

## **Environmental Needs of Different Age Groups**

### **Young Infants (Birth to 9 months):**

- Small numbers of children and adults are recommended.
- Diapering, feeding, sleeping, and play areas should be set up to allow quiet, personal contact between the caregiver and young infant.
- Young infants need to be taken to interesting parts of the environment or have interesting things brought to them.
- The setting should facilitate face-to-face and skin-to-skin contact between caregiver and child, by providing multilevel areas and comfortable places for caregivers to sit and hold infants.
- Infants spend a great deal of time looking up toward the ceilings, walls, and lights, so these elements of the environment should be pleasant to look at but not over-stimulating. Bare light bulbs and bold colors and patterns can be irritating to young infants.
- Young infants like to practice body movements while they are lying on a firm, cushioned surface. Watching and exploring with hands and mouth are prominent learning activities of young infants.

### **Mobile Infants (Approximately 6 to 18 months):**

- Mobile infants are at the peak of sense and motor exploration and need a safe and interesting environment to explore.
- Infants put almost everything in their mouths, so no toy should be so small that a child could swallow it or choke on it.
- Dangerous, breakable, and costly objects should be kept out of the reach of infants.
- You need to be able to see the children and get to them quickly. Be available but do not hover.

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### **Mobile Infants (Approximately 6 to 18 months) Continued:**

- Some risk-taking by mobile infants needs to be allowed. Provide small, safe challenges, such as low steps or risers.
- Infants do not always have to be close or get in your lap to feel secure. Sometimes a reassuring glance will do.
- Peer play and conflict begin at this time. Provide more than one of a popular toy as well as opportunities for social play, such as a double slide or two rocking horses, side by side.

### **Older Infants (Approximately 16 to 36 months):**

- The children love dress-up and fantasy play. A special area and equipment for this type of activity are important.
- Choices among activities are essential for the older infant.
- Peer play happens more often and needs to be provided for in the setting.
- The children like their items displayed, so allow wall space on their level for this purpose.
- Older infants need room for large-muscle activities available to them throughout the day.
- The children sometimes do not consider the needs or safety of younger infants in rough-and-tumble play, so use developmental barriers to protect younger infants in mixed age groups.
- Older infants are ready to begin learning rules for caring for the environment and the equipment in it. Along with autonomy, they need gentle guidance.
- The children need learning centers offering a variety of small-muscle and sensory perception activities.