

HANDOUT

1-4-6

SIX DIMENSIONS OF HEALTHY ENVIRONMENTS FOR CHILDREN: ORDER-DISORDER



daily schedule never varies
Order

flexible schedule

no schedule
Disorder

We impose order on our lives in two ways.⁶ Time is ordered by the schedules and rituals of our days, weeks, months, and years. We order space by the way we arrange the physical environment in which we live and work.

Striking a balance between order and disorder at a SACC program can be difficult, especially when the adults involved in the program have very different ideas about what constitutes a comfortable level of order and disorder. Children's level of comfort with order and disorder may be very different from the adults' view.

The level of order or disorder should reflect clearly defined goals for children, assuming that staff, parents, and children have agreed on a set of goals. Schedules and

storage need special attention. For instance, if encouraging children to be independent is a goal of the program, storage of materials and equipment should be designed for independent use. If offering children choices is a goal, the daily schedule should allow a child to set his or her pace for the day, including down time or doing nothing.

To evaluate this dimension of your program, consider how an environment might reflect the following goals for children.

Goal:

To support children's growing independence and autonomy

Are storage areas organized so that children can choose and put away materials and equipment without adult assistance? Are toys,

games, and books stored so that they invite children to use them?

Goal:

To welcome children into a warm, homelike atmosphere

Does each child have a cubby, locker, or special place for personal belongings?

Goal:

To encourage children to make choices among activities and plan how they will spend their time at the program

Is the daily, weekly, and monthly schedule posted or discussed with children? Do staff consult with children when planning the schedule? Is the schedule flexible enough to accommodate a group's changing interests and energy levels?

6. Jim Greenman, *Caring Spaces, Learning Places: Children's Environments That Work* (Redmond, Wash.: Exchange Press, 1988), p. 81.