HOLISTIC EDUCATIONAL APPROACH

for children from 0 to 6 years

REEC

A guide for teachers and educators

Contents

Abbreviations

ACE   Adverse Childhood Experience[1]

ACE	Adverse Childhood Experience[1]
HC	Healing Classrooms
IRC	International Rescue Committee Italy
MGS	Movements, Games and Sport
MIUR	Ministry of Instruction
REEC	Reinforce Educators, Empower Children
SEL	Social-Emotional learning
Tdh	Terre des hommes Hellas

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[1] Adverse Childhood Experiences, potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood (0-17 years) such as experiencing violence, abuse, or neglect; witnessing violence in the home; and having a family member attempt or die by suicide. Also included are aspects of the child's environment that can undermine their sense of safety, stability and bonding such as growing up in a household with substance misuse, mental health problems, or instability due to parental separation or incarceration of a parent, sibling or other member of the household (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019). Available at: https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/about.html

Acknowledgements

This manual was written by Dr. Giulia Cavalli and Dr. Simona Vigoni in collaboration with Alice Tramontano and in close consultation with the International Rescue Committee (IRC) Italy.

For more information about the Safe Healing and Learning Spaces (SHLS) Toolkit, please contact the IRC at children@rescue.org.
To download the resources in the SHLS Toolkit, please go to SHLS.rescue.org.
For more information about the "Movement Games and Sports" methodology, please contact TdH at info@tdh-europe.org.

Disclaimer: This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of project partners and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

Introduction: A new integrated approach and its adaptation to the Milanese context (2017-2021)

Drawing on over 30 years of child advocacy experience and 10 years of research and field testing, the IRC developed the Healing Classroom (HC) and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) curricula to help boys and girls develop cognitive and social-emotional skills in a stable, welcoming, child-friendly space. These curricula have been widely used and tested in crisis, post-crisis, and fragile state settings. This makes them useful and reliable materials, and at the same time flexible and adaptable to different contexts.

Starting in 2017, the IRC worked with the Early Childhood Education and Care Department of the Municipality of Milan to adapt its approach to the specific needs of the Milanese context. Thanks to several moments of brainstorming and training, the curricula of the Healing Classrooms and Social-Emotional Learning have been translated, adapted, and aligned with the pedagogical framework of the Municipality (Pedagogical Guidelines) with the support of expert consultants and the IRC's Technical Units.

Capitalizing on the experience and collaboration between the International Rescue Committee and the Municipality of Milan that began in 2017, a new approach was designed, combining the HC and SEL tools and methodologies – already adapted to the needs and specificities of the Milanese educational and social context – and the "Movements, Games and Sport" curriculum developed by Terre des Hommes in a new comprehensive methodology, modeling it on the needs of educators, teachers and organizational positions in the Municipality of Milan. The *"Holistic educational approach for children from 0 to 6 years"* proposed in this manual aims to support children's psychosocial development and to promote the construction of well-being environments, namely safe and welcoming environments and relationships within early childhood education and school services. Below is a brief description of the curricula that will be explored in the manual:

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL): It is critical to ensure that all children receive adequate support and learning opportunities to enable them to develop to their full potential. Creating a safe, welcoming and reassuring environment fosters Social-Emotional Learning, which can be defined as the process of acquiring and applying knowledge, attitudes and skills that are fundamental to daily life. This includes the ability to focus, memory, awareness and management of one's own emotions, recognition of others' emotions, empathy, the ability to make decisions, build friendships, solve problems, and persevere in one's goals. The acquisition of these social-emotional skills in the early years of life strongly influences the ability of boys and girls to grow into satisfied, healthy, and happy adults.

Healing "Classrooms" (HC): The classroom (namely the section they belong to in the City's education and school services), where boys and girls spend a considerable part of their day, plays an important role in their growth and learning process. In this classroom, it is important to promote not only the well-being of children, but also the well-being of the educator or teacher who cares for them, who follows, supports and nurtures their learning processes every day. The adult builds a context that is reassuring, participatory, cooperative, expressive and respectful of children's needs and choices. Learning must be centered on the child, who is left free to choose, move and experiment at his or her own pace and according to his or her own inclinations, while the teacher/educator facilitates learning processes by relaunching and extending spontaneous research. In fact, the child learns by experimenting personally and actively, starting with examples

and activities that s/he knows from her or his daily life. Healing classrooms are not just about the school building: they are active, experimental and open, and children's well-being also depends on the possibilities that the open space (the garden, the territory, etc.) offers them. In the healing classrooms the adults who educate also support their own well-being and that of the work group, through a process of self-awareness and of their own educational outlook.

Movement, Games and Sport (MGS): Movements, Games and Sports is a curriculum produced by TdH in 2005 and has been tested in a variety of settings since then. MGS focuses on the psychosocial development of children. This curriculum aims to increase the capacity of teachers, educators, and school psychologists to develop personal, methodological, social, technical, and demonstration skills in practice, conflict resolution, group work, and social relationships.

Healing Classrooms approach is based on 30 years of IRC's education work in conflict and crisis-affected areas.

The approach focuses on expanding and supporting the ways in which teachers can create and maintain "healing" learning spaces in which all children can recover, grow and develop.

In 2005, Terre des hommes developed a pilot-project called "Movement, Games and Sport (MGS) for the psychosocial development of children". This methodology is the result of that 15-year MGS field experience on strengthening the skills of adults (animators, social workers and teachers) working with children.

The approach to SEL is adapted from the International Rescue Committee's (IRC) ongoing work to integrate SEL in education and protection programs.

SEL has been shown to mitigate the effects of adversity, by providing children with the tools to focus, regulate their emotional responses, interact with others, and cope with stress and challenges.

This new approach proposes theoretical reflections and practical advice for creating an educational context that places the well-being of children and adults as its ultimate goal. By applying this approach, children will have the opportunity to develop new skills in a caring and welcoming environment while at the same time reinforcing and reducing the effects of possible adverse childhood experiences that the child has encountered or may encounter. The approach is based on activities that invite the child to use his or her mind, body, and emotional world. The classroom is immediately transformed into a space that considers the child's well-being holistically and combines pleasure, wonder, and learning.

How to use the manual

This handbook is aimed at educators and teachers of nursery and preschool and aims to improve children's overall well-being through the strengthening of their psychosocial competencies by providing effective information and tools for working with children. This handbook will help educators and teachers design safe and interesting learning contexts for children, with the goal of providing them with multiple opportunities to experiment with diverse experiences that are meaningful to their sensory, cognitive, social, expressive, and motor development.

The first chapter, based on sound scientific findings, is an introduction to the meaning of well-being and the role of educational settings in promoting children's well-being and holistic development, including through health and nutrition.

The second chapter highlights the milestones and goals for skill development for children between 0-6-year-old range. Keeping in mind the possible achievements of boys and girls suggests to the educator/teacher orientations, attentions and responsibilities in organizing activities and experiences aimed at promoting competence, which at this age should be understood in a global and unitary way.

The third chapter provides an overview of what it means to create an "Environment of Well-Being" and of the fundamental role of the educator/teacher in the lives of children and their families in designing safe, inclusive and interesting spaces in which each can learn and grow according to his or her own rhythms and inclinations. This section also offers suggestions and strategies for educators and teachers who work with children with disabilities, special needs or heterogeneous groups.

The fourth chapter offers a detailed and practical guide to the creation and design of the environments of well-being, offering suggestions and ideas on how to organize physical space and the use of materials, starting with the centers of interest, which correspond to the different and varied languages of children. By subdividing the space by centers of interest, we work with the dimension of the small group, a fertile condition for guaranteeing concentration and attention on the part of the children and for offering the adult the possibility of stopping, observing, noting down the children's research, supporting them if necessary, relaunching with subsequent proposals, increasing the degree of complexity, with a view to enhancing learning.

1. Early childhood Development

1.1 Introduction

Childhood begins during the prenatal period, when the mother's health and well-being have a strong influence on the child's development, and extends through the transition to primary school, covering the 0-10 year range. In this book, we focus on the nursery and preschool years, i.e., 0-6 years, before primary school.

Focusing on children's development in this early part of childhood is important because:

- Many fundamental aspects of future learning are built at this stage;
- Child development depends on genetic and contextual factors (family, community, education, recreational activities, cultural customs);
- Development in the early years is largely influenced by the surrounding community, which includes parents, caregivers, relatives, teachers, health care providers, and others who interact directly with the child;
- **Loving teachers, educators, and caregivers** play an essential role in supporting the development of young children and can help prepare them for future well-being.

The below graphic illustrates the key spheres of influence in child development. First, children are influenced by their families, parents, and other primary caregivers who play the most important role in the early experiences they have in the world. Childcare providers, such as teachers and educators, constitute the next level of influence, having significant interactions directly with the child and family. Finally, the community and the broader sociopolitical environment in which the child lives influence service providers and the family, having an indirect impact on the child's development. When thinking about how to promote development, it is important to consider the activities and interventions within each level of influence and to recognize **the vital role of teachers, educators**, and early childhood services in general.

It is useful to remember that human development continues throughout life, is not solely confined to childhood, and is **a multidimensional and multidirectional process**: developmental trajectories have multiple dimensions that influence each other (e.g., physical, cognitive, social, affective development...) and can take any direction. From this perspective, development does not follow a "forward and upward" or "negative to positive" pattern; rather, we can think of development as the possibility of dealing with life based on who one is at any given moment. Development is a profoundly **interactive** and relational process, embedded in historical and cultural reality and, in this sense, has a lot to do with the gaze adopted by those who educate. For this reason, even starting from disadvantageous conditions of life, every relationship is really

an opportunity - both for the child and the adult - for the development of personal and contextual potential.

International community Legislation, policy, resources

Central government Legislation, policy, resource

Local government practice

Rights claims

Family

Community

Civil society Private sector

Civil society Private sector

Civil society Private sector

Obligations and responsibilities
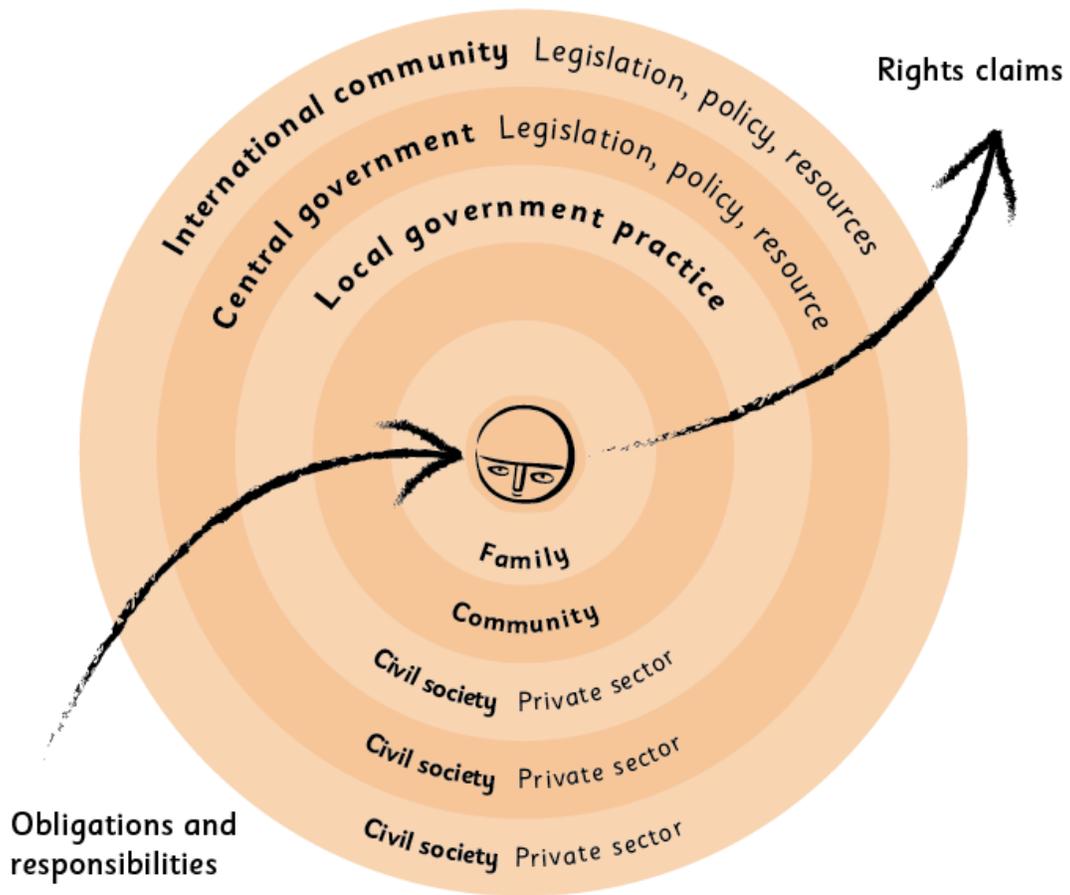
1.2 Brain development

A baby is born with basic elements for learning and memory. An infant's brain has over 80 billion neurons! That's almost all the neurons the brain will have for life, but in order for the baby to learn and develop, the brain must form and strengthen connections between neurons, called synapses. At birth, the baby's brain has very few synapses.

The brain develops rapidly during the first few years of life, and **synapse formation** depends largely on experiences and interactions with parents/caregivers. Over 1 million synapses are formed every second in the first few years of life! When parents and caregivers have a loving relationship with their child, when they play, sing, tell stories or read books, they are helping their brain develop and strengthen synapses in areas that are critical to future learning, long-term health and well-being.

This means being in a nurturing relationship with children and offering them appropriate stimulation. Hypo-stimulation has detrimental effects on brain development, but hyper-stimulation can also hinder balanced brain development; at this age it is common to be bombarded with perceptual stimulation that is too intense and rapid for a child's brain. For example, it has been demonstrated that children aged 3–4 years old who are immersed in a sensory rich environment with lots of colors may have greater difficulty focusing on an activity.

Neuroscience has also shown us that excessive stimuli (visual, auditory....) that call attention to the outside can lead to an alteration of brain development, with consequences in emotional and social skills, since they reduce the brain's activity aimed at "looking inside", at listening to oneself, at getting lost in fantasy and play, at inner reflection. Indeed, in the brain the areas dedicated to "looking outside", namely the areas that lead to giving attention to the outside, are activated when the areas dedicated to "looking inside" are inactive and vice versa. This supports the idea that learning is not just a process whereby children are guided to pay attention to what comes from outside, but it necessarily also requires an inner, mental and emotional process. The results of these studies are also very interesting with reference to the adult brain, which is continually led to "look outside" (e.g., using cell phones, social media, etc.). This widespread behavior thus diminishes the possibility for adults to rework within themselves what they observe outside, to allow memories and dreams, to become aware of their own and other people's emotions, with the result of decreasing relational and empathic skills, which are fundamental for those who educate.

> **KEEP IN MIND!**
>
> **Brain development = neurological connections, synapse formation, learning**
>
> **Neurons:** Specialized nerve cells in the brain that serve as the basic units of learning and memory. Neurons communicate with each other using electrical and chemical signals and are able to receive, analyze, and produce information.
>
> **Synapse:** Area of connection between two neurons, created and strengthened when learning new things and repeating activities.

Synaptic connections in early life

| At birth | 3 months | 5 months | 15 months |
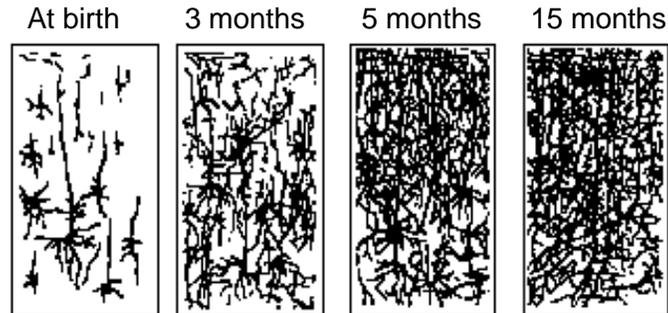
At preschool age (3-6 years), the brain ...

- Grows to 90% of its adult size.
- Develops more than 100 trillion synapses.
- Has about 50% more synapses than the adult brain.

Synapse formation and brain growth mean that children are in a period of fundamental learning and development. As children grow, the development of new synapses slows down.

Teachers and educators therefore play a very important role in the development of children's brains. Their work has an enormous influence on the creation of synapses and thus on children's learning through interactions with them.

Reducing stress

Experiences that repeatedly cause high levels of stress for your child can damage brain development. Specifically:

1. When the child lives in a stressful environment for prolonged periods (poverty, hunger),
2. When the child is a victim or witness of violence,
3. When the child is a victim of neglect (the child does not have a parent or caregiver who is able to respond to the child's needs and care for the child in a loving and timely manner).

In situations of crisis or conflict, the child's environment at home and in society can cause prolonged stressful situations. Stress has a destructive effect on brain development because it disrupts the creation of synapses and destroys some of them, and this can have long-term consequences on the child's own learning and behavior.
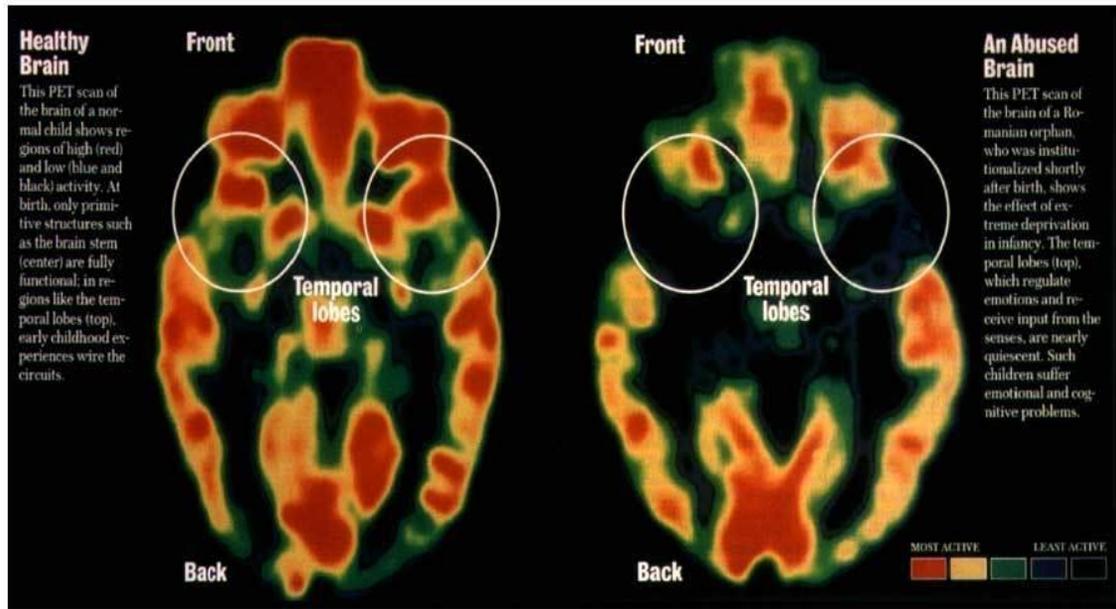
Impact of extreme neglect on brain development

This child's brain has a high level of activity in the prefrontal cortex, the area of the brain responsible for cognitive function and higher-level memory. This indicates typical brain development.

This child's brain has almost no activity in the prefrontal cortex. This is the outcome of extreme neglect.

As an educator and teacher, you can play an important role by providing a consistent and protective environment. Research shows that cognitive stimulation, timely care, and loving relationships can reduce the negative effects of stress and contribute to balanced brain development even during times of stress at home or in the community in which you live.

Having understood the negative impact of stress, adults should work to create a safe, calm, supportive environment with a consistent routine. The well-being environments at the nursery and preschool level presented in this handbook provide guidance for creating positive environments for all children to thrive, with particular attention to those living with psychosocial fragility.

1.3 Well-being and nutrition during development

Cognitive, physical, and social-emotional development requires good health and a balanced diet that includes essential vitamins and minerals, also called micronutrients, but excludes others.

The relationship between food and behavior is articulated and still under study. An unsuitable nutrition can lead not only to physical problems, but also to emotional and cognitive difficulties. Sweets, for example, can be a rather insidious cause of fits of anger and tantrums of "biochemical" origin: the excess of sugar would promote restlessness. Numerous researches have shown the close correlation between a diet too rich in sugars and undesirable behaviors. Artificial sweeteners and food additives are no less damaging, because they alter the stabilization of serotonin, a hormone essential for psychophysical balance, negatively affecting hyperactive and aggressive behavior.

We need to promote children's well-being through a healthy diet also because our gut impacts our mood!

What can you do?

➢ **Provide children with age-appropriate, nutrient-rich foods.** Preschoolers should eat foods that contain a wide variety of proteins, fats, carbohydrates, vitamins and micronutrients, including Vitamin A, Calcium, Iron, Folate, Zinc, Iodine and Vitamin D. Sufficient amounts of green leafy vegetables, fruits, grains, meats and iodized salt can provide children with most of these elements. Healthy, energizing snacks should be provided to preschoolers throughout the day.

➢ **Have them drink plenty**. Our nervous system works through electrical stimuli and water is a good conductor. Having a dehydrated nervous system means circulating poor and ineffective biochemical signals.

➢ **Omega 3 facilitate the transition between neurons** (nowadays we talk about disconnected children struggling to turn on certain areas of the brain). 95% of serotonin is secreted by the gut! And serotonin is best known for being the hormone responsible for good mood and is bi-directionally linked to experiences of contentment, satisfaction and mental and physical well-being.

➢ **Practice healthy and hygienic habits in the classroom.** Children can learn healthy routines, encouraged to use the same healthy habits at home.

➢ **Report instances of neglect.**

➢ **Refer children to health services when necessary.**

1.4 Promoting a holistic development

Focusing on a holistic development means recognizing the multiple needs of the child, including nutrition, health, educational relationships, communication, play, and appropriate learning activities. Addressing these multiple needs strengthens the three key domains related to child development: physical/motor, cognitive, and social-emotional. Development in one domain, influences development in the other domains, like cogs in an engine.

HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT
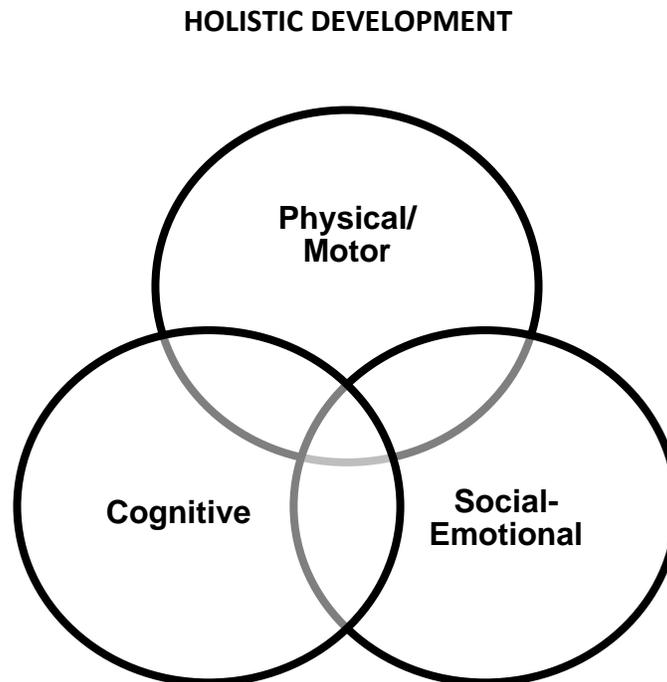
Physical development refers to a child's sensory and motor functions, including global motor skills, or large movements of the arms, legs, or the whole body (such as walking or kicking); fine motor skills, or the coordination of hands, fingers, and eyes (such as holding a pencil or writing); visual function (vision); auditory function (hearing); tactile system (touch); and balance.

Cognitive development refers to the mental processes involved in memory, intelligence, problem solving, and decision making. Language development is also considered part of cognitive development, although it is strongly related to physical and social-emotional development. For example, the physical abilities of hearing, vocal cord development, and fine motor skills influence language acquisition, as does the social-emotional use of language as a form of communication and self-expression.

Social-emotional development refers to a child's ability to identify and understand his or her own emotions and build and maintain positive relationships with others. This involves emotional self-regulation, the ability to regulate behaviors and expressions of emotion, the ability to read and understand one's own and others' mental states correctly, and to develop empathy for others.

Motor/Physical
- Growth (height, weight)
- Global motor skills (walking, jumping) and fine motor skills (outlining, holding an object to write)
- Coordination and balance
- Sensory functions (hearing, seeing, touching, tasting, etc.).

Cognitive
- Memory
- Problem Solving
- Decision Making
- Pre-Mathematical Skills
- Language skills

Socio-Emotional
- Identification of emotions/feelings (I'm sad, I'm happy, I'm scared, etc.).
- Empathy and response to the emotions of others
- Ability to calm oneself, regulate emotions
- Playfulness (learning to wait one's turn, learning to negotiate rules, cooperation, etc.)
- Self-esteem (feelings of importance, pride, and confidence)
- Mentalization (recognizing the mental states underlying one's own and others' behaviors)

Although the skills listed above in the three key areas related to child development are critical, they do NOT specifically address all the important skills that children will learn in the first 6 years of life. Concepts such as morality, spirituality, creativity and artistic expression, and others often address ALL of these areas. Teachers can promote **holistic development** by incorporating aspects of each domain into activities and planning. In fact, some of the most effective activities draw from ALL of these domains at the same time. Think of a group of children doing a circle. They are using cognitive skills (language to sing a song, etc.), social-emotional skills (interacting with friends, finding a shared rhythm, etc.), and physical skills (walking in a circle).

The developmental stages in early childhood development

In most children, development occurs in stages, although each child develops at its own pace. Children with physical or developmental disabilities will grow and learn at their own pace. Below

is a schematic summary of the "classic" developmental stages in early childhood, although it is important to remember that not all children experience these stages in the same way.

REMEMBER!
Each child grows and develops at his or her own pace.
~ 40% of children may have delays in one or more areas.
~ 20% of children have delays in two or more areas

Age 0-1 y.o.	**Socio-emotional** Calm down when caregiver is calm. Seek comfort from reference adults. Learn basic trust in self, caregivers, environment. **Cognitive** Repeat movements to master them. Interested in the environment. Make lullabies, say syllables, and imitate sounds. Discriminate caregivers from other unfamiliar adults. Solve problems by trial and error. **Physical** Roll over. Turn their head. Grab objects. Raise head and torso off the floor. Support own weight. Stand up. Begin to walk.
Age 1-3 y.o.	**Socio-emotional** Show anxiety about strangers and separation anxiety from caregiver. Imitate people in surroundings. Participate in parallel play and symbolic play with peers. May have mood swings (stubbornness). Take pride in doing well and embarrassment in doing what they perceive as "wrong". Can recognize stress in others. Emotionally attached to toys or objects for safety. **Cognitive** Begin symbolic thinking. Point to pictures in books. Respond to verbal cues. Begin to use words. Imitate complex behaviors. Know that objects are used for specific purposes. Use more complex toys and puzzles. **Physical** Walk with more confidence. Develop more complex motor skills. Climb stairs. Go down stairs.
Age 3-4 y.o.	**Socio-Emotional** Openly express a variety of emotions such as joy, sadness, pride, anger. Can easily separate from parents. Wait their turn. Rejoice in helping others. Respond with increasing confidence, autonomy, and determination. Begin to follow rules

	and routines. Want to do things for themselves. Imitate adults and peers. Begin to develop empathy. **Cognitive** Begin to understand concepts of space, time, and quantity. Begin to count. Begin to classify objects by shape and size. Extend vocabulary and speak in short sentences. Can follow a conversation, understand sentences, and play language games. **Motor/Physical** Run with ease. Walk with the rhythm of music. Jump with both feet together. Overcome obstacles.
Age 4-5 y.o.	**Socio-Emotional** Develop empathy. Control and express emotions better. Understand the mental and emotional states of others. Begin to play competitive games by understanding basic rules, although not always completely. **Cognitive** Are aware of their own cognitive performance. Begin to understand cause/effect relationships and solve problems. Organize objects from smallest to largest, lightest to heaviest. Make requests and justifications. Compare objects by noticing similarities and differences. **Motor/Physical** Can climb a step ladder. Walk backwards. Hold paper steady with one hand while writing with the other. Can get dressed with some help. Draw a line between two dots. Cut straight with scissors.
Age 5-6 y.o.	**Socio-emotional** Know how to control emotions most of the time. Choose friends. Negotiate with adults. Become increasingly independent. Better understand the rules of competitive games. Understand and encourage fairness. Like to play in groups. Ask for clarification when they do not understand something. Ask for permission. **Cognitive** Follow and engage in a more complex conversation. Understand that the size of a collection of items remains the same regardless of how it is presented. Draw representations of objects or stories. Write their name. Tell chronological and logical stories. Begin to read simple words. Identify rhyming words. Understand better (but not completely) the concept of time.

	Motor/Physical Can get dressed by themselves. Can jump on one foot. Control fine motor skills better (write letters, numbers and words, stay within certain lines while coloring).

In order to help children develop to their fullest potential, it is important to offer:
- Learning experiences that engage multiple senses (sight, hearing, taste, smell, touch)
- Opportunities to make choices
- Opportunities to do fine motor exercises to develop motor skills
- Opportunities to express language through speaking, listening to readings, and singing
- Opportunities to be involved in activities that help them develop a sense of mastery and accomplishment
- Opportunities to learn about cooperation, helping and sharing
- Opportunities to practice logical-mathematical thinking

DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

The following list is a reference for educators. It is not meant to diagnose disabilities, but to give an idea of the types of skills children should have at various stages.

From 3 months

Physical Skills
- Raise their head and chest when lying on their stomach
- Stretch and kick when lying on their tummy or back
- Open and close hands
- Bring hand to mouth
- Grab and shake toys

Social Skills
- Begin to develop a social smile
- Like to play with people
- More communicative and expressive with face
- Mimic some movements/expressions
- Begin to make babbling sounds

Sensory skills
- Follow moving objects
- Recognize familiar objects and people at a distance
- Begin to use hands and eyes in a coordinated manner
- Look at faces carefully
- Prefer sweet smells and soft sensations

From 7 months

Physical skills
- Roll in both directions
- Sit with and then without hand support
- Support full weight on legs
- Grasp objects with one hand
- Transfer an object from one hand to the other

Social Skills
- Respond to their names
- Lallation (chain of sounds)
- Like social play
- Interested in mirror images
- Respond to expressions of emotion
- Often appear joyful

Cognitive skills
- Find partially hidden objects
- Explore with hands and mouth
- Strive to reach objects out of their reach

From the first year

Physical skills
- Get into a sitting position by themselves
- Crawl forward on belly
- Crawl on all fours, on hands and knees
- Move from sitting to crawling position
- Rise to stand
- Walk by holding onto furniture

Social skills
- Respond to "no"
- Try to imitate words
- Shy or anxious around strangers
- Enjoy imitating people, playing games
- Show preferences for certain people and toys
- Check parents' response to their behaviors
- Feed themselves using their fingers

Cognitive skills
- Explore objects in various ways
- Easily find hidden objects
- Look at the correct picture when the picture is called out
- Imitate gestures
- Begin to use objects correctly (e.g., drinking from cup)

From the second year

Physical Skills
- Walk alone
- Can carry various objects while walking
- Begin to run
- Stand on tiptoes
- Climb up and down without assistance

Social skills
- Use short sentences
- Follow simple instructions
- Mimic the behavior of others
- Are aware of self as separate from others
- Enthusiastic about the company of other children

Cognitive skills
- Find objects even if hidden under two or three covers
- Order objects by shape and color
- Implement pretend play

From the fourth year

Physical Skills
- Jump and stay on one foot for a few seconds
- Can easily walk back and forth
- Go up and down stairs without support
- Throw or kick balls forward

Social skills
- Draw simple shapes and people
- Tell stories
- Collaborate with other children
- More complex pretend play
- More independent (can dress and undress themselves)
- Interested in new things

Cognitive skills
- Name some colors correctly
- Understand the concept of numerical quantities
- Execute commands consisting of three deliveries
- Understand the concept of equal/different
- Can recall parts of a story

2. Possible milestones from 0 to 6 years

In accordance with the Pedagogical Guidelines for the Integrated System 0-6 years developed by the National Commission[2], in the well-being environments for boys and girls from 0 to 6 years, the direction of teachers/educators, the configuration of space, proposals, materials, and pedagogical design will be aimed at promoting in children:

- Their ability to feel good with their body. The body should be considered as a whole and as a tool to relate to others

- Their ability to listen, to communicate, verbally and non-verbally, in order to be understood by and dialogue with others

- Their ability to represent the world and socialize experiences through the use of body, expressive, verbal, mathematical, artistic, and musical languages

- Their ability to observe the natural world and social reality, to ask questions, detect problems, make hypotheses, find possible answers

- Their acquisition of social and relational skills such as negotiating while taking into account the point of view of others, collaborate in the execution of a task, share, establish friendly relationships, reconcile small conflicts, propose ideas and solutions, etc.

From the draft of the National Guidelines for Educational Services for Children[3] prepared and presented on December 6, 2021 by the National Commission for the Integrated System of Education and Instruction (art. 10 Legislative Decree No. 65 of April 13, 2017), the possible achievements of children for the 0-3 age group are the following:

- Use their body to make contact with the physical and social world
- Recognize the sensory qualities of objects and materials, progressively developing a sense of the beauty found in order, harmony, rhythm, combination of sounds, smells, colors, flavors, shapes, movements
- Listen, understand and communicate, verbally and non-verbally, in order to dialogue with others

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[2] https://www.miur.gov.it/documents/20182/1945318/Bozza+Linee+pedagogiche+0-6.pdf/5733b500-2bdf-bb16-03b8-a299ad5f9d08?t=1609347710638
[3] https://www.istruzione.it/sistema-integrato-06/allegati/Documento%20base%20Orientamenti%20nazionali%20per%20i%20servizi%20educativi%20per%20l'infanzia.pdf

- Discover the pleasure of leaving their traces in the environment, modify it, create through the movement, the graphic sign, painting, manipulation, the use of the voice, the production of rhythms
- Observe the surrounding reality and ask questions, make assumptions, try answers
- Relate to others, share, collaborate, make friends, make the first negotiations, internalize rules and limits necessary to respect the environment and the other.

Taking into account the fields of experience or the cultural areas that refer to the different aspects of human intelligence and to the symbolic-cultural systems with which these aspects come into contact, the National Directions for the curriculum of kindergarten and the first cycle of education (Annali Istruzione, 2012) define the goals for the development of competencies for 3-6 years.

"In kindergarten, the goals for the development of skill suggest to the teacher some guidelines, care and responsibilities in creating workflows to organize activities and experiences aimed at promoting competence, which at this age should be understood in a global and unitary way".

Skill Development Goals (FIELD OF EXPERIENCE: SELF AND OTHER)

Children play constructively and creatively with others, know how to argue, confront, and support their reasons with adults and children.
They develop a sense of personal identity, perceive their own needs and feelings, know how to express them in an increasingly appropriate way.
They know that they have a personal and family history, know the traditions of the family and the community and compare them with others.
They reflect, compare, discuss with adults and other children and begin to recognize the reciprocity of attention between speaker and listener.
They ask questions about existential and religious issues, cultural differences, what is good or bad, justice, and have reached an initial awareness of their rights and duties, and the rules of living together.
They orient themselves in the first generalizations of past, present, future and move with growing confidence and autonomy in familiar spaces, progressively modulating their voice and movement also in relation to others and to shared rules.
They recognize the most important signs of their culture and territory, institutions, public services, the functioning of small communities and the city.

Skill Development Goals (FIELD OF EXPERIENCE: THE BODY AND MOVEMENT)

Children fully experience their own body, perceive its communicative and expressive potential, and mature behaviors which allow them good independence in managing the day at school.
They recognize the signals and rhythms of their own body, sexual and developmental differences and adopt correct practices of self-care, hygiene and healthy eating.
They take pleasure in movement and experiment with postural and motor patterns, apply them in individual and group games, even with the use of small tools, and are able to adapt them to environmental situations inside the school and outdoors.

They control the execution of the gesture, evaluate the risk, interact with others in games of movement, music, dance, expressive communication.

They recognize their own body, its different parts and represent the body both still and in motion.

Skill Development Goals (FIELD OF EXPERIENCE: IMAGES, SOUNDS, COLORS):

Children communicate, express emotions, tell stories, using the various possibilities that body language allows.

They invent stories and know how to express them through drama, drawing, painting and other manipulative activities; they use materials and tools, expressive and creative techniques.

They explore the potential offered by technology.

They follow with curiosity and pleasure shows of various types (theatrical, musical, visual, animation ...).

They develop an interest in listening to music and in the enjoyment of works of art.

They discover the soundscape through activities of perception and musical production using voice, body and objects.

They experiment with and combine basic musical elements, producing simple musical and sound sequences.

They explore the first musical alphabets, also using the symbols of informal notation to encode perceived sounds and reproduce them.

Skill Development Goals (FIELD OF EXPERIENCE: SPEECH AND WORDS):

Children use the Italian language, enrich and clarify their vocabulary, understand words and speech, and make assumptions about meanings.

They know how to express and communicate to others emotions, feelings, arguments through verbal language that they use in different communicative situations.

They experiment with rhymes, nursery rhymes, dramatizations; they invent new words, look for similarities and analogies between sounds and meanings.

They listen to and understand narratives, tell and invent stories, ask and offer explanations, use language to plan activities and to define rules.

They reason about language, discover the presence of different languages, recognize and experience the plurality of languages, and measure themselves with creativity and imagination.

They approach written language, explore and experiment with early forms of communication through writing, also encountering digital technologies and new media.

Skill Development Goals (FIELD OF EXPERIENCE: KNOWLEDGE OF THE WORLD):

Children group and sort objects and materials according to different criteria, identify some properties, compare and evaluate quantities.

They use symbols to record them.

They perform measurements using tools within their reach.

They know how to place everyday actions in the time of day and week.

They can correctly report events of the recent past.

They can tell what may happen in the immediate and near future.

They observe with attention their body, living organisms and their environments, natural phenomena, noticing their changes.

They are interested in machines and technological instruments and can discover their functions and possible uses.

They are familiar with both the strategies of counting and operating with numbers as well as those necessary to perform the first measurements of lengths, weights, and other quantities.

They identify the positions of objects and people in space, using terms such as forward/backward, above/below, right/left, etc...

They correctly follow a route based on verbal directions[4]."

Remarks of fields of experience

"In kindergarten, it is not a matter of organizing and "teaching" specific knowledge or languages/skills too soon, because fields of experience should rather be seen as cultural and practical contexts that "amplify" children's experience thanks to their encounter with images, words, emphases and "relaunches" promoted by the teacher's intervention. Among the fundamental aims of kindergartens, in addition to "identity", "autonomy" and "competences", "citizenship" is also indicated: "Living the first experiences of citizenship means discovering the other and giving progressive importance to others and their needs; becoming increasingly aware of the need to establish shared rules; it implies the first exercise of dialogue that is based on the reciprocity of listening, attention to the point of view of the other and gender diversity, the first recognition of rights and duties equal for all; it means laying the foundations of an ethically oriented behavior, respectful of others, the environment and nature. At the center of the curriculum is the promotion of basic skills (cognitive, emotional, social) that structure the growth of every child. Suggestive in this regard are the observations contained in the field of experience "the self and the other" which prefigures the promotion of an active and responsible citizenship. (...) "The many whys represent their drive to understand the meaning of life around them and the moral value of their actions. In school they have many opportunities to become aware of their own identity, to discover cultural, religious, and ethnic differences, to learn the first rules of social life, to reflect on the meaning and consequences of their actions (...) (...). This field represents the elective environment in which the themes of rights and duties, of the functioning of social life, of citizenship and institutions find a first "gymnasium" to be looked at and faced concretely (...) (...). The school stands as a space for meeting and dialogue, cultural deepening and mutual training between parents and teachers to address these issues together and propose to children a model of listening and respect, which helps them find answers to their questions of meaning in accordance with the choices of their family, with the common goal of strengthening the prerequisites of democratic coexistence. (...)".

- *National indications MIUR 2018*

The concept of field of experience was introduced by the 1991 Guidelines to outline specific areas of competence, defined as "the different environments of children's actions and activities, and therefore the specific and identifiable areas of competence in which children give meaning to their many activities, develop their learning, also acquiring linguistic and procedural tools, and pursue

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[4] http://www.indicazioninazionali.it/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Indicazioni_Annali_Definitivo.pdf

their educational goals, in the concrete of an experience that takes place within the defined boundaries and with their constant active involvement".

There are 5 fields of experience. Each one is linked to a set of Skill Development Goals. The 5 fields of experience are:

1. The self and the other is the field of all the experiences and activities explicitly aimed at stimulating children to understand the need to fix and to refer to rules of behavior and relationships essential for a unanimously valid coexistence.

2. The body and movement is the field of experience of the body and motor skills, aimed at promoting awareness of the value of the body, "understood as one of the expressions of personality and as a functional, relational, cognitive, communicative and practical condition".

3. Images, sounds, colors is the field of experience that considers all activities related to communication and expression, such as manipulative-visual, sound-musical, dramatic-theatrical, audio-visual expression, and mass media, with their continuous intertwining.

4. Speech and words is the specific field of communicative skills related to oral language, an essential tool for communicating and knowing, in order to gradually make their thoughts more complex and better defined, also through comparison with others and with concrete experience and observation.

5. Knowledge of the world is the field of experience related to the exploration, discovery and first systematization of knowledge about the world of natural and artificial reality, namely the field of scientific knowledge and mathematics linked to "the ability to group, sort, quantify and measure phenomena and facts of reality" (Miur, 2012).

3. Building well-being environments

Children's services are often the first institution in which boys and girls are welcomed and the first place in which they receive care outside their home contexts. They serve not only as a safe place, but also as a place to meet, to play with other children, a place of possible learning in which to meet professional adults capable of supporting and expanding their research and interests. Here, daily routines and rituals are very important: the continuity and repetition of experiences have a great impact on the level of security, especially in the early age group, when time is defined by the constant succession of events. Rituals and routines allow children to master situation, precisely because they are predictable. Within this framework, the suggestions, the spaces, the occasions for dialogue with the materials available must also take into account the diversity of languages that the child possesses, the evolution of the project proposals, the introduction of cognitive challenges capable of stimulating curiosity and of promoting the acquisition of new competences. This is why childcare services are flexible, inclusive, creative and adaptable to the needs and wishes of children. In recent decades, awareness of the needs and desires of young children has increased considerably thanks to the contribution of neuroscientific disciplines and the successful encounter with pedagogical sciences: this has led to a holistic view of children's development and well-being. We believe that, given the strong cerebral plasticity of the first years of life, the job of educators and teachers is one of the most important and delicate jobs in the world.

When children are in good health and their physical, social-emotional and cognitive needs are met, they can feel "good", they can be ready to interact positively with their peers and learn new things, they can be willing to learn. When we talk and deal with good health, we refer to a broad concept, which does not only cover physical aspects, but follows the indications and the definition that the World Health Organization (WHO, 2011) gives us. Health is the ability to adapt and self-manage when facing social, physical and emotional challenges**: a dynamic concept based on resilience or the ability to cope with, maintain and restore one's integrity, balance and sense of well-being**. Well-being, or the feeling of well-being, is different for every child. However, there are compasses that can direct us to promote children's well-being within educational and school settings.

3.1 What is a well-being environment

It is a place that promotes the well-being of boys and girls. Well-being environments take an inclusive approach to education: all children are welcomed and supported, regardless of gender, nationality, religion or ethnic identity. This also means that children should have equal opportunities to play and learn, regardless of their socioeconomic status or background. At the same time, the "well-being environments" approach recognizes that crisis situations and trauma affect children's physical, emotional, social, cognitive, and spiritual development and increase the risk of abuse and exploitation, including in education and school services. This handbook provides guidelines and strategies to mitigate these risks.

Key messages on the well-being environments

➢ **Child-centered:** Allowing children to make choices is important for them to gain a sense of self-worth and pursue their individual interests. Opportunities should be provided for children to engage in play-based activities on their own or in small groups, guided by an adult or self-directed. This places the child at the center of his or her own learning. The child feels, in this way, capable of learning.

➢ **Play-based:** Play is the work of children. Through active and engaging experimentation, children learn and acquire and reinforce important skills that serve as the foundation for future learning and behavior. The educators and teachers will support the different interests that emerge from spontaneous play. Depending on the ages of the children and their interests and based on observations, they will expand the activities, taking into account the different expressive languages of the children: motor, graphic, pictorial, narrative, musical....

➢ **Experimental and active:** "the brain needs tactile and motor experiences in order to develop those motor sensory areas that are the starting point for the maturation of upper areas, those of language and complex thought" (*Oliverio, Il cervello che impara*). Children experience the world through sensory exploration. Sitting at a table for more than 10-15 minutes at a time is not favorable to early childhood learning. Well-being environments are defined as educational and school settings inside and outside of buildings. Therefore, there should be a constant and continuous dialogue between indoor and outdoor, in which the outdoor is considered a fundamental learning space.

➢ **Plural, diverse and connected:** Well-being environments should be capable of taking into account the different expressive possibilities of children. Motor, graphic, symbolic, manipulative contexts... A variety that can allow each one to experiment with the languages they prefer and to be accompanied and supported in their knowledge of others.

➢ **Aesthetically beautiful and legible:** Environments should be rich, but not overloaded: too many stimuli risk overwhelming the child. Environments should be orderly, beautiful and able to trigger wonder in children.

➢ **Relevant and practical:** It is important that learning processes represent the reality of children's lives. Educators and teachers should refer to activities familiar to children. This means including and bringing in objects or materials that are recognizable by children.

➢ **Independent and self-directed:** Children learn best when they try things on their own, have the opportunity to "make mistakes", and are encouraged to try again. It is important that children have opportunities to learn on their own. Making mistakes is part of the learning process.

➢ **Rich in unstructured material:** Unstructured material (recycled, natural, industrial waste), in a context where children have the opportunity to do things for themselves, promotes creative processes, divergent thinking, problem solving skills, independent exploration.

Teachers and educators need to:

➢ **Be aware of the ways in which children learn:** Teachers and educators need to be aware of learning processes, know how children learn, and also take into account that they learn in different ways: some learn best by seeing, some by doing, some by listening.

➢ **Create a peaceful environment:** It is important to build a relaxing, peaceful, and routine environment. Children feel safe when they know where their materials and belongings are and when educators and teachers document and make visible their research. While teachers and educators are encouraged to be researchers with the children, observe their findings, propose new activities and materials, and prepare contexts, they should also keep in mind that children, especially those who have experienced stress and adversity, can be hypersensitive to over-stimulation, which can affect their ability to focus attention. Educators and teachers must support and accompany children in developing strategies for self-regulation.

➢ **Be respectful of a child's learning and personal development:** Each child's unique inherited and learned traits shape his or her behaviors and ability to learn. Some may exhibit learning disabilities or adjustment problems: it is important to be patient, try to understand the children's perspective, and let them feel understood. Educators and teachers can identify strategies that help and support children and make them feel welcomed and accepted. This is often a long process that requires trying and adapting new strategies, and reflecting on the growth process.

Boys and girls should have:

➢ **Freedom of movement:** It is important to give children the freedom to move and explore, bring different contexts into dialogue, experiment.

➢ **Freedom of choice:** It is important to let children choose their own activities to support resourcefulness, self-awareness.

➢ **Feelings of safety and support:** Children should always feel welcome, safe and supported.

3.2 The role of adults in the well-being environments

Children's services have been shown to play an essential role in promoting children's well-being, particularly in situations of stress and fragility. The "well-being environments" approach expands and supports the positive role that educators and teachers can play in the lives of children and their families by creating safe spaces in which children can recover from critical situations, learn and grow.

The role of teachers and educators:
- ➢ Prepare the space, set the contexts
- ➢ Create a serene environment
- ➢ Provide moments of care, with care
- ➢ Act as modeling and scaffolding (Bruner)
- ➢ Work in the zone of proximal development (Vygotskij)
- ➢ Co-design with children and families
- ➢ Observe children
- ➢ Document learning processes
- ➢ Cultivate a good relationship with caregivers
- ➢ Encourage family participation

KEEP IN MIND!
The team should work in synergy to create a thoughtful, safe, stable, educational, beautiful, orderly place. They should support each other, be kind to each other, appreciate each other's strengths, and help each other learn.

Characteristics**:** An educator/teacher in a well-being environment is ...

- ❖ A researcher
- ❖ Curious
- ❖ Observant
- ❖ Confident
- ❖ Flexible
- ❖ Consistent
- ❖ Prepared
- ❖ Creative
- ❖ Respectful

Actions: An educator/teacher in a well-being environment ...

- ❖ relates to children in an equitable manner, without prejudice
- ❖ ensures equal gender opportunity
- ❖ understands children's developmental processes and how they learn
- ❖ works for inclusion
- ❖ views individual differences as an asset
- ❖ informs children of what is expected of them

- ❖ provides children with opportunities to play
- ❖ observes children
- ❖ co-designs with children and families
- ❖ documents children's processes and research
- ❖ displays attitudes and behaviors consistent with the values and pedagogical guidelines of the service.

> **Remember to take care of yourself.** Implementing well-being environments can be very challenging. Children, especially those who have experienced trauma or crisis situations, may bring their struggles into the educational and school context, and adults may end up exhibiting inappropriate behaviors, such as getting angry, judging, belittling and devaluing children. As educators and teachers, many of you will go through difficult and stressful times. It is important that you take time to take care of yourself. Relaxation exercises, deep breathing can help relieve stress. You are encouraged to take time for yourself and talk to co-workers and coordinators if you are feeling distressed. Children internalize stress from the adults around them. In order to provide them with the support, encouragement, and guidance they need to learn, educators and teachers must be healthy, emotionally and psychologically balanced, and motivated to provide children with high-quality learning experiences.

3.3 Creating safe and inclusive educational and learning settings

Well-being environments for 0-6 years old are designed to provide a routine, nurturing, and supportive environment for ALL boys and girls. This requires some guidelines to ensure that learning contexts are safe and inclusive.

Specific reference is made to four general principles outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) that cut across all children's rights: non-discrimination (Art. 2), best interest of the child (Art. 3), right to life, survival and development (Art. 6), participation and respect for the child's views (Art. 12).

"Many studies have shown that participation in high-quality pre-school programs by children from disadvantaged families leads to the attainment of better cognitive skills and has a considerable and long-term influence on social-emotional skills: these factors have a positive impact on their social and employment pathway as adults. The benefits of investing in early childhood education programs are far more effective and less costly than later interventions aimed at combating early school leaving (James Heckman and Dimitri V. Masterov, 'The productivity argument for investing in young children', Review of Agricultural Economics, 2007). Having a qualified set of educational and learning services is a response to the right to a good individual and community life[5]."

"The change in procreative behavior that took place at the end of the 1960s has produced recurring situations of family loneliness, due to the increasingly frequent constitution of small households, characterized by the absence of siblings, close relatives and grandparents. Adults are sometimes unable to take care of children on an ongoing basis, also because of the lengthening of working life and/or physical distance. In recent years, ways of building and being a family have multiplied and differentiated, with an increase in differently configured households. Today's families are increasingly plural in the ways they build relationships and bring differences linked to cultural, ethical and personal choices that demand respect and attention. Among these, families with foreign origins deserve a welcome, listening, and a non-stereotypical idea of cultural belonging, the freedom to choose roots, to uproot, and new roots. [6]"

Safe contexts

- **All children have the right to protection from abuse and neglect:** Children's services should protect children from physical violence, emotional abuse (such as humiliation, intimidation or shaming), sexual abuse (such as rape), sexual exploitation, or exposing children to pornographic material, and neglect (failure to address the child's developmental needs, or lack of safety).
- **Work with the entire child protection network:** Educators, teachers and school administrators should collaborate with agencies, associations and social services that, in various capacities, are involved in protecting the health and psychological and

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[5] https://www.miur.gov.it/documents/20182/1945318/Bozza+Linee+pedagogiche+0-6.pdf/5733b500-2bdf-bb16-03b8-a299ad5f9d08?t=1609347710638

[6] ibidem

physical well-being of children. Mapping child protection referral systems should be an integral part of any well-being environment.

- **Respect for privacy:** Confidentiality is a rule of law, an obligation not to disclose or make available information shared by an individual in a relationship of trust, to unauthorized persons and without the consent of the individual concerned.
- **Mandatory reporting:** Teachers and educators must adhere to national and local mandatory reporting standards for suspected cases of neglect and abuse.

Inclusive contexts

- **Children of all ethnic, religious, socioeconomic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds:** All children have the right to attend quality daycares and schools, and it is the responsibility of educators, teachers, school administrators and parents to ensure that all feel welcome and are encouraged to participate. This requires understanding the diverse needs of children from different backgrounds. "For children to grasp what we all have in common and what makes us unique is an early experience of the great variety of the human family. If each person learns to avoid classificatory definitions of the other's identity, this variety can be explored, known, raise questions, and promote comparison and discovery of different points of view. [7]" It is important to value different languages of origin, to create contexts in which they can be used, and to foster curiosity about different languages in all children.
- **Gender sensitivity:** in most parts of the world, women and girls face barriers and discrimination that have a great effect on their lives. The educator/teacher should ensure that these discriminatory practices do not occur within the service. Play and educational activities should not reinforce gender stereotypes, and all children should be encouraged to express themselves freely, without naming activities as things for "boys" or "girls."
- **Accommodate children with disabilities**: Some children have disabilities or special educational needs. Welcoming them as a priority in the educational services means recognizing their right to education, the need they have, like all children, to be accompanied in their growth[8]. This requires building an ongoing relationship with the child's caregivers in order to understand their needs and how they can be supported in the educational community. The teachers/educators, the support staff, in synergy with the family and the health care team in charge of the child, will draw up an individual project that fits in with the planning intentions of the service (section, class, etc.).

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[7] idibem
[8] ibidem

Working with children with disabilities

When working with children who disabilities keep the following in mind:

- Your role is to create an accessible environment: if a child has a physical disability, be sure to set up your space so that there are no physical barriers to that child's participation. Low shelves, pictures at eye level that everyone can see are just a few ways to make your space comfortable for everyone. Do not separate children with special needs from the rest of the group.
- Together with your colleagues, take care of the individual project by incorporating it into your section/class design.
- During the day and activities, make sure everyone is safe and has interesting experiences. This is what it means to cultivate everyone's well-being.
- Be flexible and ready to change directions, following children's interests, do not be directive or forceful.
- Take the time and observe. Be flexible and let children set the pace of the activity.
- Help children build positive relationships with their peers. When you make a change to meet a special need, find ways to do it so the child does not feel unique.

> ***Strategies for more inclusive classrooms/sections:***
>
> - Environment: Modify the social, physical, or temporal environment of the activity to better meet the child's needs. For example, this might mean making a child work with a partner rather than in a group if they are overwhelmed by group activities, or having a child sit closer to you if they have difficulty hearing or focusing on the activity.
> - Materials: Adapt and choose the materials used in the activity so that the child is better able to use them.
> - Activities: Simplify a more complex activity so that it is more accessible to the child

Heterogeneous groups

Early childhood educators have many good reasons and advantages for creating heterogeneous age groups of children. In particular, it can happen:

- Emotional involvement and empathic-type behaviors are more prevalent
- Imitation becomes a strong driver for learning in younger children
- The interest aroused by the older child is a source of gratification, raising self-esteem and a positive self-image
- Relationships between peers seem to give a strong push to overcome egocentrism because the difficulty in relating to peers who have a different level of competence forces

them to use different strategies: simplification, redundancy, repetition of attempts, both in the child who wants to be understood and in the child who wants to understand.
- The relationship between non-peers allows the older child to feel authorized to regressive behaviors related to the possibility of becoming a little smaller, to confirm to themselves that they are now grown up, through a sort of evolutionary regression useful to consolidate some steps forward

However, they present also some challenges. To provide an adequate variety of stimulation for older children, it may be necessary to offer certain materials only under controlled conditions. There are also precautions needed when children who are able and unable to walk are in the same space. In this, the direct involvement of the children is fundamental, just as it is fundamental to reason and proceed step by step: at the beginning of the year, the context will be presented in one way, then gradually, getting to know the children, the educator/teacher can modify the space, leaving the materials within the reach of the children....

When you have a group of children of different ages, it means that you may have a group that varies in:
- Attention span (the amount of time you can focus on a single topic/activity)
- Physical ability (muscle strength, coordination)
- Emotional development (ability to be with others, cooperate, knowledge of social rules, etc.).
- Language (ability to communicate one's thoughts/feelings, understand others)
- Cognitive skills (access to symbols, planning a project, etc.)

In general, heterogeneous groups offer a number of benefits, in the areas of social, emotional, and cognitive development. To maximize the benefits, caregivers should focus on developing relationships with and among children. More importantly, children grow and learn in an environment that provides rich opportunities for the development of empathy and social understanding.

Strategies when dealing with heterogeneous groups:

When you have a diverse group, it is important to make sure you are prepared to meet the needs of each child. In general, you can try the following strategies for engaging children of all ages in an activity:
- ✓ Friends - Pair each older child with a smaller "friend" who can help during the activity. In addition to the benefits of the activity itself, having a friend is a learning experience for both.
- ✓ Work in small groups.
- ✓ Use diversity - The children in your group bring a wide range of experiences and interests. Allow children to share and learn from each other.


3.4 Specific elements of the well-being environments

A well-being environment supports children by providing them with 5 key elements necessary for healthy development:

- A play-based learning environment
- A sense of control
- A sense of belonging
- Feelings of self-esteem
- Positive social interactions

The way the space is organized, the way we relate to the children, and the educational experiences we offered will reinforce the elements of the well-being environment and positively impact the collective well-being.
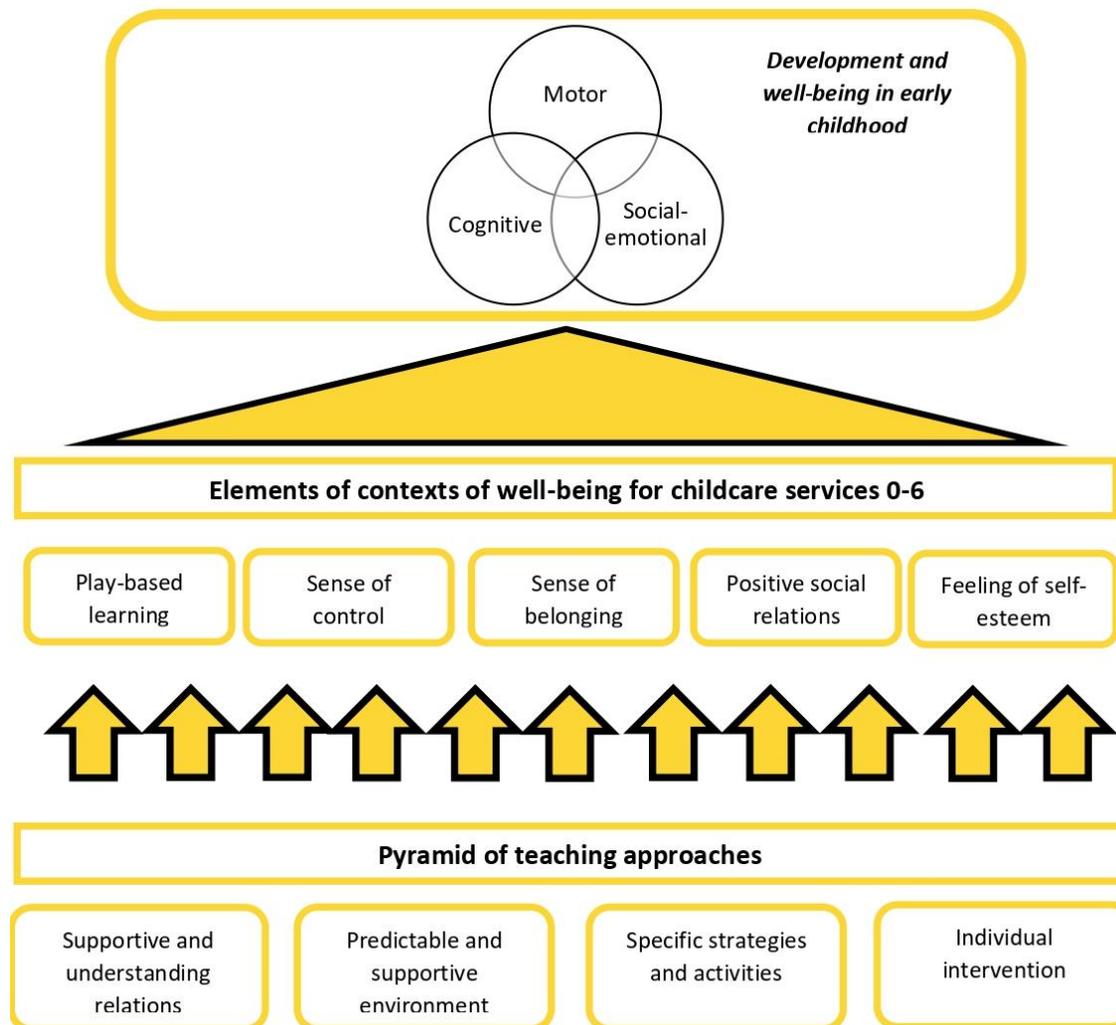
Element n.1: A play-based learning environment

A context based on play stimulates children's learning. **Playing is learning.**

We know that young children learn daily through play and exploration in safe, stimulating environments. The brain, at this time of life, is open to new experiences. Children learn when they use their whole bodies and senses. Giving children the opportunity to explore unstructured materials that can be manipulated and combined in different ways provides endless opportunities for playing and learning. We are talking about blocks, small figures, animals, toy cars, balls, spoons, buckets, pans, baskets or reclaimed materials. This type of playing allows for experimentation, supports problem-solving skills, higher-order thinking (critical thinking, analytical skills, synthesis, reasoning, understanding, evaluation), and the development of language, social skills (including the ability to take on different perspectives), and self-regulation. In addition, playing is a powerful experience from a motivational and emotional point of view: it excites children and allows them to experience pleasant emotions, which research shows directly promote learning processes.

A play-based learning environment ...

- Enhances active learning by allowing children to directly participate in activities.
- Promotes brain development.
- Contributes to cognitive, motor and social-emotional development.
- Captures children's interest and is highly motivating.
- Generates positive emotions (self-esteem, sense of self-efficacy).
- Enables educators to stimulate varied forms of learning in children.

Playing is a natural and preferred way for children to learn and also helps them socialize. While playing in a well-being environment, children learn to follow rules, listen to others, develop relationships and show respect.

Children learn through play in all developmental areas:

- **Socio-Emotional Area:** Children take turns, share, communicate with peers, negotiate rules, make decisions, manage their frustration, gain confidence, manage their emotions, deal with challenges.
- **Cognitive Area:** Children use their imagination, solve problems, evaluate outcomes.
- **Motor Area:** Children use gross and fine motor skills.

Playing in a well-being environment can be done spontaneously, guided by the adult, individually, or in groups. Most of the time spent in the section/classroom is used to do play-based activities. The type and variety of playing also depends on the ability to focus on games which varies from child to child and generally ranges from 2-4 minutes for children in their first year of life, to 5-10 minutes in their second year, to 10-15 minutes for 3–4-year-old, to 15-20 minutes for 5-6 year old.

> ***Strategies on how to play with children:***
> ✓ Sit on the same level as the children. This communicates, "I am with you and I respect you."
> ✓ Let yourself be guided by what emerges from the children.
> ✓ Keep up with the children's rhythms.
> ✓ Encourage creativity and imagination.
> ✓ Describe and talk about what the children are doing. This builds thinking skills, vocabulary, and confidence.
> ✓ Encourage problem solving.

For children, playing involves the body and its movements from a very young age. Movement is linked to brain development (e.g., specialization of brain hemispheres and connections between them) and to emotional, cognitive, and social skills.

Importance of movement for development

Movement leads to the development of:
- **I AM** (social-emotional skills): feeling good about oneself, trusting others, expressing one's emotions, solving problems and conflicts, cooperating with others, respecting rules and commitment, being receptive and curious;
- **I THINK** (cognitive skills): knowledge of oneself, what one likes and dislikes, one's strengths and limitations, perceive what is happening around, integrate new knowledge, pay attention, create action strategies, invent, have ideas;
- **I DO** (motor skills): strength, endurance, flexibility, coordination, agility, precision, reaction to stimuli, rhythm, balance, body awareness, feeling good in your body, letting go.
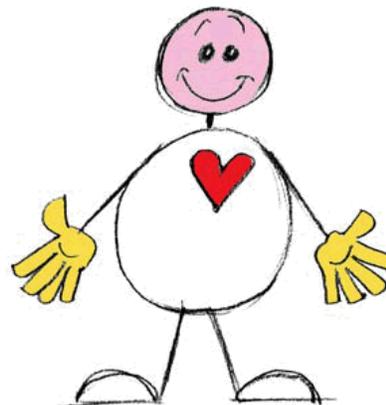
Learning in childhood comes from doing, from motor involvement, from concreteness and not from abstraction. The movements performed when modifying a reality (grasping, picking up, lifting, throwing...) bring into play procedural memories that are robust, precocious and long-lasting, while declarative memories linked to language are structured at a later age and are more labile and fragile. Any learning that involves movement and direct action subsequently triggers declarative memories. (*A. Oliverio*)

Element n.2: Sense of control

A sense of control leads to a sense of stability and security. It is important for children to feel safe and secure. Having a routine and knowing what is expected of them makes them feel stable and secure.

Sense of control...
- Helps children live positively and adapt to different situations.
- Promotes well-being and gives children hope for the future.
- Enables children to initiate the natural processes of resilience and recovery.

> ***Strategies on how to give children a sense of control:***
> There are many ways to give children a sense of control. For example:
> ✓ establishing a routine,
> ✓ co-creating rules,
> ✓ repeating information,
> ✓ using encouragement, authority, leading by example.

Routines and relational exchanges that are repetitive, i.e., have a predictable rhythm, maintain the affective relationship. Recent studies show **the importance of bodily rhythms** (gestures, voice, movements...) in the relationship between adults and children, because it is through this rhythm that one accesses the world of the other, one becomes deeply attuned to the other. Disordered and unpredictable rhythms are not conducive to a sense of security.

This kind of attunement does not require specialized cognitive functions, and even the youngest children synchronize their body rhythms with those around them. Adults can become increasingly aware of their own body rhythms and what they convey to children in this way, since rhythms are closely linked to emotional experiences.

Element n.3: Sense of belonging

Feeling part of a community makes children feel safe, supported and peaceful. Creating an environment where children feel empathy, feel included, and care for their peers will help them develop a sense of belonging to the classroom/section. A sense of belonging facilitates resilience for children experiencing trauma and stress. A sense of belonging is closely linked to the inclusion and empowerment of each child and adult in the classroom/section.

When children have a sense of belonging in the classroom....
- They demonstrate respect for their peers, their educators, and the educational service they are in.
- They practice empathy and sharing with their peers.
- They have trust and healthy affection for the adults in their lives.

- They develop trust and positive relationships.
- They build self-esteem.

> ***Strategies on how to give children a sense of belonging:***
> There are many ways to give children a sense of belonging in your wellness classroom. For example:
> - ✓ create and assign meaningful tasks,
> - ✓ linking activities done in the classroom/section to children's experiences, interests, and knowledge.

Element n.4: Feelings of self-esteem

When children feel a sense of self-esteem in their classroom/section, they feel capable, knowledgeable, and confident. When children experience difficult situations, they may lose confidence in experimenting and discovering things on their own, feeling a sense of esteem and self-efficacy motivates children and instills in them a love of learning.

When children have a feeling of self-esteem in the classroom...

- They appreciate themselves and feel self-efficacious.
- They become more self-reliant.
- They feel optimistic and motivated to try new things.
- They experience learning as a positive experience.

A well-being environment gives children a sense of self-esteem by showing them that they already

> ***Strategies on how to foster self-esteem in children:***
> It can be helpful to, for example:
> - ✓ expressing appreciation,
> - ✓ giving children choices,
> - ✓ create and assign meaningful tasks.

Element n.5: Positive social relationships

have or can develop the skills to solve problems, cope with newness and possible adversity. Positive relationships are important for children's social-emotional development. When children have developed positive relationships with their peers and adults, they feel valued, heard, supported, loved and appreciated.

Connecting with caring and respectful adults helps develop a sense of trust in themselves and others because it makes them feel safe. Because children learn so much from observing adults and peers, having positive social relationships is essential to sustaining well-being.

When children have positive social relationships....

- They develop self-esteem and confidence.
- They learn to communicate effectively with others.
- They can build strong social bonds.
- They feel emotionally supported.
- They feel their surroundings are safe and predictable.
- They learn to trust others.
- They develop tolerance and empathy, which also reinforces the well-being of their peers

To promote healthy relationships between adults and children and among children, it is important for the educator/teacher to listen to what children say, treat them fairly, and show empathy for each of them. This is a model for the positive behavior we would like to see in the children themselves.

Empathy

Empathy is the ability to feel and understand the emotions of others, looking at the situation from the other person's point of view. Children learn to be empathetic in early childhood. Educators teach empathy through their own example, listening to children and showing empathy.

An early form of empathy, which appears to be present from birth, is called primary intersubjectivity and is manifested in empathic mirroring. As cognitive skills and, in particular, mentalization develop, a form of empathy appears that is characterized by an understanding of what the other person is feeling.

> ***Strategies on how to support children in building positive social relationships:***
> There are many ways to help children build positive social relationships. For example:
> - ✓ speaking respectfully to children and relating respectfully to parents and colleagues as well,
> - ✓ working in small groups.

The development of positive relationships is also related to the adult's ability to mentalize. Mentalization is the ability to recognize the mental states (emotions, desires, beliefs...) that drive people's behaviors. Knowing how to read what lies beneath one's own and other people's behaviors is a skill that is learned over time and is supported by adults who maintain a mentalizing attitude in relationships, that is, by educators who are curious and genuinely interested in children's thoughts and emotions and who are willing to generate different points of view on a situation, without believing they have the "truth" and without discrediting children's thoughts and emotions.

Mentalizing contexts are well-being environments because they foster positive social relationships and emotional regulation.

3.5 The well-being of adults in the well-being environments

A well-being environment is created by adults who care about children's well-being as well as their own. A well-being environment also promotes well-being in the adults who attend it.

Adults who participate in the creation of a well-being environment are called upon to:

- Observe and listen to themselves in order to increasingly develop an awareness of self;
- Accept and rejoice in their own uniqueness, recognizing their strengths and areas for improvement;
- Become aware that one's own point of view on reality is one of the views one can have on the situation, but not the only one;
- Acting creatively;
- Observe the rhythms of the body and how one's own body resonates with that of others;
- Develop the ability to be fully in the present, without re-acting or being overwhelmed by what is happening, without judging oneself (mindfulness);
- Breathing correctly (the breath is a powerful vehicle of psychophysical well-being, moreover, the breath generates a rhythm that resonates with other bodies);
- Mentalizing in relationships with children, parents and colleagues.

4. Designing well-being environments

Children learn by interacting with the people and things around them: development is a social process and not exclusively individual. As Stern (2004[9]) said: "Our mental life is the result of creating a continuous dialogue with the minds of others that I call the intersubjective matrix". Adults, therefore, have the task of paying attention to how children learn, of engaging and supporting them in their learning processes, of sharing their learning, evaluating from time to time how to intervene, to extend, enrich, simplify.

Teachers and educators can set up contexts in such a way as to promote learning by offering many opportunities, as many as the different expressive languages of children. "From Plato onwards, playing is considered as a natural educator and constitutes the endogenous engine that moves children in space, fosters their exploratory and manipulative behaviors, strengthens their temperament through the achievement of good habits that will permanently structure their personality" (Bobbio, 2018[10]).

"The language of space is very strong and conditioning, for it is analogical. Its code (...) is perceived and interpreted by people since the earliest age. Like any other language, it is therefore a constitutive element of the formation of thought. (...) The qualities between the subject and its habitat are reciprocal, so that both man and the environment are active and modify each other. Boys and girls reveal an innate and very high perceptive, polysemic and holistic sensitivity and competence. They are as active as they will ever be in other phases of life, and their ability to analyze reality through sensory receptors is very high (...). For this reason, when designing the space we must take into account lights, colors, olfactory, sound and tactile elements that are salient in the sensory definition of space (...). It is important to strive to introduce greater intelligence into the space of the objects that are placed there (...). (Rinaldi, 1988, in Reggio Children).

It is important that the space be a set of con-texts, meaning rich in "texts that are varied in genre and readable" by children, much like the pages of a book. A text-rich environment is a space in which children have many opportunities to see and learn about "text." In concrete terms, the posture and responsive behavior of parents and educators would consist in offering indoor and outdoor contexts that are challenging and problematic, aesthetically beautiful, capable of stimulating children's curiosity and spirit of wonder, incentivizing autonomy and freedom of choice by offering possibilities and ample space for movement without anticipating their possible responses, being active listeners capable of respecting each child's personal time, offering emotional support without substituting or interfering, and giving them the chance to be useful and resourceful.

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[9] Stern D. (2004), Il mondo interpersonale del bambino, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino.
[10] Bobbio A. (2018) in Amadini M, Bobbio A., Bondioli A., Musi E., Itinerari di pedagogia dell'infanzia, Scholè, Brescia.

The space should be set up and subdivided into different areas that are separate but potentially in communication, as a set of learning contexts that give children the opportunity to meet, join in, play in different ways and at different times and develop creative behaviors.

The section/classroom should be a physically safe place for children. The maintenance of the environment, hygiene and cleanliness are gestures of care and thoughtfulness due to the children and families who live in the educational and school services. The "rules" of coexistence can be discussed and established with the children at the beginning of the year. It is important to share care, tidying-up and some practical life activities with the group of children. The classroom should always be a space that supports children's well-being: safe, bright, welcoming and interactive, where everyone can learn and play together.

"Space, time, objects create the climate that characterizes the "folds" of everyday life. Therefore, it becomes fundamental for those involved in education to ask themselves some questions.

What kind of use is granted to the child? **What permissions, what prohibitions and what prescriptions in relation to space?** Understanding reality, in the sense of taking it in, also means having the possibility of manipulating space. What discoveries can children make when using resources open to their interpretations?

The environment is the physical and psychic place that welcomes children during their day at the nursery: **it has the function of a container of experience**. "Container" should not be interpreted in the sense of restraining children, but in the sense of supporting their motivation, their initiative, their conquest, in the sense of welcoming, protecting, orienting.

What adventures and risks do we let children experience? "Being at risk is an opportunity for formation, even more in a society that tends to make everything safe, especially for the youngest. But where everything is made safe, where the body cannot exercise its natural need for adventure, a training opportunity is lost. We often see little ones being held with two hands even only to go down a step of a few centimeters. If children fall to the ground, adults immediately surround them. Adventure is a great pedagogical category. [11]" Therefore, if safety appears among the criteria for setting up the space, it is important to clarify that the space should be a secure base (to quote Bowlby), not a safety box, the container in which we sometimes want to harness the more properly creative and adventurous dimension of play activity[12]."

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[11] Gamelli I., Manuzzi P., Zatti A. (2010), Il corpo ai tempi di Avatar, Roma: Armando.
[12] Vigoni S. in Crispoldi S. (a cura di, 2016), Cuore, Mente, Mano. Il senso della cura nei servizi 0-6 anno. Aracne Ed.

4.1 The physical design of spaces

The physical layout of the room is particularly important because if it is well thought out, organized, and appropriate from a developmental point of view, there will be fewer provocative or dysfunctional behaviors present. On the other hand, children in poorly organized spaces depend on the caregiver for guidance, all day long. You will therefore spend a lot of time and energy, risk having to exercise leadership and control functions, direct group behavior, and have much less time to spend researching with them and following their processes. Exhausting! The following strategies will help create a physical environment that leads to being well:

- Avoid "high traffic" areas so children can move around and explore.
- Organize areas by adding shelves, labels.
- Enrich the walls with documentation of the processes that take place there.
- Set up a context that can hold the work the children do.
- Take care of aesthetics: beauty triggers wonder, which is the engine of curiosity, the basis of knowledge. Beauty calls for beauty; it is an invitation to stay in place, to be interested.
- Provide areas to support the possibility of personal space for children, as well as quiet and expressive moments.
- Secure child-size furniture as much as possible and organize it so that children can begin to meet their own needs independently.
- Organize the setting so that it is visible to you, too.

BE CAREFUL!

In the well-being environment great attention should be paid to any elements of stress that may affect the behavior of the child and the child's degree of attention. In addition to the use of soft, natural colors and balanced color combinations, it is important to remember that **a high level of noise, an overload of stimuli, too high or abrupt temperature changes, too much mobility or, on the contrary, excessive fixity can really generate an overload in children.**

Wherever possible, place plants in the various rooms of the nursery and school: besides being an excellent energy balancer, children learn to take care of them.

Holistic development areas

In children's services, the environment acts as a "third educator," as stated by Loris Malaguzzi, by supporting children's learning and development. To promote and accompany children's holistic development, well-being environments should offer the following areas of focus:

- **A widespread library:** We can prepare children to learn, to listen, to appreciate the value of reading by exposing them to printed materials in different ways. Although children may not be ready to read text, they will learn that language is represented by

letters and words. They will also see that writing in Italian is different from writing in Arabic or Chinese, which will prepare them for learning more languages later. The presence of thematic books in the different centers of interest (symbolic, constructive, graphic-pictorial, mini-world, and art books in the graphic context, books of scientific interest in the context of natural material, etc...), stimulates interest in this cultural object, so as not to relegate it to the sole moment when the educator/teacher reads something. It is important that the books are of quality and that they range in content, graphics, format: silent books, picture books, hardbacks, material books for children.

- **Sensory-manipulative area** (e.g., sand and/or water, clay, moldable material): an area that cultivates sensory and scientific development, giving children time to experiment with measuring, counting, pouring, and predicting through magnifying glasses, and elements of the natural world (such as plants, rocks, shells, leaves, possibly some small animals such as snails, etc.), depending on the time of year and children's interests

- **Small constructiveness area:** an area that offers a variety of materials including small blocks, tiles, other discarded and salvaged materials that promote mathematical thinking and skills (counting and cardinality, operations and algebraic thinking, number and number sense, measurement and data, and geometry)

- **Big constructiveness area:** industrial and recycled waste material that lends itself to assemblages, constructions, transformations, projects. This place that can recall both art and science (construction of towers, bridges, buildings, etc. ...)

- **Symbolic play area:** used as a "home" or set up to create other places of interest for children (such as a store, a doctor's clinic, etc.); creation of habitats (savannah, farm, dinosaurs...); creation of contexts (car track, means of transportation...)

- **Graphic area:** an art area that offers different types of paper and drawing materials (crayons, markers, etc.), glue, scissors, stamps, watercolors, crayons and tempera colors and brushes, an easel or table available for large painting, collage and building materials and other assorted materials such as plasticine and clay, books.

- **Music area:** sound materials and furniture available, musical instruments

- **Large area dedicated to movement:** children can jump, climb, roll, crawl...

- **Outdoor area:** if possible, this area should always be accessible to children, in dialogue with the interior, set up with centers of interest (uncultivated area, uneven ground, excavation area, mud kitchen, construction site area, movement area...)

- **Natural area:** lends itself to artistic and scientific investigations. Set up with natural materials, magnifying glasses, digital and measuring instruments, sheets.

- **Digital material:** Computer, video projector, digital microscope, webcam, graphics tablet, optical pen: by designing space with digital tools and materials we can expand

the children's daily research and bring into dialogue the different expressive languages.

The boundaries between areas should be clear to everyone: creating specific contexts does not mean preventing children from making connections between one context and another and having the possibility of creating a dialogue between them, quite the contrary! Space communicates possible action, and if a context with two chairs and a small table is already occupied, the child will be invited to return to his or her initial choice or to wait for the opportunity to participate with the new learning group. Boundaries can be mobile, for example using small rugs, sheer curtains, shower curtains. The choice of the space for the morning is shared with everyone in the morning, based on the children's choice and on any proposals from the educator/teacher related to the different possible activities.

Some considerations about the creative process:

Creativity is the freest form of self-expression. There is nothing more satisfying and rewarding for children than to be able to express themselves openly and without judgment. The ability to be creative, to create something from personal feelings and experiences, can also reflect and nurture children's emotional health.

All children need to be truly creative is the freedom to fully engage in the effort and do whatever activity they are doing. Creativity fuels mental growth in children by providing opportunities to try out new ideas and new ways of thinking and solving problems. The creative act helps us recognize and celebrate the uniqueness and diversity of children, provides excellent opportunities to personalize our educational approach and focus on each child.

Start by making proposals based on children's interests and ideas. This means learning to listen carefully to what children are saying. Children of all ages delight in expressing their ideas through sounds, colors, shapes, and role-playing activities. Creativity in children can be developed by engaging them in activities that allow them to share ideas, thoughts, and feelings.

Be sure to offer children a wide range of materials. Being creative is more than just drawing or painting. It also includes photography, music, hiking, wire work, clay, paper, wood, water or shadows. The possibilities are endless. It is important to give children plenty of time to explore materials and pursue their ideas. This allows them time to think about planning, designing, building, experimenting and revising what they are creating.

It is also important to encourage children to make their own decisions. Children should be given frequent opportunities and plenty of time to experiment and explore expressive materials. Place emphasis on the creative process, not the finished product. What children learn and discover about themselves, in relationship to what they are creating, is vital to their development. Show your support for the creative process by appreciating and offering support for children's efforts. Independence and control are important components in the creative process. This is especially true when working with children with disabilities.

4.2 Materials

Playing is an important part of child development. It provides opportunities for children to practice skills in a way that is appropriate for their development. Children's brains, as we have already seen, are developing at a surprisingly fast pace. Although they do not yet have the words to express what they see, hear, or do, children absorb everything around them, and it affects their brain development. Children are curious and playing is natural for children. It is how they learn and explore the world around them. Having positive playing experiences contributes to healthy growth and lays the foundation for lifelong learning.

That's why play-based learning is the cornerstone of children's services. To develop cognitive, social-emotional, and motor skills, children need opportunities to interact with different types of materials. These materials expose them to a variety of sensory experiences, texts, fictional worlds, and ways to express themselves.

Alongside structured materials, it is essential that well-being environments have materials that are not created with a declared didactic purpose, namely artificial and natural unstructured materials. By artificial materials, we refer to "recycled materials, meaning materials that have already been used and have reached the end of their life cycle with regard to their original function, and especially industrial waste materials, which are characterized by being paradoxically new, as the result of a production process that at its end has deemed them superfluous or unnecessary" (Guerra, 2017[13]). By natural materials, we mean those that come from the animal, plant and mineral world.

These materials are open, polysemic and for this very reason inclusive: "because in them each person can find answers to specific and different needs with regard to age, interests and skills: where in fact a material – as it happens more easily unstructured materials and highly informal materials such as industrial waste or natural - invites to personal uses and not performative ones, everyone can find their own ways to interact with it, without feeling unable to respond to exclusive or oversized requests. [14]" Unstructured materials offer opportunities for scientific and artistic research because of their versatility, and they can also be invested symbolically offering support to the imagination.

"This physical and symbolic exercise supports the competence of children to consider the mutability of things, to intervene on them drawing beauty from them, contributing to form a more elastic mentality." (Munari, 1977[15]).

Some of the possible learning advantages that we can offer children by enriching the environments with these materials are: enhancement of problem solving skills, enrichment of logical scientific and mathematical skills, training of divergent thinking, exercise of creativity, strengthening of imagination, training of the aesthetic sense, education in taste, concentration, knowledge of nature and connection with the ecological issue (for natural materials).

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[13] Guerra M. (A cura di, 2017). Materie Intelligenti, ED. Junior, Bergamo

[14] ibidem

[15] Munari B. (1977), Fantasia. Invenzione creatività e immaginazione nelle comunicazioni visive, Laterza Roma Bari

"The intelligence of these materials is also manifested in their generating questions and spontaneous problem solving (*Gariboldi, Cardarello, 2012; Guerra, 2013*) that usefully provoke children's intelligences by introducing proximal and constructive difficulties and generating impasses (*Cavallini, Giudici, 2009*) and stumbling blocks (*Guerra, 2013*) that can be fertile for adults as well." [16]

> **KEEP IN MIND!**
> We encourage you to take inspiration from the materials and objects in your surroundings to diversify materials and to involve families in the collection of recycled materials and the local area in the search for discarded industrial materials. When used effectively and safely, almost anything can be a learning material for children.

Creating a heuristic context with poor and recovered materials, industrial waste, means offering multiple possibilities of constructive and scientific learning for children.

Here is an interesting table (Miklitz, 2011) which compares the characteristics of industrial toys and natural materials and which highlights interesting advantages in terms of training that derive from offering educational and didactic proposals starting from this material. The natural material explored and collected outdoors and brought into the services also makes it possible to connect outdoor experiences with indoor ones, to enhance the continuity of pedagogical proposals, broadening the children's research and making the projects last over time.

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[16] Guerra M. (A cura di, 2017). Materie Intelligenti, ED. Junior, Bergamo

Industrial toys	Natural materials	Effects of natural materials on children
No smell	Each material has a specific smell	Differentiated perception; species-specific odor knowledge
No species-specific weight; weight, size, and function are often unrelated	Unmistakable and unique weight of each material	Knowledge of physical phenomena; appreciation; experience of one's own limitations; team spirit
Color not necessarily related to the material; Few shades of color	Colors are related to the material; Many shades of color	Differentiated perception; Aesthetic competencies
Requires an expense	Does not require any expense	Alternative to consumptive orientation
Non-species-specific object and material surface	Species-specific material surface	Differentiated perception; Knowledge of different materials and their characteristics
Often not biodegradable	100% biodegradable	Understanding natural processes and increasing networked thinking
Available everywhere in the world	Linked to the environment and the setting	Knowledge of the characteristics of different places
Difficult to modify	Modifiable and personally interpretable	Fostering imagination and the joy of playing
Examined according to safety standards	Without safety standards	Experiencing limits; Acting with direct responsibility
Available all year long	Often linked to season cycles	Knowledge of specific maturation processes; Rhythmic experience

Some examples of unstructured material

4.3 The circle

The circle is the place of reunion, the area in which everyone meets, greets each other in the morning. In the circle each child declares in which center of interest s/he is going to play, on the basis of one's own interests and of the project choices that educators and teachers are carrying out. It is the place of the large group, where everyone meets at the end of the morning to tell each other, through the words of the children and those of the educator/teacher, what has been done, to offer everyone the possibility of knowing the research of others, so that the learning process of a group can circulate.

It is a welcoming and comfortable space where children can sing, move and interact as a real community. The circle area will be used to welcome children, work out new concepts together, and read stories aloud.

The area of the circle should be:

- Large enough for you and all children to sit on the floor in a circle.
- Close to a wall where you can place materials at children's eye level
- Bright and comfortable
- Stable and steady. Should never be used for storage or moved

The circle is a point of reference, it helps to increase **the sense of mastery and security, the sense of belonging to the group.**

4.4 The centers of interest

Early childhood services are likely to be the first places of gathering and socializing which children will begin to inhabit. We can help them make this transition by making the classroom environment as comfortable and engaging as possible. Space should be structured around the premise that learning is based on play and relationships with the group and the adults. Each learning center refers to a children's language. By dividing the space by centers of interest, everyone works with the dimension of the small group, a fertile condition for guaranteeing concentration and attention on the part of the children and for offering the adult the possibility of pausing, observing, noting the children's research, supporting them if necessary, bringing forward new suggestions, increasing the degree of complexity, in order to enhance learning processes. The adult can use simple questions and encourage children to consider what they hope to accomplish, how they plan to reach their goals, what materials they will need, what assistance they will need from others, etc. Children should also be encouraged to talk about what they did, how they completed it, and what other activities they can do within the learning center.

In the centers of interest you can ask:
- *Can you tell me what you are doing here?*
- *What do you plan to do next?*
- *What do you plan to accomplish here? What do you think you might need to accomplish it?*
- *Can one of your peers help you? How? Do you need my help?*

At the end of the day, children should have time to clean and tidy up the space or decide to keep the space organized that way to continue the next day. If this is not allowed for organizational reasons, you can photograph the material (e.g., building a neighborhood with the deconstructed material) so that you can later reproduce the work. What will be created by the children can be exhibited in a place dedicated to giving evidence of the research carried out during the day, also to involve the rest of the group, and to give information back to the parents through a material documentation accompanied by the words of the children and the thoughts of the adult.

BE CAREFUL!
"Documenting is not only an operation instrumental to the request of families to receive information on the life of their child at the nursery or school, but it is above all and primarily to penetrate among the processes of growth of children, observing them, narrating them and attributing them new senses and meanings, with new and different points of view on the events, through the formulation of questions capable of supporting the child in a constantly renewed path of growth."(Malavasi, Zoccatelli, 2018)

Learning centers reinforce the elements of the well-being environments:

- **Safety, mastery of the environment (feeling safe)** - Children will learn to expect daily opportunities to explore in the different centers of interest and will use the same routines each day to move in and out of the learning centers. This provides the predictability that children need to feel they are in control.
- **Sense of belonging (feeling part of a group, recognizing oneself)** – The sense of belonging can be enhanced by: sharing during the circle time the processes explored in the small group, displaying documentation, sharing experiences in the centers of interest.
- **Sense of competence (feeling capable of doing, feeling capable of choosing)** - In the learning centers, children will have the opportunity to make decisions, plan, solve problems and complete tasks. Children will also have the opportunity to choose their own learning centers and play freely, to follow their interests.
- **Positive social relationships –** When children are in learning centers, they will often play together, collaborate, and learn through relationships. They learn how to interact with each other respectfully, to take turns, to share and help each other. This helps children develop and maintain positive relationships with their peers.

In a classroom/section of well-being, there will many centers of interests.
We have already pointed out that it would be interesting to create a varied library in the well-being

1. Reading/narration/dramatization Center

environments: books of an artistic or scientific nature, illustrated books, pictures available in every center of interest of the section/class. It is also possible to dedicate a specific space dedicated to reading. Here are some indications.

In the reading/narration/dramatization center, children can develop oral language skills, vocabulary, mimicry, letter recognition. The literacy center is also a space where children begin to develop an appreciation for reading and writing.

Materials for this center may include:
- Books (e.g., tactile books for toddlers, hardcover books, picture books, silent books, etc.).
- Cushions
- Pencils
- Sheets of paper
- Different kinds of texts (e.g., newspapers, flyers, magazines)
- Puppets/marionettes
- Animated reading moments

To establish a storytelling center you can:
- Clearly label the space as the "center of XXX". Choose a name that is easy for children to understand and translate it into all languages.
- Choose a classroom space that has good light for reading.
- Place 2-3 pillows on the ground to make reading comfortable.

- Include a small table with 4-5 chairs for writing.
- Display books in a way that is attractive and accessible to children.
- Hang pictures, letters, images of what is done in this center.

Read aloud

One opportunity for positive interaction with children is to share a special story with them. You might think that this modality is not "child-centered" because it is primarily the caregiver speaking. However, if the activity is interactive, engaging, and child-friendly, it can still be child-centered.

Reading books aloud helps children acquire new vocabulary and can improve their expressive language skills and listening skills. Young children receive the most benefit from reading books aloud when they are actively engaged in the story.

When caregivers read aloud, they should always ...
- show children the cover and read the title.
- hold the book so children can see the pictures.
- use their finger to point at words while reading.

When reading aloud, caregivers can include ...
- movements related to a repeated event in the story.
- calls and response sequences.
- simple questions such as "What will happen next?", "What can we do?" or "Why did this happen?"

Which books?

"The best books propose to children interesting and original images and illustrations that are often refined and of exquisite artistic quality. We could rightly speak of child-friendly art because a consistent part of contemporary artists intends to offer the young reader illustrations that amaze and fascinate precisely because of their unusual beauty and originality. The illustrators expressly refer to the various contemporary and ancient artistic currents, to graphics or to audiovisual and multimedia languages, creating interesting opportunities for contamination. This orientation produces a twofold positive effect on the growth of young readers because it helps to refine their aesthetic taste and accustoms them to a highly active and interpretive reading that sees them engaged in the search for signs of meaning implied and alluded to. (....) The illustration has an interpretative function in the sense that it communicates sensations, emotions, feelings and therefore senses of the text that are barely hinted at in the writing or sometimes even hidden. In the case of illustrated books with text, it is important not to forget that pre-school children are very sensitive and interested in language, even in new and unusual terms, so much so that an excessive simplification or reduction of vocabulary causes a loss of interest;(...). The best illustrated books are structured in such a way as to appeal the children, urging them to read actively and with a strong sense of interpretation. In order to understand the story, the child must put into action a series of cognitive processes of analysis and reworking that are activated and sustained by the amazement and fascination aroused by the illustrations. The messages are never given, they must be sought, thought out and constructed, together with the adult. (....) The current book production, in fact, does not propose as much as in the past models of children or model children to which to adapt in order to grow in a healthy and balanced way. Instead, it presents many characters and many different ways of being children today. In the illustrated books, the protagonists (children or various animal characters) embody the real authentic child

who lives alongside us every day, complex children who express their needs, their thoughts, even hidden ones. These children try to explain, according to their own logic, how the world and the things that surround them are and ask themselves many questions of existential, cultural, ethical, metaphysical and religious importance. This fictional child expresses and tells a whole complex emotional affective world. (....) In the early years, when the child is approaching life and must know it, I suggest not to use fantastic or fairy tale texts but realistic ones, even if told in an original way. It would be preferable, as they usually do abroad, to have books that have children as protagonists and not animals, so that children (0-3) can better identify with the protagonists of the stories. The older they get, the more we can also use fantastic stories about animals, around the age of 3.[17]"

Stories

Oral storytelling is a great way to develop children's literacy skills. Oral storytelling is a shared experience in which the child becomes an active participant in the creation of the story. Children who listen to oral stories need to exercise their imaginations. The storyteller helps them create pictures in their minds with words, facial expressions, tone, and gestures, but each child's inner vision will be different.

> **ATTENTION TO:**
> Stereotypical stories and images
> Trivial images
> Artificial, unrealistic colors
> Explicit messages

For children, being "active" in listening to stories helps improve their ability to concentrate and comprehend. Storytelling also develops vocabulary, exposes children to complex grammar and different structures in stories. As they grow, these skills will help them analyze texts and even write a structured essay.

Storytelling nurtures emotional intelligence. The narrators' reactions to the story, their tone of voice and facial expressions, support emotional competence (expressing, understanding, and regulating emotions). Learning to recognize emotions and express them is a critical step in a child's development. Listening to stories also gives children control over the level of fear they experience because they can create images in their minds that they are comfortable with.

As a caregiver, you can draw on a variety of sources to construct your own stories. These sources include:

1) A story you already know.
Oral storytelling is a great opportunity to share some favorite fairy tales or familiar stories from your childhood with children.

2) A story you made up.
You can also make up your own story. These made-up stories can be based on topics that children are interested in or a topic that you would like to discuss with children but can't find a story to convey that message.

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[17] Silvia Blezza Picherle e Luca Ganzerla, La narrativa illustrata: albi e libri illustrati definizioni e classificazioni,
https://www.raccontareancora.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/AlbiLibriIllustrati.pdf

3) A story you have received from the children's families.
Consider asking parents or other family members to share stories, sayings, legends, that they know or frequently use at home. You can then create a story based on these tales.

Whether you are making up your own story or using a story that families share with you, you need to prepare to share it with children. When creating your story, you need to be flexible. The goal is to engage the children. Oral stories can be 5 to 7 minutes long. Practice telling the story aloud to familiarize yourself with the story, characters, and sequence of events. Think about vocabulary related to the characters, setting, and plot. Think about pictures and accessories you can use, as well as ways you can represent the story. When telling the story to children, consider using your voice to dramatize the story, pausing to create anticipation, and using your body and hands to act it out.

Children have wonderfully vivid imaginations and love to participate in storytelling. Using puppets, along with other storytelling props, is a fun and easy way to bring books to life for children. These visual aids help increase motivation, oral language, and comprehension.

Children love using puppets and props to tell a story they know. When children use puppets to tell a story, they show that they understand the structure of the story: the beginning, plot, and ending; the sequence of events and dialogue; and sometimes the ability to expand the story.

Ways to engage children when using puppets to tell stories:
- Encourage children to add details to their stories or even tell them again in a different way.
- Encourage children to add a different voice for each character.
- Use puppets to sequence the story or to tell the beginning, plot, and end of the story.
- Ask children questions. For example, how could you change the ending? How might you change the settings? What other characters are in your story?

Also, a great way to cultivate empathy through stories is to invite older children to act out the stories. Stories provide a structure that guides children's actions and requires them to pay attention to the story and its plot. Each time children "pretend" they must imagine how another person might think and feel, and then act accordingly, for instance by assuming the confident pose of a superhero, forgetting how to walk and talking like an infant.

2. Big Constructiveness Center

"The term constructiveness does not refer to an activity programmed by an adult, but constructiveness is characterized as a space-time in which children's constructive planning can express itself in a plurality of languages and explore a multiplicity of materials of different natures and characteristics, interacting with the open gaze of the educator who legitimately welcomes and restores value to the children's investigation. [18]"

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[18] Infantino A. (2019), I bambini imparano. Il ruolo educativo degli adulti nei servizi per l'infanzia 0-6. Guerini Scientifica.

With recycled materials, industrial waste and natural materials, educators and teachers set up the context.

"In the experiences of constructiveness, the children's thoughts take on a leading role: it is the children who give form and meaning to the materials they find, bringing out intuitions, questions, first interpretations, problems, doubts and perplexity in the face of the objects, their behavior and their transformations. It is the children who stage fantastic plots that narrate the most symbolic perceptions of reality in the interaction in the group with the adult and the other children. (...) Constructiveness concerns not so much the outcome of the constructed product (which obviously has its own value) but the research processes and the learning that children can undergo when they come into contact with materials that are unpredictable, sometimes even challenging, and that can be used in various constructive projects. Constructiveness therefore refers to the processes implemented by children on the basis of their resourcefulness, in order to produce elaborate projects that are sometimes very sophisticated, organizing gestures, behaviors and complex operations. Thus, children experiment with and on materials, starting from an idea that is already clear at the beginning or in relation to a design, to a series of hypotheses and expectations that are clarified along the way, perhaps even changing."[19]

Educators and teachers observe the children's research, offer technical support when needed, document the learning processes, enrich the context by proposing possible connections, and proposing new activities. The educational gains are manifold: problem solving skills, physical and mathematical learning (measurements, balances....), aesthetic research. Also:
"Imagination, attention, memory, motor, control, narrative language and graphic skills, imitation and coordination, creativity, evaluation and decision making, control of frustration or emotional arousal: children are holistically solicited by experiences of creation and construction shared with others. Each time new creations take shape with materials, each time adults and children share challenges and new problems for which original solutions must be devised."[20]

Center of constructiveness 0-3 years old

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[19] ibidem
[20] Ibidem

Children bring several actions into play: stacking, grouping, building, destroying. Classification, seriation, grouping, patterns, shapes, and other early math skills are the operations visible within this context. Children also develop motor skills, problem solving, and social relationships through working and sharing with others.

<u>Centers of constructiveness 3-6 years old</u>

3. Graphic and Art Center

"Before discovering signs, children encounter their own traces left casually. What strikes the adult is the intense attention with which children follow the result of their actions. This concentrated gaze leads them to gradually repeat their initially random actions to obtain the same results... Try and try again. This is the first discovery of their ability to intervene on the world and on things. They realize that they can transform them, they can leave traces (...) By not grasping the preciousness of these products, the risk is to unwittingly stifle the true expression of children. Children who are free to trace arrive at the age of 5 with their own figurative style, without

stereotypes because their creative expression has not been stifled. Unfortunately, to design the teaching intervention with the goal of bringing out style it is not yet an established practice." [21]

In the art center, children develop oral language, imagination, and motor skills through artistic self-expression. Research at the art center helps children become familiar with size, shape, texture and color.

It is true that drawing and painting require technique. However, art is a creative expression that feeds the imagination, it should not be a lesson about artistic techniques. Through painting, sculpture, collage, clay, drawing, or any other medium, art is a way for children to work through emotions, make decisions, and express their ideas. Manipulating art materials provides a sense of freedom, but it also encourages concentration and focus. Art activities also develop motor skills and hand-eye coordination. Moreover, art activities build confidence for children to gain a sense of mastery over materials, which results in new creation.

Our goal is to encourage children's creativity through developmentally appropriate art experiences, not to create a product that is cute or to "look good" to parents. What do you think the difference between art process and product-centered art might be?

Here are some of the characteristics of product-centered art experiences:

- Children have instructions to follow.
- The adult has created a sample for the children to copy.

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[21] Tonelli P., Tra linee, segni, colori. Ogni bambino trova il suo "stile", intervento al Terzo Convegno Nazionale di Percorsi Formativi 06

- There is a right way and a wrong way to proceed.
- There is a finished product in mind.
- All children's finished products look the same.
- Children experience frustration.
- The adult can "correct the mistakes."
- The entire class participated in an art project at the same time.

These are some of the characteristics of process-centered art experiences:

- There are no step-by-step instructions.
- There are no examples for children to follow.
- There is no right or wrong way to explore and create.
- Art focuses on experience and exploration of techniques, tools, and materials.
- Art is unique and original.
- The experience is relaxing. Art is solely made for children's experience.
- The art experience is the child's choice.
- Ideas are not available online.

To provide creative and open art experiences, teachers can offer:

- Easel painting with a variety of paints and brushes (without instruction).
- Watercolor painting.
- Explore and create with clay.
- Paint with fingers.
- Paint with unusual tools such as toothbrushes, paint rollers, potato masher.
- Print and stamp (purchased stamps or made with sponges).
- Create rotating graphics with a turntable and paint, bottle necks, brushes or markers.
- Concatenate pieces independently and creatively.
- Use cloth fabric, thread, or paper.
- Draw with pencils, wax crayons, chalk, markers of various sizes, or crayons.
- Use homemade pasta or bread dough or salt dough.
- Create collages with tissue paper, mixed-media paper, glue, scissors, and recycled materials

4. Manipulation Center

In the manipulation center, children have above all different sensory experiences. Once again, we are in a place where science (states, transformations, cause-and-effect), art, and beauty meet and connect. Activities in the exploration center develop vocabulary, problem-solving skills, descriptive language skills, and motor skills. The exploration center also encourages children to work and play together facilitating the development of social skills and self-expression.

KEEP IN MIND:
Photographic, material and verbal documentation will show the children's path and works.

Here, the children engage in transformations of the material: clay, clay, flours, in dialogue with water take on different consistencies and shapes under their hands and tools. In this context and with these materials, the child cultivates the exploratory and research dimension, the symbolic one and the narrative one.

5.Outdoor living center

The natural environment is the primary source of sensory stimulation. The freedom to explore and play is absolutely essential to development: children test themselves, do and look, smell, listen, touch and observe. The outdoor environment becomes their gymnasium of life. In the outdoor center, children explore scientific concepts, experience a variety of sensory experiences and engage in movement games individually or with other children, explore risk-taking possibilities, and confront effort and strain by testing their own limits and possibilities. Even for children who are not yet walking, being able to be outdoors is a source of important experiences.

The experiences outside, especially if lived in continuity with the indoor environment, bring countless benefits:

1. **Mental and physical well-being** (exposure to sunlight for vitamin D, strengthening of the immune system, decreased hyperactivity, increased concentration, obesity prevention, decreased stress, myopia prevention)
2. **Benefits for learning processes, sensory development, motor, cognitive maturation** (problem solving skills, knowledge and risk management, mathematical and scientific learning such as the study of natural phenomena,

classifications, language development) **and emotional maturation** (self-esteem, sense of mastery and control)
3. **Socialization and interaction**
4. **Sense of belonging to the cosmos**
5. **Ecological awareness and connection with nature**
6. **Civic sense**

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KEEP IN MIND!

The centers of interest in the outside can be different:
- Creation of a base camp (the circle), as is done inside the classes/sections with the same function
- Hill zone (unevenness)
- Excavation zone
- Mud kitchen (available water, mud...)
- Construction site zone
- Frames
- Movement zone
- Uncultivated islands
- Vegetable garden

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6. Center of natural material

Inside, in the well-being environments, the children will also find a center of interest with natural material: this will be the place to take what is collected outside that can be investigated with graphics, manipulable material, some technological instruments (digital microscope), magnifying glasses, PC and video projector. The natural material can also be compared in order to carry out classifications. Alongside the scientific instruments, there should be books that allow children to make connections and study the finds.

7. Center of small constructiveness

In the center of small constructiveness, children can practice fine manual skills, make compositions and collages, obtain letters (pre-writing) and numbers.

POSSIBLE ELEMENTS:
Pebbles, shells, mosaic tiles, small blocks, buttons, caps, frames

8. Symbolic Play Center

In this center, children open up to the dimension of symbolic play and "pretending to" play (from about 2 years of age), playing different roles, learning to put themselves in other people's shoes, to take care of dolls, to simulate jobs. Symbolic play is a powerful means of releasing possible tensions that the child experiences in real life.

It should be borne in mind that this is not the only place where children open up to the narrative and symbolic dimension of experience: in the constructiveness center, in kindergarten, children can decide to build a city, in the manipulation center the shapes they make may acquire symbolic meaning, etc...

KEEP IN MIND:
It is important to avoid fake materials: children, even young ones, need to be able to experiment with real objects.

This center, with dolls, a kitchen, etc., also has the function of reassuring the children, because it reminds them of objects, materials, actions and gestures experienced in everyday life. "Pretending to" play helps improve a child's social skills and learn new words. Studies have shown that children who participate in complex forms of social-dramatic play have greater language skills than those who do not play these games. They develop better social skills, more empathy, more imagination and a greater ability to know what others want to say; aggressive behaviors are less frequent, they show more self-control and higher levels of thinking.

9. Narrative-Symbolic Play Center

This can be a racetrack for toy cars, a setting of the savannah or dinosaurs, or a forest full of animals. These settings lend themselves to both sensory exploration and the narrative-symbolic dimension present from age two onward.

PAY ATTENTION:
In the different centers of interest we have explored you can think of creating immersive contexts in which the digital language meets the material one, creating evocative and suggestive scenarios.

4.5 The places of care

Bedtime Space

Some important things to remember are:
- Babies fall asleep on their backs.
- All babies have their own designated sleeping space that is the same each day for predictability and safety.
- Infants and toddlers are regularly supervised by staff when they sleep.

Some tips to help a baby learn to fall asleep (and go back to sleep) from the earliest months of life:
- Maintain a consistent, loving, and soothing routine.
- Watch for signs that children are tired: yawning, crying a certain way when sleepy, touching their ears, crinkling their eyes or getting irritated, having a lost look.
- For children older than 1 year, an object that provides security (such as a favorite stuffed animal or soft blanket) can be an important part of the routine.
- Use soothing music or singing in your own voice.
- Be gentle when waking up.

The Dining Space

Some important things to remember are:

Lunch is:

- "Attitude of caring (how much I offer, the quality of what I offer and how I offer it).
- Privileged moment of relationship
- Sensorimotor experience (discovery and manipulation)
- Moment of acquisition of bodily and psychological autonomy
- Experience of sharing, imitation and mutual cooperation
- Experience of knowing oneself, one's own needs and the body
- Exercise of cognitive, social, perceptive, motor and emotional activities
- Moment in which the skills of the child are recognized, as well as its rhythms, its tastes and disgusts" (S. Vigoni, 2008)[22]

> **KEEP IN MIND!**
> It is important to value autonomy: children must be able to take part in practical life activities such as setting the table, clearing the table, serving themselves.
> Use ceramic tableware and glassware.

Lunch is not:
- Moment of struggle
- Performative moment (using cutlery perfectly...)

[22] Vigoni S.(2008), Vita quotidiana al nido: i contesti di cura, Ed. La Scuola, Brescia.

5. Building well-being environments

The five elements of a well-being environment not only support learning and balanced development, but also help create respectful and peaceful relational contexts that support the self-regulation of each participant. Research shows that when children have a sense of self-esteem and belonging in the classroom, relationships among children and with adults are positive, children are more able to self-regulate and show respect and empathy for peers. By promoting a sense of control and allowing children to understand what to expect each day, teachers will create supportive and routinized environments that serve to prevent and reduce inappropriate behavior. In addition, the use of play-based learning methods will encourage children's active engagement and allow for the promotion of social-emotional and cognitive skills and brain integration. The concrete approach in a well-being environment is based on the five core elements (presented in Section 3.4.) and the "Pyramid Model." The Pyramid Model provides a guide for observing and supporting children's development, making them feel safe, capable and supported.
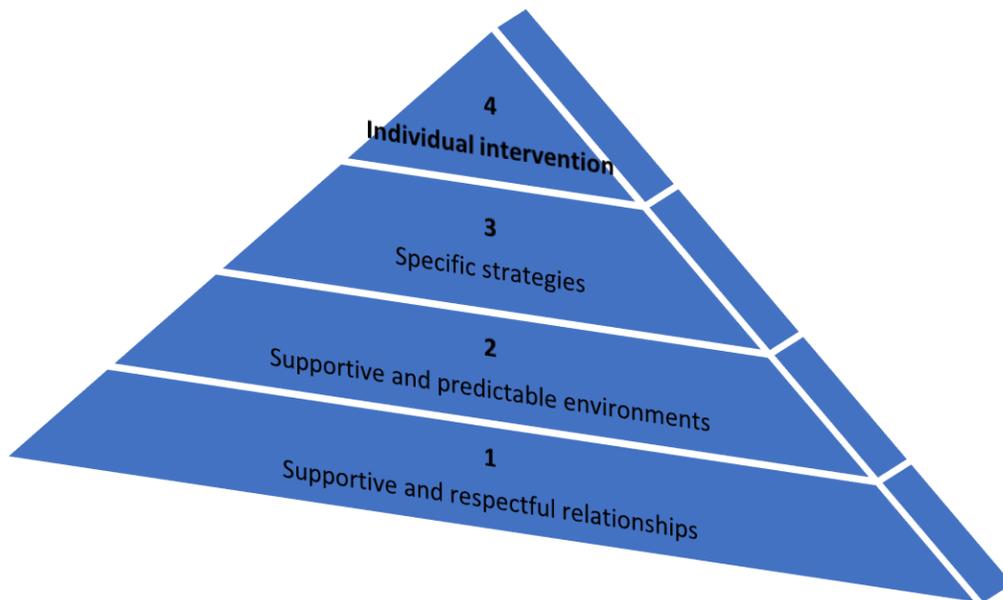
Each level within the Pyramid Model promotes the elements of well-being environments:

		Levels of the Pyramid Model			
		Supportive and respectful relationships	Supportive and predictable environment	Specific strategies	Individual intervention
Elements of the well-being environments	Play-based learning		✓	✓	
	Sense of control		✓	✓	✓
	Sense of belonging	✓			✓
	Feeling of self-esteem	✓		✓	✓
	Positive social relationships	✓	✓	✓	

Managing the "difficult" behaviors of children is neither immediate nor easy. This Handbook provides some suggestions, which can be combined with the experience of the educator/teacher and the comparison with colleagues. The practice of the method presented in this Handbook has shown that, if applied right from the start with the children, it sustains the well-being of the whole section/class, because the children feel ready and able to be in that context and are not surprised by the actions of those who educate them, and the adults feel they can maintain the control that is needed to create a safe and serene environment.

Using the well-being environments and the Pyramid Model in section/classroom management means working to:

- establish positive relationships with children and caregivers,
- establish rules and expectations with children,
- establish routines,
- lead by example and, when necessary, explicitly teach children ways of self-regulation, emotional awareness, conflict resolution, etc.,
- encourage behaviors that bring well-being to the child and the group,
- propose meaningful experiences.

5.1 Supportive and respectful relationships

The foundation of the pyramid is the development of a supportive and respectful relationship between you, the children in your class/section, and their families. By respectful relationship we mean the possibility for each of the interactants to be welcomed for their specific, unique and wonderful characteristics, respected in their emotions, thoughts, attitudes. This does not mean not putting limits on the children, but it does mean not making them feel humiliated or devalued; it means appreciating them for what they are and, at the same time, supporting them in being what they are so that their uniqueness can also be a value for the group.

It is important to begin developing these supportive and respectful relationships early on. For this, it is important to observe and listen to each child's world, their way of dealing with situations, relationships, strengths, desires, fears... This will develop a positive relationship that will set the stage for every interaction you have in the classroom. In addition, this type of adult relational style makes children realize that you respect them as members of the community in the classroom/section and helps them develop a feeling of trust in themselves and others. Finally, developing respectful supportive relationships with children's families allows you to continually engage them and collaborate when difficulties arise.

Here are some methodological indications, which you can adopt with your children.

Speak with respect

Even though they are young, children are very perceptive and learn by imitating what they see adults do. If you speak to children or other adults in a testy tone of voice that communicates devaluation, or impose things on them rather than asking politely, children will begin to speak to adults and their peers in the same way. In addition, being treated with respect by the adults in their lives gives children a sense of belonging and control and develops feelings of trust.

> **To speak with respect, you can…**
> - always use kind and supportive language when talking to children, even if their behavior is socially inappropriate (consider that their "difficult" behavior has a reason, which we may not immediately understand);
> - avoid raising your voice or use other tactics to intimidate children: intimidation is not respectful and generates fear and anger (children shut down or become aggressive and put aside who they really are to please the adult);
> - express requests as a question instead of an order (e.g., "Can you please give me the marker?" instead of "Give me the marker!");
> - regularly use "please" and "thank you" when talking to children and adults in the classroom/section (politeness) and support children in this behavior.

Find opportunities for positive interactions on an individual basis

If a child has been through strenuous experiences, it will be difficult for them to enter the room with an open heart and mind and a willingness to get involved and collaborate with peers and adults. Especially with these children, it is important to make sure you have at least 1 positive

one-on-one interaction each day. These interactions can be small, like a kind word, or larger, like personal help with an experience the child is having. When you privilege positive interactions with children, you develop a trusting relationship with them, and they will enter the emotional learning environment with joy, looking forward to another good day.

To find opportunities for positive one-on-one interactions, you can...

- greet each child by name when they enter the section/classroom;
- speak at the child's height;
- use a "positive" voice and speak with respect;
- notice when a child is positively experiencing the setting, is passionate about what they are experiencing, feels capable, handles conflict, shares, etc.;
- always ask the child if he/she wants a hug (physical contact) and wait for his/her consent;
- remember that children can also be supported simply with a gesture or a smile;
- be genuinely interested in what children are doing or playing;
- communicate clearly in simple language and at an appropriate pace;
- help children solve their own problems they encounter, rather than solving them for them;
- be proactive and avoid automatically re-acting to children's behavior;
- encourage interactions among children, with an eye toward inclusion;
- support what the child is experiencing, there are no bad ideas;
- celebrate effort and process instead of what we think is "perfection."

Two-way communication

Early childhood experts suggest that caregivers regularly have two-way communications with each child every day. These are often conversations or proto conversations characterized by mirroring (in tone of voice, gesture...). Consistent and appropriate responses from the adult support the architecture of the brain.

Here are some steps you can take on a daily basis…

- notice what the child's attention is on and share the attention with him/her. You will learn a lot about a child's abilities, interests and needs and encourage him/her to explore and strengthen the emotional bond;
- support and encourage the child's interest and curiosity: the child will know that his/her thoughts and feelings are heard and understood;
- name what the child is curious about: when you name what interests the child, you help the child understand the world around him/her and know what to expect;
- communicate, play, take turns helps children learn self-control and how to relate to others; moreover, waiting for one's turn gives the child time to develop ideas and build confidence and independence;
- when children take the initiative, support them by exploring their world and enabling interactions.

Cultivating a secure attachment

Attachment is defined as a deep emotional bond with a reference person that persists over time. Children create attachment bonds with important people in their lives, and these early relationships create important foundations for future relationships. Children with secure attachments show more positive emotions and less anxiety in early childhood. It takes time to develop strong bonds between children and caregivers.

Caregivers that are reliable, warm, and predictable lay the foundation for secure relationships in which children draw strength from adults and use them as a secure base for exploring the environment. Children are predisposed to develop strong emotional connections with their primary caregivers. The ability to bond with a significant adult allows children to gain confidence, security, and the ability to regulate stress and distress.

The quality of the relationship between the child and the caregiver relies primarily on the quality of nonverbal communication that occurs between the two. Remember that you can begin to make a child feel understood and safe at any age. Children's brains continue to create their own architecture until about age 20-25. In addition, because the brain continues to change throughout life, it is never too late to begin engaging in a nonverbal emotional (body) exchange characterized by attunement.

Children can then participate in an emotional exchange with their caregiver, communicating their needs and feeling understood and safe. Children who feel emotionally disconnected from their caregiver are at risk of feeling confused, misunderstood, and insecure.

Supporting social and emotional development

Children always learn from what the adult does. If children see the adult react to stress with anger, they will tend to adopt the same behavior. Seeing the educator react effectively to stress and

providing loving support such as hugs when children are stressed, frustrated or sad will go a long way!

In accompanying them in their social-emotional development, children need someone…

- who they can trust (meets their physical and emotional/psychological needs);
- to show them love (hugs, caresses, kisses, speaking softly and warmly...);
- who communicates with them (responding, for example, to their vocalizations or sharing interest in what interests them);
- who understands them (knows what they like to do, what makes them unhappy or happy...) and plays with them;
- who is there for them as a "safe base".

From the earliest months, children and babies feel a full range of emotions including sadness, anger and fear. A crucial factor in promoting healthy development is the adult's ability to read and respond to the children's signals about how they are feeling and what they need to feel safe and secure. Throughout childhood, children will gradually learn about their emotions, how to name and manage them.

There are children who are emotionally quick and intensely reactive (e.g., they show happiness by shouting for joy, express anger by yelling, throwing things, hitting or biting) and react intensely to physical stimuli (e.g., they cannot tolerate an itchy label on a shirt or an unpleasant smell or taste).

For children who react so impulsively, the following strategies may be helpful:
- use softer music and lights,
- make activities fun but not overwhelming,
- let the child decide whether or not to participate in sensory activities, such as finger painting or playing with cream,

It may also be helpful to offer physical comfort when the child is in emotional difficulty, as well as to name what he or she is feeling (e.g., "I know it is hard for you to be in places with lots of people and lots of noise"). Intensely reactive children do not need to be misjudged for their strong reactions: that is just the way they are. They can be helped to calm down and feel safe. Then they can be shown ways in which they can express their feelings.

Involve caregivers

Caregivers, including biological and non-biological parents or other adults responsible for the care of children, play a critical role in raising children. It is part of the job of educators/teachers to support them in the task of educating and caring for their children. Establishing positive relationships with caregivers will also help ease the child's transition from home to school.

To engage caregivers, it is important to...

- Be respectful of diversity: caregivers may come from different cultures, religions or ethnic groups (e.g., greeting caregivers in a language they are familiar with, when possible, can help families feel welcomed and accepted, as well as respecting and valuing their holidays);
- Organize educator-parent meetings, in which they can dialogue with each other about their children's development, with respect for different points of view.

Expressing appreciation

Using language that supports what is already present in children or is developing (rather than emphasizing what is missing or wrong) with children and verbally expressing appreciation for them help to increase their self-esteem and make them realize that they are important, with their uniqueness, in the community in the classroom/section. In this way they will also feel supported to try new things.

To express appreciation, you can…

- congratulate children on their attitudes, efforts, and positive progress. One can also congratulate children for getting the answers right, but a sense of self-esteem is truly built when children feel they are meeting expectations and making progress;
- recognize positive behavior, that is, behavior in which the child expresses himself or herself in a way that is empowering to self and others (e.g., telling a child about his or her positive behavior that you noticed and why you like it, or congratulating the child on his or her positive behavior in front of the entire class: "Well done!", "You are doing great!", and "Thanks for all your work!"); let children know that you are giving them respectful attention;
- encourage children to do their best, even if they are not doing everything completely "right." Making mistakes is part of the learning process! Encouragement works more than 89 reprimands!

5.2 "Sweet violences"

Reflecting on positive relationships, we invite you to analyze your behaviors and your language in the light of what C. Schuhl in her text *"Vivre en crèche: remédier aux douces violences"* calls the *sweet violences*, i.e. poorly chosen words, labels or behaviors that plunge the child into a world where his/her emotions are not taken into account. Everyone must reflect on their professional practices and know their limits. We cannot fail to evaluate the words spoken, the gestures that accompany them, the unspoken or even restrained aggression.

Perhaps out of habit, professionals have a tendency to do things mechanically, and it is precisely this that must be absolutely avoided. Among the gestures and words that stimulate, encourage, envelop and assure, it is necessary to be able to identify those that constrain, belittle and brutalize. It is interesting to sift through the scenes of daily life to identify these *sweet violences,* because they are sometimes deeply "anchored" in professional practice and hardly admitted.

Below are some examples of *sweet violences*:

- Talking over the child's head during various exchanges, without including him/her in the conversation, when s/he is the subject of the conversation.
- Making essentially negative communications.
- Openly criticizing a parent who has just left in front of their child (e.g., comments about punctuality, clothing, parenting habits, etc.).
- Forcing the child to do an activity.
- Suggesting too many activities all at once.
- Pressuring the child.
- Commenting negatively on the child's accomplishments.
- Not encouraging the child when s/he is struggling.
- Making comparisons between children.
- Calling children names only, without respecting their true identity.
- Judging.
- Belittling.
- Not smiling.

> **REMEMBER!**
> It is important to remember that:
> - when you touch the body you always touch the emotions,
> - the body is not a place of performance but a place of sensitivity,
> - the body is marked by the words we have received and listened to.

It is essential that everyone reflect on daily practices in order not to risk falling into some drifts that can really harm the child. The level of awareness and attention must always be kept high and the institutional organization of the service must not negatively affect the quality of the relation, which is the starting point for the child to be available for learning.

5.3 Supportive and predictable environment

An effectively managed children's service is one in which children are safe, supported and can learn. This does not necessarily mean that all children sit quietly. Quite the opposite! Children learn best when they are active, so a space with lots of movement or noise might be fine, as long as children are safe and the space is supportive.

A predictable and supportive environment within a well-being environment comforts children and makes them more emotionally stable due to the fact that they have the information they need to do their best. This is especially important when children have experienced a situation that they had no control over in their daily lives, for example, sudden moves, bereavement, or traumatic events. By building a space where children understand what is expected of them and feel they have the help they need to succeed in expressing their resources, you will support well-being and encourage adaptive social and emotional behaviors.

Creating a predictable environment does not require a large or resourceful physical space. Rather, it refers to the structure given to the children's day.

Because children may come from chaotic families and community environments, it is important to develop a learning space that is calm, peaceful, and predictable. Children feel safe when they know where their materials and belongings are and when adults showcase children's work. It is helpful for educators to be creative in offering colorful and attractive materials, with the understanding that children who have experienced stress and adversity or who have particular perceptual sensitivities may be hypersensitive to overstimulation, which can affect their ability to concentrate and self-regulate.

The following methodologies should be used throughout the year.

Establishing a routine

Routines at school help bring order to the day's events and to understand what to expect here. At the same time, routines allow children to make choices at each point in the day. Introducing and reexplaining classroom routines should be a fun activity so that children feel part of their daily schedule and enjoy following it.

What routines do you want to use with the children each day? It can help to ask yourself these questions:
- How will I greet the children?
- Where will the children go each day?
- What elements of our morning meeting will remain the same each day?
- How and where will the children sit when they are all together?
- Is there a specific place or way the children should wait to use the bathroom?
- Is there a specific place or way children should line up to enter or exit the classroom?
- Are there other routines I want to put in place to make our day run more smoothly each day?
- What time and where will the children have their meals, snacks, and naps?

At the beginning of the year, explicitly teach the children each routine you want them to use every day. Keep repeating them (it is also helpful to represent them graphically in a simple way) until they become automatic for them. This may take a while...and that is okay!

If a routine is about to change, inform the children before the change and give them time to learn the new one.

One routine that cannot be missed is to greet children using their names when they arrive in class. Start and end the day the same way each day, with an opening activity and a closing activity. Start and end activities on time so as not to rush children. Make it clear that what children are learning is related to what they have learned previously.

> **REMEMBER!**
> It is important to remember that routines are not rigid structures that can never change. They should be flexible and adaptable to children's needs. For example, if a suggestion that day does not work well or if children do not show interest, sometimes it is best to stop with that experience, just as what works well can be extended.

Creating rules together

Setting reasonable expectations is also an important part of building a sense of control in children, and will help them understand acceptable behaviors as well as the consequences of contextually inappropriate behaviors. With older children (ages 2 and up), allowing children to participate in creating classroom rules allows them to feel responsible for their behaviors and the school environment, highlights respectful attention to their needs, and develops a positive relationship among the whole group.

Key elements for making the rules:
- The class should have no more than 5 rules;
- Hang a rule sign that has simple pictures and words in a place where children can easily see it;
- Explain to children what the consequences will be if the rules are not followed;
- Remind children often of the rules they have created together;
- Always provide opportunities for children to practice them; show how to follow the rules and encourage children to do so. Children learn by imitating you!

Repeating information

Young children are eager to learn, but they are still figuring out the best way to do it. When they hear, see, or do something repetitively, it is easier for them to remember it in the future.

> **REMEMBER!**
> - **Repeating is helpful for children.** If they need a concept repeated to them, they should not be reprimanded or scolded for it. It is a sign that they are working hard to process the information and are eager to succeed!
> - **Be patient.** Keep explaining how to listen and play together while respecting each other, and gradually children's listening skills will improve and the need to repeat will decrease.
> - **Do not wait for children to ask you to repeat something**. If you see that a child is struggling, they may simply need a reminder of what to do.

Being a role model

Young children learn behavior through imitation. When you treat children with respect, communicate positively, and use teaching materials appropriately, children will do the same. Maintaining a positive tone and developing warm, respectful relationships with children helps them build positive social relationships with each other and reinforces feelings of control, self-esteem, and belonging.

For example, instead of saying:
"Stop crying"
"What are you doing? Leave her alone"
"I'm sick of it, you never finish what you started. If you do not finish, you can't participate in the game"

You can say:
"I can see that you are struggling"
"It was good to see you helping your friend with what he was doing, now I would like you to focus on what you are doing"
"I can see that you like this game and I think you will succeed."
Creating and assigning meaningful experiences

Providing opportunities for children to contribute to the community in the classroom gives them a sense of belonging, complementing the predictable and supportive environment. You can provide opportunities for them to have appropriate experiences so that they can demonstrate that they are valued and supported by their peers. In addition, these experiences give children a positive outlet for their energy and help ensure that they have the guidance they need to continue to adhere to rules and follow routines.

On a daily basis, you can provide opportunities for all children to have meaningful experiences:

- You can choose appropriate and safe activities for children to do that will contribute to the functioning of the whole class/section (e.g., fixing a space, helping you and their peers);
- You can come up with different "tasks" throughout the day, each of which will be assigned to a child (e.g., you can have children draw names to be given assignments);
- You can have children display their daily activities on the classroom wall with pictures and simple words; this will help children understand what responsibilities they have.

Offering the ability to choose

In the first few years of life, children learn to be independent and are satisfied with themselves when they do things on their own. Giving them choices shows that you trust them and increases their feelings of confidence and self-esteem. It is important that the choices offered are choices the child can actually make and not options we offer already knowing what the "right answer" is for the child to make.

Choice gives children the opportunity to practice managing their emotions and behaviors and prepares them to be comfortable in life, taking into account their strengths, difficulties, and interests.

SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR YOU!
When you offer children choices, you can…
- offer children different ways to practice skills (e.g., "Would you like to count cubes or count how many beats you hear?");
- use choice as a way to give positive discipline (e.g., "I see you are struggling to keep your hands to yourself. Do you want to sit next to your friend and keep them in place, or would you rather move to another chair?");
- make sure choices are appropriate for children's ages and abilities (e.g., if a child needs to be walked to the bathroom, do not give him the choice to go alone; if a child struggles to sit for long periods of time, do not give him the choice to sit for long periods of time).

Making connections with children's interests

Make connections to children's experiences, knowledge, and interests. When children know that their personal experiences, knowledge, and interests are valued, they feel a sense of belonging and support.

In order to connect the experiences they make in the classroom/section to children's experiences, knowledge, and interests, it is important to:
- adapt the proposals to the realities of the children;
- ask children questions about their interests;
- connect new concepts to what children already know. This will help them understand new concepts more easily. It will also support their self-esteem because the child will feel that capable and competent.

5.4 Specific strategies

The adult's example, the explicit teaching of emotional and behavioral coping strategies, and the use of appropriate and engaging experiences help maintain a learning environment in which children can thrive. In a word, it helps them get to know each other.

Photo credits: IRC

Teaching and reinforcing self-regulation strategies

Throughout the year, you will teach children self-management strategies that will not only help you better manage your classroom but will set them on the path to well-being for the rest of their lives. In this handbook there are many activities suggested that help them understand and manage emotions, think creatively, persevere through difficult times, make friends, and develop social skills. Particularly for children who have experienced severe adversity, these strategies help them in their positive adjustment and recovery.

To ensure that children learn and use these strategies effectively, you can…
- Reflect on the suggestions. Think about the children in your class and try to anticipate concepts or strategies that might be difficult for them in the proposals. Then, think about how you will address these challenges if they arise.
- Continue to reinforce children's learning by encouraging them to use these strategies regularly.
- Practice the strategies yourself throughout the day. When children see you practicing self-regulation strategies effectively - regulating your emotions, breathing with your diaphragm, etc. - they are more likely to adopt them as well. Children learn by observing you!

- When referring to a strategy, try to use the same terminology and instruction as used in the proposal that introduced the strategy. For example, when you think a child might benefit from a few deep breaths to calm down and feel centered, always use the same terms so that the child quickly understands what you are suggesting and how to implement it.

The Peace Corner

The Peace Corner is a small, quiet place where children can go alone, calm down, listen to their emotions and rest. In the peace corner, children feel comfortable and protected. It is an opportunity to teach self-regulation techniques to children who can use them whenever they need a break.

> **A SUGGESTION FOR YOU!**
> To create a peace corner, you can…
> - Choose a quiet corner of the room to place it in.
> - Clearly designate the space as a peace corner.
> - Make the peace corner a comfortable place for children to sit and relax.

Children can choose to go to the peace corner at any time. Educators can also ask a child to visit the peace corner if they think the child needs a break from the group. But the peace corner should never be a punishment. It should always be a place for positivity and quiet thinking. The peace corner is not TIME OUT and can possibly be used as a resource when the child is experiencing such intense emotion that it is important to allow time for the strength of the emotional state to reduce.

Materials for the peace corner may include:

- Mat
- Comfortable cushions
- Glitter jars
- Modelling dough
- Paper and pencils

- Sheets of paper and scissors
- Feelings scales

Glitter jars are useful tools to help kids calm down, because they can shake it off and then watch the glitter as it settles on the floor. Or you can make bottles with water and glitter (sealing the cap tightly). Children can shake the bottle to express their emotions, shaking it hard or gently. You can suggest that children show their emotional state by shaking the bottle.

It is important for children to learn to manage their emotions. The emotion scale is an example of a tool that can help children identify and understand what they are feeling at any given time.

Using a variety of techniques to ask children questions

Using different types of questions and experiences with individual children, in small groups, or with the whole group helps them feel involved, allows for effective observation of learning, and allows everyone to participate. These techniques give everyone a chance to intervene and help children feel valued in the group.

> **SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR YOU!**
> - Call everyone to answer: ask all children to answer a question by raising their hand.
> - Change the children selected for certain roles in the classroom.
> - Call all children the same way.
> - Provide opportunities for children to share what they have done with others.
> - "Turn and talk": ask a question, then invite children to share their answers with a partner sitting next to them.
> - Ask simple open-ended questions. These are questions that do not have a specific answer. They are usually questions with "how" or "why" (e.g., "How are you feeling today?" "Why do you feel this way?").
> - Vary your techniques!

Small group activities

Encouraging children to play together builds positive relationships and discourages discrimination and exclusion. It also provides opportunities for children to help and learn from one another, building a positive community.

When using small group work (referring to preschool), you must:

- Ensure that every member is involved. This requires very clear guidelines and active engagement with all groups during activity time. Move around the room to observe the groups, ask/answer questions, and make sure all children are participating.
- Establish clear guidelines and give examples before the group activity begins. This also includes behavior and manners in the activity and all class discussions - listening carefully, respecting and encouraging, etc.
- Divide children randomly into groups.

Engaging the senses

Because children learn in different ways, it is important to use as many senses as possible to best support their learning. Highlighting children's senses throughout the day establishes a feeling of community in the classroom where all children feel involved and valued.

5.5 Individual intervention

If you implement the first four levels of the Pyramid effectively, you can solve most relationship difficulties. However, sometimes children need individualized support to manage their behavior and to learn new, positive ways to channel their energy. Positive discipline strategies consist of small, individual steps indicate to children that the way they are behaving is not acceptable and provide them with alternative behaviors. When necessary, appropriate consequences show children that their negative actions have negative results and teach them how to behave differently in the future.

Young children are just beginning to learn how to behave with family, in the childcare center, and in the community. It is important that everyone understands and finds ways to teach children positive

> **REMEMBER!**
>
> You disapprove of the behavior, never of the person.

behavior rather than punishing them after they misbehave. It is also important to understand that caregivers need a lot of practice and experience to develop effective behavior management strategies.

Successful caregivers know that they will need to continually practice and seek support from colleagues for challenging behaviors. Do not wait until a bad behavior occurs to fix it. Instead, use strategies to encourage good behavior from day one!

When you manage your group effectively, children feel good and are not surprised by your actions. This promotes children's well-being and helps you maintain the control you need to create a safe and calm space.

Positive discipline

When clear rules are established and positive language is used to encourage children to follow them, children feel a sense of control in the classroom. They also feel they belong to a supportive community, feel confident in themselves when they meet expectations, and are able to build positive relationships. Positive discipline is the key to a well-being environment!

Positive discipline is used when children need a little reminder to follow the rules. It is a way to address socially inappropriate behavior that is not frequent and does not harm the child or their peers. "Discipline" comes from the word "disciple," which means "teaching." Using positive discipline with honest consequences is one way to teach children appropriate behavior in the classroom.

An example of a technique is redirecting: When you show children a positive alternative to their inappropriate behavior, you redirect them to more appropriate behaviors.

To do this is helpful:

- **Privately help the child choose another behavior** - This can be done with small, respectful reminders (e.g., crouch down next to the child and whisper a suggestion for a better behavior).

- **Help the child choose another behavior by highlighting positive classroom behavior** - This can be done by announcing the behavior you see that meets expectations (e.g., tell the class "I love seeing kids use their hands to build....!"). This does NOT mean that you should refer to children who exhibit positive or negative behaviors in particular. Instead, it is a way to remind children of your expectations and encourage children to evaluate their own behavior to find out if they are meeting expectations.

- **Respect the child** - Put yourself in the child's head to determine why the child might be behaving in a "difficult" way. Find friendly ways to talk to the child about the negative behavior while keeping the focus on change, not criticizing the child. This can be done by using "I" instead of "you."

Examples of redirection:
- "I am sad that this game is broken and can no longer be used. How can we make it better?"
- "I feel angry when you tap on the table. Do you remember it's against our rules?"
- "Do you feel like raising your hand and being quiet until your name is called? That's okay - you remembered the rule about raising your hand!"
- "I see you are done playing with blocks. Do you remember what we always do at the end of the game and before we start a new activity? "

Don't forget to let the child know that you saw that he or she is committed to changing behavior.

Another technique is to use facial expressions and body language. Your expressions and body language can tell children what you think of their behavior.
- Show disappointment on your face. Sometimes, children do not yet have the oral language skills to talk about feelings. Physically showing your feelings will help them understand your expectations.
- Sit or crouch down to the child's level. This will show the child that you respect them and help them focus on your direction and expectations.

Also help them understand that accidents happen. When children learn how to behave in the classroom, they almost certainly make mistakes. These mistakes or accidents are not intentional. Talk to the child about the behavior that led to the accident and suggest how they might change it in the future.

> **SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR YOU!**
> When children make mistakes, you can…
> - Comfort them by saying that you, an adult, sometimes make mistakes too.
> - Ask them what led to the mistake. Then ask, "What can we do next time to avoid doing it again?"
> - If children accidentally have a negative interaction with another child (such as bumping or stepping on their foot), ask them if them intended to hurt their buddy. If it was an accident, the answer will be "no." Then, you can encourage the child to say "sorry" and think about how that mistake can be avoided in the future.

Another aspect to take care of is transitions between activities: plan for transitions at the beginning and end of the day, as well as between activities. Give children reminders before important transitions so they have time to finish what they are doing and prepare for the next activity. Try to minimize waiting times during transitions to maximize children's active participation. Transition times can be common triggers for behaviors ranging from fighting to tardiness to outbursts.

There are many ways you can help children with transitions, but it may take some experimentation to discover what works for each individual child. Along with routines, reminders and countdowns could be key. In the morning, you can set up what the day will look like. Then before each transition, set a time and description of what will happen along with countdowns (in 20 minutes, then 10, then 5, it will be time to...). This allows them to prepare emotionally for an event.

For younger children in particular, songs can be particularly effective tools to help implement routines and ease transitions. Songs and chants such as "opening" or "closing" can be used to indicate the transition from one activity to another. Other children may benefit from visual cues. Pointing out a graphic picture of what to expect from a particular transition or the steps involved can help tremendously.

Acknowledge to children when things are going well. Do not miss the opportunity to get excited and say that it was great, that it was so easy, that they loved the way they immediately put their toys away and started washing their hands, and now we have more time to play outside together. Be specific in your compliments. With the right support, kids can learn to switch activities with peace of mind.

Appropriate consequences

Appropriate consequences are used ONLY when the child's behavior is dangerous or unchanged after trying positive discipline techniques. It is important to use appropriate consequences along with positive discipline to help children understand why their behavior is inappropriate and how to choose positive behavior in the future. Appropriate consequences for negative behavior teach children what positive behavior to expect. Violent or unsafe consequences do not work in the long run. They increase children's stress and decrease their well-being.

Bring a team together

When you develop strong relationships with caregivers in a child's life, you create a team of adults ready to help each other, support positive behavioral development in the child, and address misbehavior.

- When difficult behaviors emerge, ask to meet with caregivers. This is not to encourage caregivers to punish the child. Rather, it is to discuss potential reasons for the behavior and make a plan for how to help, both in the classroom and at home. When all the adults in a child's life agree on how they will deal with socially inappropriate behavior, the child feels supported, learns faster, and is not confused by mixed messages.
- Maintain frequent contact with the team. Communicating regularly and positively to caregivers is key to addressing negative behaviors and encouraging positive behaviors in the long run.

Logic consequences

In order for children to learn positive behaviors, they must see the natural effects of their negative behaviors. Understanding this cause-and-effect relationship is the key to changing behavior. For example.

- If the child breaks an object in class voluntarily (i.e., not by accident), you can prohibit the child from using that material for the rest of the activity. If the loss of that material lasts too long (longer than the school day), the child will focus more on his or her own anger rather than on the rule that the consequence should have taught.
- If the child writes on the wall or table with his/her pencil, ask the child to help you clean up the wall or table.

Sometimes, children may need to take a break from a situation to calm down and change their

Pause Time

behavior. This does not mean you should ban the child from the classroom. Instead, you should help children get back in touch with themselves through for example:

1. The use of controlled breathing
2. Mindfulness exercises
3. Keeping calm and present by acting as emotional regulators, mirroring their emotions and verbalizing what happened, thus putting words on the experiences (mentalization): *"You got angry because he took your game and you didn't want to. You didn't know how to tell him and you hit him..."* point out to the child the inappropriate action, providing valid alternatives of behavior: *"I do not want you to hit, hitting hurts. Do you see him crying? Next time tell him with the words, I'm playing with it."* Give hope to children that, in time, they will learn to manage their emotions: *"You'll see that little by little you'll learn not to hit anymore, in the meantime I'll help you".*

4. If adults lose their temper, it is useful for them to take a break and ask for the support of another person, also because in such an emotional state they will hardly be able to calm the child down (emotions are contagious!); let's avoid being reactive and impulsive ourselves, as well as being guided by the lower brain (limbic and reptilian). We need to activate our cortex, the seat of our adulthood and rationality.

5. When children prey to an emotion of strong intensity and become unapproachable, we can ask them to leave as a last resort. Letting them express what they feel by moving away, but confirming their emotional availability, can allow them to recover in their own time and in their own way: *"By letting children experience the difficulties linked to these experiences, we offer them the opportunity to learn to tolerate their emotional discomfort. By letting them feel what they feel, by supporting them and letting them know that we understand how hard it is, for example, not getting what they want, you are doing the most positive and helpful thing for them at that time."* Then if necessary and as a last resort, but not punitive, you can invite the child to move away from the play space and into a break position: *"It sounds like you need a minute break from the group so you can calm down and remember how we behave in class. Can you please come and sit quietly on this cushion for 3 minutes?"*

Next, in all cases, the adult will speak about the incident to help integrate the event.

When working with children who have special needs related to developmental delays or disabilities, keep the following in mind:

- **Create an accessible environment:** if a child has a physical disability, be sure to set up your classroom so that there are no physical barriers to the child's participation. Low shelves, pictures at eye level so everyone can see them, and extra space around tables are just a few ways to make your classroom friendly for everyone. Do not separate children with special needs from the rest of the class.

- **Plan ahead**: working with groups that have different abilities and needs can introduce unexpected challenges. Reduce interruptions during activities by planning in advance how you will include a child with special needs during your lesson plan activities.

- **Be aware:** pay attention to situations where a child is unable to participate or does not feel included and make adjustments. During the day, make sure everyone is safe and having fun.

- **Be flexible:** be prepared to change your methods if you notice that a child is unable or unwilling to participate. Allow yourself to adjust the route or reduce the number of activities in the day to better accommodate children.

- **Take your time:** sometimes children pick up on a message quickly and sometimes they need something explained to them several times. Be flexible and let children set the pace. If they are having difficulty, help them break down the steps into smaller tasks to overcome the challenge.

- **Focus on a child's strengths:** Find out the strengths of each child in the class, including children with special needs, and develop strategies that can highlight those

strengths. For example, if a child is good at drawing, but has difficulty paying attention during another activity, allow him/her to illustrate the activity. If another child has trouble sitting still and learns best by moving, allow him or her to play a central role in showing the activity.

- **Stay positive**: You can help all children build positive relationships with their peers. And when you make a change to meet a specific need, find ways to do it in a way that does not make the student feel labeled. You can also encourage positive attitudes by showing your class that children with special needs can simply do things in a different way.

- **Be consistent**.

- **Be a positive role model:** children learn through imitation.

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