You’ve learned about the typical development of the baby at birth through age eight. In this final assignment, you’ll learn about the importance of early intervention and how to meet the diverse needs of all children and families in your care.

**ASSIGNMENT OBJECTIVES**

When you complete Assignment 4, you’ll be able to

4. Explain early intervention and how to meet the diverse needs of all children

**EARLY INTERVENTION**

Every parent-to-be dreams of the birth of a healthy child and has big hopes and dreams for him or her. It’s important that every child is screened for possible developmental issues. As you learned in earlier assignments, it’s also important for caregivers to know when milestones should occur in each of the domains of development. When children don’t meet these milestones, they may be experiencing a developmental delay. The Centers for Disease Control (2015) indicate that up to 13 percent of children in the United States have a developmental delay or disability. It’s extremely likely that you, as a caregiver, will have a child in your care that has been diagnosed with a developmental delay or disability. All children should regularly be screened for possible developmental delays. One study has found that fewer than 20 percent of children from birth to age three are screened for developmental delays (Easter Seals, n.d.). As a caregiver of young children, it’s critical that you learn about the importance of early intervention.

Learn more about developmental screenings [here](#).

There are many things that put children at risk for developmental delays. As you learned in earlier lessons, if a fetus is exposed to teratogens (or harmful agents) in utero, the baby may be born with a disability. Some developmental delays and disabilities are genetic, or due to biology. Babies born prematurely are also at risk for developmental delays.
Children living in poverty are also at risk for developmental delays. Long-term research indicates that children from low-income families are at risk for cognitive and behavioral delays without early intervention (Columbia University, 2014). Children who live in poverty and also have additional risk factors—such as living in a single-parent household, with a teen mother, or with someone in a linguistic minority—are at even greater risk.

Have you ever wondered why some children in a family at risk for developmental delays don’t experience delays, yet other children in the same family have lifelong issues? Though the environment is the same, some children respond differently to the many stressors that can affect their lives. Some children have resilience, which means they can handle stress in their lives better than others. Resilience is the ability of a child to recover in the face of traumatic events and stress. Children who demonstrate resilience possess certain factors that protect them from these stressors. Protective factors can include having caring and compassionate role models, high expectations, and opportunities for participation.

There are two types of stressors: physical and psychological. A physical stressor is something that harms the child’s body, such as a fall that fractured a bone. A psychological stressor is one that harms the child’s sense of security, such as his parents’ divorce. In addition, there are both acute and chronic forms of stress. Acute stress is more common, intense, and tends to subside quickly. Chronic stress is persistent, and the effects can be cumulative and harm even well-adjusted children. For example, if parents have a hostile marriage, the couple will most likely deal with the children with criticism, anger, and punishment, which can cause chronic stress.
There are two types of stress: internal stress and external stress. *Internal stress* comes from within the child, such as illness or anxiety. *External stress* can come from family members, peers, and others. Stress may cause negative physical effects and can lead to illness. In addition, stress can cause behavioral and psychological problems, including acting out.

It’s important to teach children how to deal with stressors:

- Teach coping strategies.
- Model good stress management and ensure that the day care setting is a low-stress environment.
- Learn about the many stressors in children’s lives.
- Adults can also act as buffers between a child and a stressor. A *buffer* is a way to shield a child from a stressor as you help him or her to deal with the stressor independently.
- Teach children calming and relaxation techniques which will begin to teach them good coping skills.
- Work with families to understand the negative effects of stressors, and teach families skills to deal with stressors.

You may have heard that autism spectrum disorders are on the rise. There’s a lot of media coverage on autism, and currently one in 68 children is diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder (CDC, 2015). It’s very important that all children are screened for an autism spectrum disorder so that early intervention can occur, as the intervention is specific to autism. Learn more here.

In this assignment, you’ve learned about the importance of identifying factors that put children at risk for developmental delays and disabilities. You also learned that all children should be screened for developmental delays. Next, you’ll learn how to provide a nurturing environment that meets the diverse needs of all children and families.

**PREPARING THE ENVIRONMENT TO FOSTER DEVELOPMENT OF DIVERSE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

Since today’s young children spend more time with caregivers, caregivers have a major role in fostering their development. Therefore, it’s essential for caregivers to know how to prepare a safe and interesting environment to meet the diverse needs of all children.
Preparing the environment for young children involves organizing the physical space, the sequence of activities, and the movement of the people within the space. Caregivers must be familiar with materials, equipment, and activities that are suitable for each age level’s interests and abilities. They must be able to conduct activities and routines within a flexible schedule that supports the individual needs of children, including those with disabilities. They must be capable of providing affection, love, guidance, and supervision as needed. The environment where care will be provided must always be arranged with special attention to ensure children’s safety. It’s also important to rotate materials for greater interest.

**FAMILY CHILD CARE**

Family child care, usually provided in a home environment, doesn’t generally enjoy the same spaciousness as child care centers housed in church buildings, schools, or community centers. The family child care provider should define some space to be used exclusively for children in the program. Even in limited space, comfortable work and play areas can be established. When space is limited, it isn’t necessary to make all materials and equipment available every day. In fact, rotating materials and equipment can make a program more interesting and help to foster a sense of routine in children.

In a family day care home, the provider may set up a painting easel on Monday. In the same space on Tuesday, water-play equipment (such as a large plastic tub with floating objects and vessels for pouring and filling) may replace the easel.

Whatever the limitations of space may dictate, it’s essential to consider the ages and abilities of the children in the group to be certain that their diverse needs and interests will be met. The caregiver must thoughtfully arrange the environment with respect to the ages and developmental levels of the children. It’s important to consider, for example, that infants will eat and sleep according to their individual schedules; that toddlers want to be on the go, but still need periods of rest; and that three- and four-year-olds enjoy playing together more than two-year-olds.

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How can a caregiver ensure a safe environment?

- Get on the child’s level and examine the environment for danger areas.
- Cover all electrical outlets.
- Furnishings should be easy for children to use (the right size and height).
- Dangerous objects, such as adult scissors, should be kept out of reach.
- The caregiver should examine the environment thoroughly before children arrive to be certain it’s free of any hazardous objects, arrangements, or equipment.
It's also important to respect the individual culture of the children in your care and their families. For example, some families may choose to breastfeed the infant, while others may choose to bottle feed. Both methods of feeding an infant should be respected. It's always important to use the NAEYC Position Statement on the Code of Ethical Conduct to ensure that you respect each individual child and family.

View the NAEYC Position Statement on Ethical Conduct [here](#).

**Case Study**

Carly is a two-and-a-half-year-old who uses a wheelchair. How can you meet her needs in your day care?

- Be sure there’s adequate space for wheelchair mobility.
- During circle time, have Carly sit on carpet squares with the other children with support as needed.
- All children can sit in chairs when Carly is in her wheelchair during activities.
- Be sure activity tables are the correct height for Carly in her wheelchair.
- Ensure outdoor play is accessible for Carly.

Learn more from the Division of Early Childhood (DEC) about including children with disabilities and their families. Their recommended practices can be explored [here](#).
ENVIRONMENT FOR INFANTS

Young infants need an environment that supports their individual physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development. Each infant has his or her own schedule for eating, sleeping, and playing. The environment should be organized to include a quiet area for sleeping and a separate area for playing. During their first year, infants gradually become aware of the objects and persons in their environment. They want interesting things to see, touch, hear, taste, and smell. They gain control over body movements and become mobile.

The environment should include a variety of textures, colors, and objects that are placed at eye level. The soft, quiet environment of the very young infant should gradually change to include more sensory stimulation and opportunities for movement. As infants become mobile, safety precautions are more important. Electrical outlets, electrical cords, and low storage cabinets are common hazards. Placing fascinating play objects on the floor will direct the infant’s attention to a designated play area. Soft rugs, pillows, and covered mattresses provide interesting contrast as well as comfort. They also make it easier for caregivers to be on the floor with infants. The caregiver is the most important source of comfort and stimulation in the infant’s environment.

ENVIRONMENT FOR TODDLERS

An environment designed primarily for toddlers must show particular respect for their physical, social, emotional, and cognitive levels of development. Since their coordination and balance still aren’t fully developed, the space should be arranged in a manner that tells them everything they need is within easy reach, including adults with helpful hands, warm laps, and hugging arms. Toddlers shouldn’t be overwhelmed with a wide variety of choices, although the supply of equipment and materials should be sufficient to provide each group member with something to do.

How can you teach sharing? Since two-year-olds are only beginning to develop a sense of self, they aren’t quite ready to accept the concept of sharing (two or more of them playing with the same toy at the same time). With gentle, close supervision, however, they can learn to take turns. The caregiver should establish short time periods and assist the children with sharing.

Because toddlers try to do things themselves, their environment needs to support autonomy. Since toddlers don’t have the developmental skills to share consistently, duplicate toys should be provided. Separate areas can be organized to assist toddlers’ efforts to assert themselves. The arrangement of furnishings and materials can indicate where certain activities should take place. The environment should provide open areas

Learn more about infant and toddler environments [here](#).
that allow freedom of movement and large-motor activity as well as smaller spaces that provide for security and intimacy. Toddlers also need a quiet area for napping, toilet facilities that encourage independence, and toddler-sized places to wash hands and eat.

ENVIRONMENT FOR THREE- TO FIVE-YEAR-OLDS

It’s important to arrange space for preschoolers in clearly defined areas, commonly referred to as activity centers or interest centers. Examples include language and literacy, dramatic play, music and movement, blocks, art, and science centers. Through experience, you’ll discover which arrangement meets your facility’s specific needs. In a child care center, the several areas mentioned above often exist simultaneously in one room. In a family child care, providing only one or two activity centers each day is appropriate.

BLOCK BUILDING

The block-building center should be equipped with a sturdy shelf unit for storing the blocks and block accessories, such as small-wheeled vehicles and figures of people. If this area is carpeted, the carpet should be of a tight weave so blocks will stand easily; if the area isn’t carpeted, the floor on which the children will be sitting shouldn’t be cold.

DRAMATIC PLAY

Through dramatic play, children learn to act out roles. An activity center for such play, known as the housekeeping corner, is essential in a well-equipped, stimulating environment. Child-sized toy kitchen furnishings are found in this center (Figure 16). Items like scaled-down pots, pans, dishes, and utensils will add a sense of reality to this area. With easy-to-hold pencils and slips of paper, children can pretend to take food orders from “diners.” Dramatic play isn’t limited to setting up the traditional housekeeping corner. It should also include sock or stick puppets that are easy for children to handle and a dollhouse with scaled-down furniture and people.
FIGURE 16—Toy kitchens allow children to participate in dramatic play.

LITERACY

A bright, well-lit area should be identified as a library center and furnished with carefully selected children’s books that are displayed on shelves and easily accessible to small children. A child-sized rocking chair, a table and chairs, or some fluffy bright pillows on a colorful throw rug complete the furnishings. This center can be enhanced through the use of a tablet, iPad, computer, or other electronic devices that the children may operate themselves.

MANIPULATIVE MATERIALS

An area, preferably with tables and chairs, should be provided for children to use manipulative materials. These materials should be stored in an orderly manner on shelves that are easily accessible to the children. Manipulative materials are items children can use with their hands, designed to foster small-muscle development and hand-eye coordination. Typical manipulative materials include pegs and pegboards, parquetry blocks, modeling dough, scissors, and crayons.

Puzzles, items for matching, counting toys, and computer-type games are some of the materials that should be available in this area for stimulating cognitive and sensory development (Figure 17).
FIGURE 17—By manipulating puzzle pieces, these children are learning to coordinate the small muscles needed for writing.

ENVIRONMENT FOR SIX- TO EIGHT-YEAR-OLDS

The environment for school-age children should be attractive and inviting. They need a comfortable place to work, but they also need places to work on projects, play games, hold “club” meetings, and engage in vigorous physical activity. Space that has been organized with interest or activity centers that include tables and chairs, as well as a “quiet” area with a sofa and other soft furniture, will help children relax and promote literacy activities. An outdoor play area with equipment appropriate for school-age children is an important part of the environment. Other things that can help school-age children feel at home include a place to prepare their own snacks and some quiet areas for reading or listening to music.

Caregivers who work with school-age children quickly become aware of the children’s increasing ability to get along without direct help. The caregiver becomes more of a support system and a resource for helping the children toward more mature functioning. School-age children have qualitative needs that differ from those of younger children.

The school-age child’s physical development requires adult supervision in the areas of safety, nutrition, rest, relaxation, and exercise. School-age children are so physically developed that they often take risks or attempt feats beyond their capabilities. They’re
adventurous and often don’t know their own limits or aren’t aware of their own lack of knowledge or skill associated with an activity. Children of this age push their energy and endurance; they’re interested in seeing how far they can ride bikes, how late they can stay up, how long they can jump rope, or how many dives they can perform from a diving board. Caregivers should be alert to the limits of children’s endurance, skill, and knowledge of whatever they’re attempting to do (Figure 18).

![Figure 18—Caregivers should be alert to the limits of children’s endurance, skill, and knowledge of whatever they’re attempting to do.](image)

School age is a time of fads and group pressure. Therefore, good eating habits from childhood may be dismissed in favor of junk food. Caregivers need to help children remain aware of their food intake to ensure they’re properly nourished. This will help head off early development of problems such as **obesity** (excessive weight gain) and **anorexia** (excessive weight loss caused by prolonged loss of appetite).

What do you know about childhood obesity? Find out more [here](#).

Adults usually understand and accept that such things as height, bone structure, hair color, and nose shape are determined genetically, but school-age children may not easily recognize or accept these realities. They may be unrealistic about the future in relation to those features. Caregivers need to help school-age children become realistic about their bodies.
They should also support children’s efforts to be successful at school. Asking questions about school, providing time and space to complete homework, and providing help whenever necessary are all essential caregiver behaviors. Following rules and directions, being organized, and finishing long-term assignments are the tasks school-age children are learning to do. Caregivers can help children work on these kinds of tasks. However, caregivers shouldn’t interpret a teacher’s instructions or do the work for the child. Perhaps the best help a caregiver can provide is to encourage the child to seek help from the teacher when unsure about directions, and to help the child become organized in completing homework.

**BULLYING**

An aggressive behavior receiving a great deal of attention today from parents, teachers, administrators, children, legislators, and the media is bullying. *Bullinging* refers to behaviors intended to cause harm or distress, occurring over time in relationships in which there’s an imbalance of power. There are many forms of bullying—physical, emotional, verbal, and even cyberbullying (bullying that takes place on the Internet or through social media). Legislation in many states specifically addresses bullying behaviors to deter this serious form of intimidation.

More information can be found at the US Department of Health and Human Services at [StopBullying.gov](http://StopBullying.gov).

**PREVENTING BULLYING**

Children learn to be aggressive in many different ways, including from family, media, and peers. Unresponsive parents often leave children with unmet needs, fail to teach social skills, reward aggression, use negative discipline strategies, and provide cues for aggression. Peers can also contribute to bullying behaviors by accepting bullying as normal, modeling bullying, and reinforcing aggression by not stopping aggressive acts. The media can affect bullying behaviors by showing violence as acceptable.

It’s important to address each of the ways that children learn to be aggressive. In regard to bullying, adults should

- Set and clearly communicate limits prohibiting aggression
- Help children make good decisions on the use of social media and television
- Encourage empathy while also encouraging children to think about the consequences of their actions
- Teach positive behaviors

In Assignment 4, you’ve learned about the importance of screening and early intervention. In addition, you learned the importance of respecting the individuality of each child and the needs of diverse families.
ASSIGNMENT 4

SELF-CHECK

1. In preparing the environment, the most important thing caregivers can do is
   a. provide many toys.
   b. buy colorful furniture.
   c. put up posters.
   d. arrange play areas to suit the children’s ages and developmental levels.

2. Young children learn best if
   a. they repeat the same activities every day.
   b. they have a variety of materials to use that are geared to their interests and abilities.
   c. they’re first taught the alphabet.
   d. the caregiver plays “school” with them.

3. The organization of play materials will best meet the needs of young children if they’re
   a. kept out of sight.
   b. rotated.
   c. displayed in all activity areas.
   d. all available in the same location at all times.

4. An environment planned for infants should have
   a. separate areas for sleeping and activities.
   b. a small manipulative area.
   c. a computer station.
   d. combined areas for loud and quiet activities.

5. It’s important to provide duplicates of favorite toys for toddlers, as toddlers don’t know how to
   a. share.
   b. choose toys.
   c. hand toys to a friend.
   d. demonstrate cause and effect.

(Continued)
ASSIGNMENT 4
SELF-CHECK

6. Providing care for school-age children
   a. requires the same skills as caring for younger children.
   b. involves providing them with more opportunities to be with peers in a variety of activities.
   c. isn’t necessary because they can take care of themselves.
   d. shouldn’t be done if the caregiver also takes care of younger children.

7. School-age children should be
   a. treated differently from younger children.
   b. treated the same as younger children.
   c. allowed to eat whatever they want.
   d. given help with homework only by their parents.

8. Screening assessments should be done with
   a. all children.
   b. children at risk.
   c. premature babies.
   d. children with autism.

9. _______ is locating and providing services for children at risk for disabilities or with diagnosed disabilities.

10. _______ is when a child doesn’t meet typical developmental milestones at the expected time.

Click here to check your answers.
To prepare for your examination, please review these key points:

- The brain and physical development occur prenatally through childhood.
- Social and emotional development can be studied in all ages of the child.
- Learning about cognition, language, and literacy is important for the development of the young child.
- It's important to intervene early and meet the needs of all children and families.

RESOURCES

Better Brains for Babies
http://www.bbbgeorgia.org/brainTimeline.php

From Neurons to Neighborhoods: Charting a New Science of Mental Health
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l4XaslROyQQ

Crawling May Be Unnecessary for Normal Child Development
http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/crawling-may-be-unnecessary/

All About Learning to Use the Toilet

Learn Correct Pencil Grasp (pencil pick up) Teaches Functional Dynamic Tripod Grasp:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DP5htYZ5jijQ

Baby Smiles Provide Clues to Healthy Development—Science Nation
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=--Ysx8lDSDxY

Essentials for Childhood: Steps to Create Safe, Stable, Nurturing Relationships and Environments

Separation Anxiety in Children

Developmental Milestones: Baby Talk from First Sounds to First Words
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a7WAwKl88Q

Early Language and Literacy Skills to Give Your Baby a Jump Start to Success
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fArQ97uIWW
Object Concept VOE Ramp Study Baillargeon
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hwgo2O5Vk_g

Practice Implementation Checklist: Responsive Caregiving

Supporting Your Child’s Communication Skills
http://www.zerotothree.org/early-care-education/early-language-literacy/communication-skills.html

Early Literacy

Media and Children

Developmental Monitoring and Screening
http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/screening.html

Facts about Developmental Disabilities
http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/developmentaldisabilities/facts.html

Young Children at Risk
http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_1073.html

Resilience and At-risk Children and Youth

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Treatment
http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/treatment.html

Practice Implementation Checklist: Responsive Caregiving

DEC Recommended Practices 2014
https://www.cde.state.co.us/resultsmatter/RMVideoSeries_GeneralInterest

Caring for Infants and Toddlers in Groups

Childhood Obesity Facts
http://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/obesity/facts.htm


University of Illinois. (2013). Object Concept VOE Ramp Study Baillargeon. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hwgo2O5V_k_g


