the child care provider. By meeting these needs, the children will feel that they are psychologically safe, secure and accepted, as well as teaching them to be competence and independent physically and socially. Therefore, careful planning in the environment is necessary so the routine of basic needs are predictable and something that all children are expected to follow.

Focus Areas and Assigned Readings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Areas</th>
<th>Assigned Readings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.2 Meals and Snacks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3 Nap and Rest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4 Toileting and Diapering</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additional Recommended Readings
Content Summary

8.1 Greeting and Departing
Greeting and departing play important roles as it shows that the children are welcomed, loved and surrounded by a friendly and predictable atmosphere. In order to support the successfulness of greeting and departing, there are certain things that can be done in the physical environment.

Opening the door when the child first arrives, for instance, gives the child an impression of whether the place is strange or predictable, unwelcome or warm. A child who is late might feel unaccepted if the doors are shut. Therefore, it is better to install doors with windows or having foyers or open spaces so that the child does not feel shut out upon arrival for the first time.

At the end of the day, the programme should provide a smooth transition for the child to get back to home life. The end of the day is a sensitive time as the children might feel angry or sad depending on what happened earlier. Therefore, it is good to have a foyer with windows so that the child feels comfortable. The teachers can also ensure a routine of helping a child with her things or having a spot in the room where the child, teacher and parents can meet. Do not forget to acknowledge the child when it is the time to go back by using comforting words, waving, touching, smiling or having eye contact.

8.2 Meals and Snacks
Meals and snack times provide positive group experiences such as social and convivial time to touch and talk about experiences. Meal times can be hectic and stressful for both the teachers and the children as they have to teach the children to eat and enjoy the meal and follow the house rules all within a limited time. However, the goal is to make meal times a relaxed social occasion that balances the children’s development and self-help skills like eating independently and cleaning up after that. Thus, special attention should be given to the design, location and layout of the kitchen, food distribution systems, choice of eating areas and choice of furniture and utensils.

Pay attention to the age group being served by the programmes. Check if there are infants or older children. This is due to the fact that infants need individual feeding times and introduction of new foods which adds to the complexity unlike older children. Take into
consideration the schedule and number of children to be served. Although meals and snacks can take place round the clock, how much needs to be served depends on the number of children.

8.3 Nap and Rest
It is natural that children need rest because children get tired playing all day or simply not having enough rest at home. An early child care and education setting needs an area where each child has the opportunity to take a rest away from interruption. Infants and toddlers for instance need a morning nap in a quiet place. The best space for a nap is a space that has acoustic surrounding as it mutes the snores, loud cries or whispers. It should be darkened, with adequate air flow and large enough to allow two to three feet between each sleeping child. Also, the place for a nap or rest can be a room with a couch or a quiet corner with pillows which do not require the child to leave the room.

Nowadays, the majority of toddlers and preschoolers nap and rest in the classroom and they typically sleep on mats or cots. Regardless of that, make sure the things that they sleep on are washable and can be stored. Mats and plastic cots are ideal as it requires less storage and are lighter. Also, if blankets are used, consider where it should be stored. In order to avoid storing, ask the children to bring their own blankets and quilts from home.

8.4 Toileting and Diapering

8.4.1 Toilet
Preschool toilets should be large enough so that the adults can change messy children’s clothes comfortably and at the same time allow other children to use the facility.

When designing a toilet, consider the easy access, cost, security concerns, supervision, respect for children, health and values about privacy, modesty and the development of gender awareness. Pay attention also to sight, sound and smell. Usually, toilets are located away from each room. This is because children might wet themselves and the place. It is important that the toilet is immediately accessible to the children in need. To be cost effective, pairing the rooms near the toilets and sharing toilets are the best.
These are some regulations on toilet usage:

(a) For children below the age of five, separate segregated toilets are considered unnecessary. This hinders visual supervision and allows ample space for an adult to assist a child. Besides, the elimination of doors is useful for contagion controls purposes. Privacy in the toilet can be achieved by having low partitions (30” - 36” high) that allow teachers supervision and visual privacy for the child to use the toilet. By having this, it also avoids idle play among the children and it has better aesthetics.

(b) School-age children require same sex toilet and in some programmes, separate stalls with doors are built for this purpose.

(c) One stool is to cater to 10 to 15 preschoolers or 10 toddlers.

(d) A flush valve needs to be installed rather than tanks which is slower and will result in flushed toilets.

(e) A drinking fountain should be placed outside the toilet to avoid congestion.

(f) A brushing teeth area is a good practice but it is possible only when space permits.

(g) A toilet with access to the play yard is recommended.

Things to consider when designing a toilet:

(a) Ventilation, acoustics and aesthetic are important for the ambience;

(b) Relaxed atmosphere such as soft overhead lighting with mirrors, windows, plants and calm bathroom colours;

(c) Provide storage, cabinets or shelving as it is also a place to store cleaning supplies, wet clothes and assorted materials for messy and art play

(d) Make sure the walls and floor are easy to clean and avoid the retention of water and germs;

(e) Installing floor drains for each toilet;
(f) Easy access for dispensers and towels;

(g) Toilet, toilet paper, sinks, paper towel dispensers should be placed at a child's height; and

(h) Liquid soap is recommended rather than the bar soap and should be placed in such a way so as to avoid dripping.

8.4.2 Diapering

Diapering should not be done in a hurry. Instead, it should be a one-to-one interaction between baby and adult. It should also include activities such as talking, eye contact and adult responsiveness. Some considerations applicable to the diapering area are:

(a) It should be adjacent to the play area as it enables the caregiver to attend the child in need;

(b) It should be accessible with water for easy cleaning; and

(c) The location should not be close to the entry, directly at the kitchen or food preparation area.

Also, health and safety play priority roles for the layout of the diapering area. It is not an easy task to undress the child, find for diapers, wash hands, return back to the child, etc. Hence, it is convenience if everything needed such as extra clothes, sink, soap, disinfect or medication is within easy reach. If items in need are unreachable, danger of falling might occur. The toddler diapering area ideally should be in the toilet along with the potty trainers.

Study Questions

1. Analyse traffic safety in the drop off area in any child care centre that you have chosen. What can be done to improve the traffic safety in the drop off area?

2. Analyse your own thoughts about eating, going to the toilet and sleeping. What environmental aspects that you find make the circumstances pleasant or unpleasant? Apply this thought to an early care and education setting.
3. At a child care centre, try a hands-on experience by changing infants and toddlers diapers. Analyse in term of:

(a) Health: Are you spreading the germs?

(b) Safety: The moment where the teacher is distracted or is attending to a very active baby.

(c) Child and teacher satisfaction: Does the design of the area support one-to-one interaction?