

What you will learn in this module

How to create environments that say “yes”

Good environments give children the support and safety they need to explore many different experiences.

How to adapt environments for children with disabilities

Environments modified to accommodate children with disabilities encourage participation and enable independent access to peers and activities.

How to use natural settings as environments for Early Intervention services

Partial participation in a natural setting can help children grow and develop alongside their peers.

How to use natural settings as environments for Early Intervention services

“I used to wonder what benefit there is to placing children with disabilities with same aged peers,” said Ms. Barker. “Isn’t it better to keep them with children who are at the same developmental level?”

“But then I went to a workshop on inclusion. It was run by parents of children with disabilities. It was an eye opener for me.”

“They kept saying things like, ‘Early Intervention isn’t about giving children more time so they’ll catch up. It’s about making accommodations so everyone has access to the same environments they’d be in if they didn’t have a disability.’ ”



What really matters

The environment plays an important role in Early Intervention services to young children with disabilities. The law says that Early Intervention services should be provided in “settings that are normal or natural for the child’s same aged peers who have no disabilities.” Giving children with disabilities access to these settings is an important step in helping them to grow and develop.

In age-appropriate environments, children can express themselves, explore new ideas, practice acquired skills, and master new ones. Intervention that takes place in these natural environments helps children learn to adapt to the world around them.

“I’ve changed my mind about a lot of things since I started working with children with disabilities,” said Ms. Rodriguez. “I used to think they needed a different kind of environment to learn and grow — you know, like a clinic or something.”



“But now I know I was wrong. Babies with disabilities need to be with other children the same age, getting to know them and becoming a part of their community. I’m so glad I listened when parents asked me to enroll their children with disabilities. They knew how important it would be for them to grow up doing the things other children do.”

“It’s a whole new thing for our center,” said Ms. Chen. “When we first started enrolling children with disabilities, I kept thinking in terms of developmental milestones. I couldn’t imagine moving a child who wasn’t walking in with the toddlers.”

“But then when Seamus turned 18 months his mom insisted. She said, ‘He’s been with these children since the infant room. They are his friends. Besides, he learns from them. He likes them, and tries to do what they do.’ She had a point. I just never thought of it that way.”

“I used to think that every child with a disability would require special care, all day every day,” said Ms. Polenski. “But as the children enrolled, I realized this wasn’t true. Disabilities are like other kinds of individual differences. They might affect how you do some things, but not everything. There’s a lot that children with disabilities can do like everybody else. That’s why it’s so important to have them in natural settings with other children.”

“It reminds me of a woman at my gym,” said Ms. Lazard. “She’s got cerebral palsy and uses crutches. She needs a little stool, and support from one of the trainers, to get on a bike; but once she’s on, she pedals faster than anyone else.”