



# Making Adaptations to Meet a Variety of Needs



Wisconsin Department of Children and Families

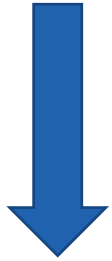
# Adaptations

vs

# Modifications

Is there a difference between these things?

Yes



- Change **how** a child learns something
- Changes or accommodations made to the environment, materials, equipment, etc.

- Change **what** a child learns
- Changes made to what is being taught or expected from the child or student



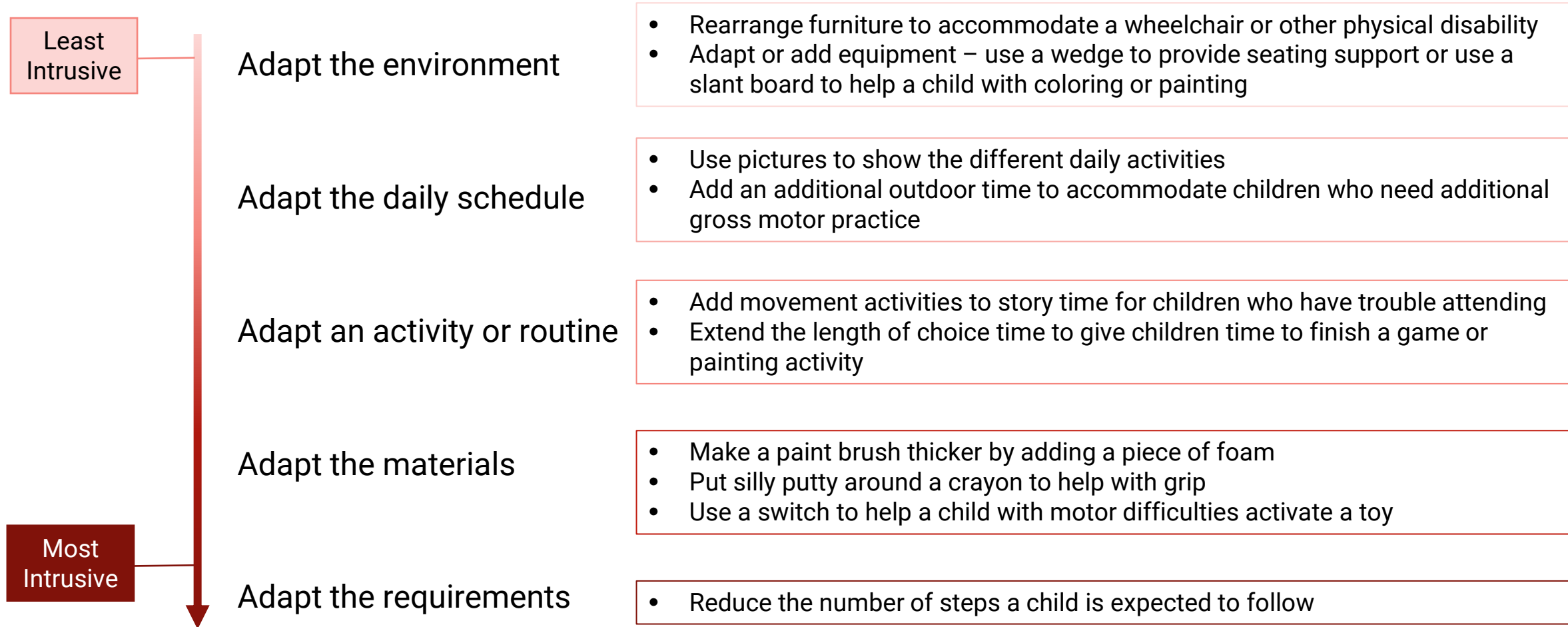
# Adaptations in Early Childhood Programs

Making adaptations does not involve teaching the child a skill.

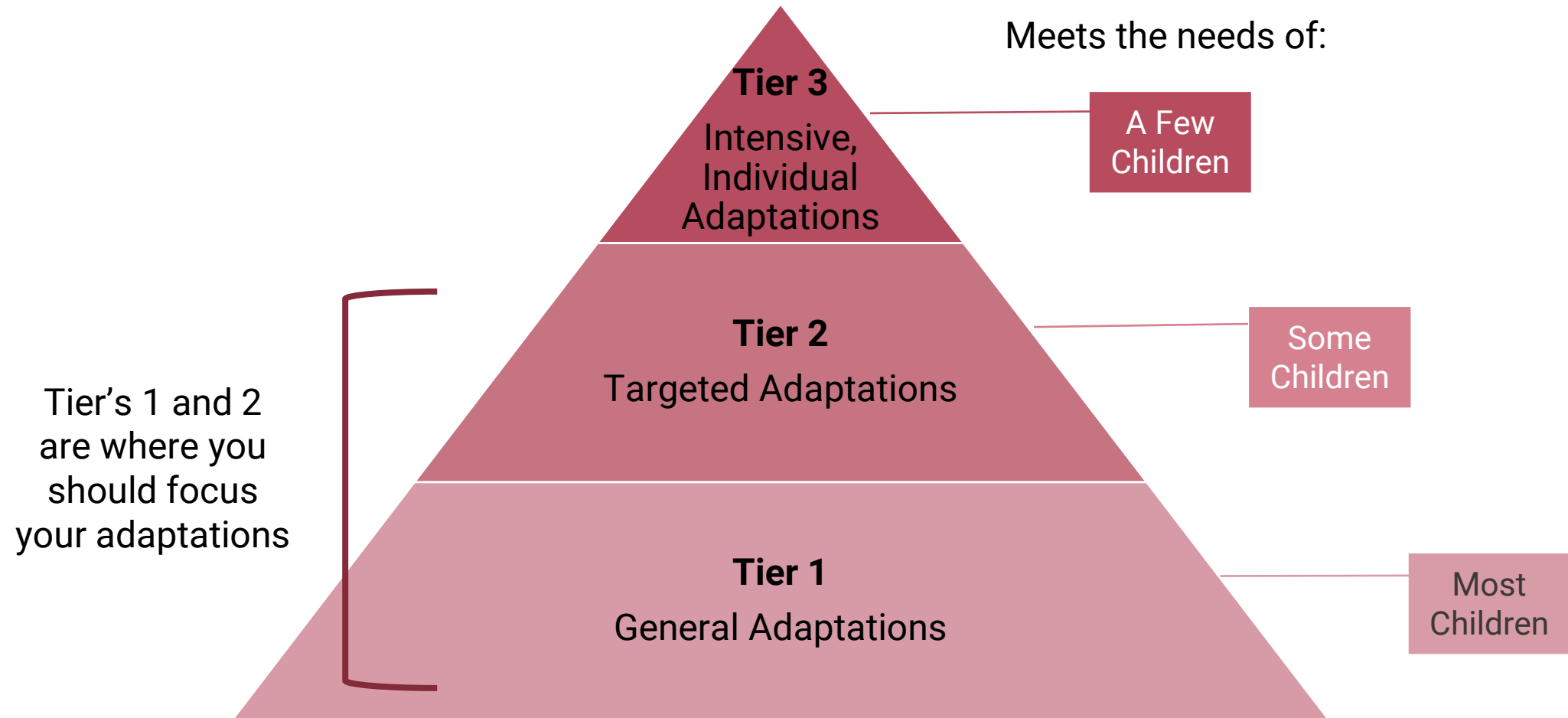
Instead, adaptations promote a child's successful **participation** and **access** to everyday activities and routines.



# Hierarchy of Adaptations



# Hierarchy of Adaptations - Tiers



# Before Making Adaptations



Making adaptations doesn't need to be difficult, but there are things you should know before you start:

1. The child
2. The situation
3. The plan



# Before Making Adaptations - Know the child

## Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)

<https://www.naeyc.org/resources/developmentally-appropriate-practice/>

### Core Concept: Individuality

- “The characteristics and experiences unique to each child, within the context of their family and community, that have implications for **how best to support their development and learning.**”
- Always consider the child’s Interests, preferences, life experiences, culture, personality, home language, motivators, family values and traditions, skills and abilities, knowledge, needs, family structure, etc.

Takeaway: Knowing the child allows you to create the most well-designed and functional adaptations and supports



# Before Making Adaptations

## - Know the situation

Think about an activity or routine (a situation) where an adaptation may be needed and decide what you want to happen in that situation.

- What would you like to see the child doing?
- What are the adults doing?
- How would the environment look?
- How does the child interact or participate in the activity or routine?
  - Do they need assistance? If yes, what adaptation would allow them to participate independently?
  - What kind of adaptations could you make?
    - Hierarchy of adaptations



Takeaway: Knowing the situation allows you to recognize and implement the adaptations that would best meet the child's needs for that activity or routine.







# Before Making Adaptations - Know the plan

You've thought about the child and the situation, now it's time to develop a plan of action.

What adaptations are you going to implement and into what situations?

- To ensure that your hard work will be successful, keep in mind:
  - Why you're making the adaptation? **What is your purpose?**
  - How will this improve the activity or routine for the child?
  - What do you need to do to implement the adaptation?
  - How will you know if it's working? What will the situation look like?

\* It's important to try the adaptation for at least 1 week before making any further adaptations or adjustments.

Takeaway: Success comes from a well thought out, yet flexible plan.



# Thinking About Making Adaptations

There are a variety of ways to think about making adaptations

- You can make adaptations based on...
  - The learning area
  - The situation
  - The type of adaptation



# Ways to adapt... By Learning Area

Think about the different areas you have in your classroom

- Book/Writing Area
- Art Area
- Science Area
- Water/Sand Table
- Math/Manipulatives Area
- Dramatic Play Area
- Block Area
- Music/Movement Area



What adaptations can you make within each learning area to better meet the needs of the children in your program?



# Ways to adapt...By Learning Area

## Water and Sand Learning Area

### Adaptations

#### Adapt Environment

- Raise the table so that wheelchairs can fit under it.
- Make sure all adaptations to tables are stable.
- Use small bins or buckets filled with sand and water if tables cannot be adapted.
- Use a plastic pool to hold sand and water.

#### Adapt Activity or Routine

- Use a variety of textures other than sand and water (e.g., dried beans, rice, shaving cream, gelatin, mud, etc.).
- Introduce materials during instructional time (e.g., group meeting/circle).

#### Adapt Materials

- Make sure the toys in the sand and water table fit a range of abilities.
- Have a range of simple to complex pouring, sifting, and squeezing toys.

#### Adapt Requirements or Instruction

- Limit the number of children allowed to play in this area to two or three at one time.

#### Provide Assistance

- Ask children to repeat what you have said to them or to demonstrate what it is you are asking them to do.
- Guide children to engage in activities with a buddy.

Least  
Intrusive

Most  
Intrusive

## Math and Manipulatives Learning Area

### Adaptations

#### Adapt Environment

- Adjust the height of the tables and chairs so that children's feet touch the floor and the table top sits at the level of their stomach.
- Place the toy in shallow tray to help keep all pieces together and define the play area.

#### Adapt Activity or Routine

- Do the activity on a vertical or slanted surface.

#### Adapt Materials

- Use adaptive scissors that can be used hand over hand or operated by squeezing.
- Help children grasp toys (e.g., build up handles with sponges, hair curlers, or pipe insulation; attach the handle to the hand with the use of a Velcro strap; etc.).
- Use puzzles with knobs or handles—or adapt with knobs from the hardware store.
- Stabilize toys (e.g., use Velcro, double-backed tape, or a C-clamp to hold the toy in place).

#### Adapt Requirements or Instruction

- Make up a new song to the rhythm of a familiar song (e.g., *Row Row Row Your Boaf*) to help remind children to use both hands together.
- Allow children to finish an activity later in the day. Use a "please do not disturb" sign on unfinished activities.
- Have children stand rather than sit to do the activity.

#### Provide Assistance

- Pair children to complete tasks together.
- Have one child stabilize while the other completes the task.

Least  
Intrusive

Most  
Intrusive

Examples taken from:

<https://www.heartland.edu/documents/heip/faculty2/CHLD109/Handouts/CARAsKitMiniPosters.pdf>



# Ways to Adapt .... Situations

ACTIVE LEARNING AND MOVEMENT ACTIVITIES					
Here's the Situation	Try This Adaptation				
	Least Intrusive				Most Intrusive
	Environment	Activity	Materials	Requirements/Instruction	Assistance
<p><b>Children are climbing, jumping, and running around the classroom.</b> [Standards: 13, 17, 30, 35, 40, 42, 49]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide a variety of defined areas in the classroom for movement activities (e.g., a place for one child at a time to jump rope or spin on a sit and spin).</li> <li>Be sure that all free standing equipment or furniture is sturdy so that if children climb on it their risk of injury is minimized.</li> <li>Arrange the classroom furniture and equipment so that there are no runways.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vary types of activities (e.g., quiet, active, sedentary, movement) and where they are offered (e.g., indoors, outdoors).</li> <li>Discuss how our bodies work (e.g., need for rest, need for physical activity, etc.). Discuss when it is appropriate to be active.</li> <li>Use transitions between activities to do movement exercises (e.g., stretching, jumping, etc.).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide materials that support indoor movement activities (e.g., jump rope, etc.).</li> <li>Ensure that outdoor equipment is age-appropriate and that it provides for varied types of movement activities (e.g., bikes, slides, climbers, spinners, swings, etc.).</li> <li>Provide "loose parts" outdoors so children can build obstacle courses.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ask children for suggestions on how to set up exercise areas indoors.</li> <li>Follow instructional guidance on safety and appropriateness of the chosen activities.</li> <li>Use pictures to illustrate proper use of indoor work out areas. Post photos of the children using the space/materials.</li> <li>Model how to ask permission to work out.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recruit volunteers from the school district (e.g., older children who are required to complete community service hours) to play with children during play time.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Children are removing themselves from movement activities (e.g., preferring to sit alone, be carried, or sit in a stroller/cart).</b> [Standards: 13, 17, 30, 35, 40, 42, 49]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Include equipment in the classroom that children can use for pushing and pulling (e.g., strollers, wagons, etc.).</li> <li>Provide furniture and equipment that children can use to maneuver themselves around.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Divide large groups of children into small groups for movement activities to reduce the intensity of the activity.</li> <li>Create alternative roles (e.g., flag holder, traffic director, time recorder, etc.).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide materials (e.g., dress up clothing, construction materials, drawing materials, etc.) outdoors so that children have options other than movement play.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allow children to choose to participate in physical or alternative activities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Be a role model for children by being active outdoors.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Children are having difficulty accessing the large motor play equipment.</b> [Standards: 13, 17, 30, 35, 40]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make sure that the ground cover is easy to move on (e.g., no bumps or divots).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offer alternative activities such as sand and water play, rider toys, swings, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide materials (e.g., dress up clothing, construction materials, drawing materials, etc.) outdoors so that children have options other than movement play.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide physical support for children who are using wheeled or other equipment for movement.</li> </ul>



# Ways to Adapt ..... Situations

Take a minute and think about the following situation.

- Situation:
  - Children are getting bored and pushing each other when transitioning from one activity to the next
- What adaptations could you make?
  - Environment
  - Activity
  - Materials
  - Instruction
  - Assistance



# Ways to Adapt ... By Type of Adaptation

- Adapt the **environment**
  - Alter the physical, social and/or temporal environment to promote participation, engagement and learning
- Adapt **materials**
  - Adapt materials so that the child can participate as independently as possible
- Adapt **equipment**
  - Use special or adapted devices that allow a child to participate or increase their level of participation
- Adapt based on the **child's preferences**
  - Identify and integrate a child's preferences into an activity to encourage participation and take advantage of opportunities



# Adapting the Environment

Intentionally adapting the environment promotes a child's access to and participation in learning opportunities

## Physical Environment

- Design and layout of your program or classroom (e.g., physical space, equipment and materials)

## Social Environment

- Interactions and connections with peers and adults

## Temporal Environment

- Timing, sequence and length of routines and activities



8:30 - 9:00 Arrival and Centers		11:30 - 12:00 Lunch	
9:00 - 9:30 Outside (or gym)		12:30 - 1:30 Rest Time	
9:30 - 10:00 Small Groups (includes snack)		1:30 - 2:00 Quiet Activities	
10:00 - 11:00 Centers		2:00 - 2:15 Afternoon Snack Time	
11:00 - 11:30 Clean Up, Storytime Large Group		2:15 - 2:30 Pick Up/Dismissal	



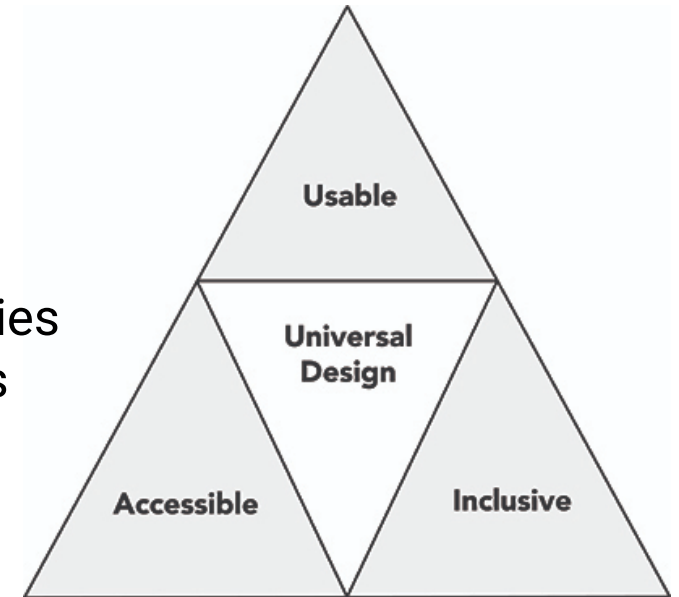


# Adapting the Physical Environment

## Universal Design For Learning in Early Childhood

- Looking at What, How and Why children learn

- Provide environments that are:
  - Equitable/Inclusive – accessible to children with widely diverse abilities
  - Flexible/Usable – accommodates individual preferences and abilities
  - Engaging – children are interested and want to attend
- Key ideas:
  - Provide multiple opportunities to find out what children know
  - Provide multiple opportunities and ways for a child to interact with the environment
  - Eliminate barriers to a child's ability to fully participate
  - Create an environment that promotes differences in physical and cognitive access



# Adapting the Physical Environment

- Adapt equipment
  - Tools for the sand table
  - Chairs with non-slip pad on seat
  - A box on the floor so the child's feet can firmly reach the floor
  - Sensory input when/where necessary (e.g., squish ball, tactile mat, vibrating toy)
  - Adapted scissors
  - Assistive technology
- Adapt space
  - Leave ample room for children to maneuver around and explore
  - Use carpet squares to show where a child's personal space is
  - Make sure visuals are placed at the child's eye level
- Adapt materials (more to come on this)



# Adapting the Social Environment

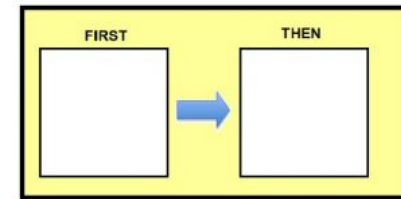
- Intentionally embed opportunities in the daily routine for peer interaction
- Use and introduce emotional literacy skills into routines and activities
  - Sing songs, play games, provide puppets, etc.
  - Use pictures of classroom friends demonstrating the different emotions
- Teach specific friendship skills using peer models
  - E.g., sharing, using words, empathy, etc.
- Facilitate social interactions
  - Match a child with peers who share the same interest's or preferences



# Adapting the Temporal Environment

Temporal = timing, sequence and length of routines and activities

- Use Visuals
  - E.g., daily schedules, activity specific expectations, steps in a routine, first/then board, visual reminders/timers
- Break activities down into smaller task
  - Task analysis, scaffolding, etc.
- Be flexible!
  - Allow for breaks if necessary
  - Allow added time for transitions or to complete a specific activity
  - Vary the length of participation
  - Adjust the schedule when needed



# Ways to Adapt ..... Toys and Materials

Types of adaptations:

- Confining
- Stabilizing or securing
- Extending or enlarging
- Enhancing or adding
- Simplifying or reducing



For any adaptation, it's important to remember your purpose for making the change.



# Confining

Confining has less to do with adapting the toy as it does with adapting the area around the toy

- If a toy moves out of reach for a child with a physical disability or a visual impairment, that toy becomes unusable, and the child becomes frustrated
- Frustration can lead to a child displaying challenging behaviors or simply not wanting to play with a particular toy (decreases opportunities to learn)

Possible items that can be used to confine a toy:

- Hula hoop placed around the toy or around the child and the toy
- A box lid
- Toddler pool
- A tray with a raised edge or lip



# Stabilizing

Stabilizing means making an adaptation to keep a toy in place or to stop it from tipping over too easily

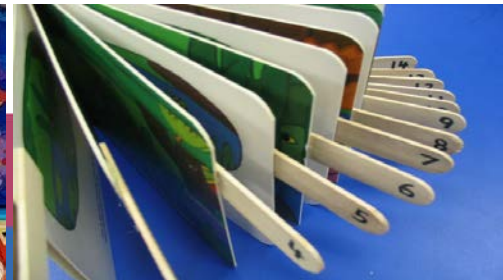
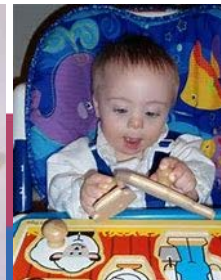
- For a child with low muscle tone or limited muscle control, a toy that moves or falls over too easily can create frustration and lead to a lack of interest
- If a child chooses not to play with certain toys, they miss out on key opportunities to learn and master important developmental skills
- Possible adaptations or items to stabilize a toy:
  - Velcro, suction cups and/or small clamps or clips
  - Magnetic strip attached to a toy and a cookie sheet used as a base
  - Non-slip shelf lining
  - Toys with wide bases
  - Placing the toy in putty or playdoh



# Extending or Enlarging

Extending or enlarging refers to adding something to a toy so that it is easier for a child to manipulate or grasp

- For children who have difficulty performing fine motor tasks, such as using a pincer grasp or using controlled movements, extending or enlarging pieces or parts of a toy or item can make them easier to grasp, push or turn
- Possible adaptations or items to extend or enlarge a toy:
  - Adding knobs or dowels to items such as puzzle pieces
  - Building up items, such as paint brushes, crayons, or markers, with foam hair rollers, pencil grippers, tape, putty, a sponge, etc.
  - Adding spacers, such as foam pieces, popsicle sticks, etc., to book pages so they are easier to turn
  - Extending the length of an item, such as a paintbrush, by attaching a ruler or dowel to the handle so it is easier to hold





# Enhancing

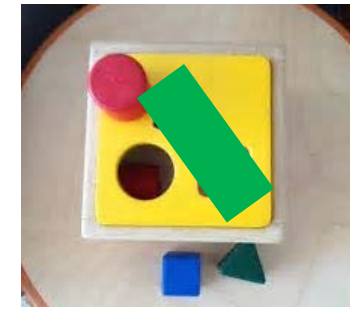


Enhancing means adding something, such as color or texture, to a toy so that it is easier to see or feel or is more appealing to a child

- For children who need additional sensory input in order to stay focused and on task, enhancing items or toys can make a big difference
- Children with visual impairments also benefit from toys or items that are enhanced to show a greater contrast between items (e.g., black on white)
- Possible adaptations or items to enhance a toy:
  - Adding swatches of sandpaper, or other textures, to handles, knobs, sides of blocks, tops of cars or trucks, etc.
  - Adding color to the water table, adding paint to shaving cream or coloring rocks or other items you use in the sensory table
  - Add contrasting colors to the specific parts of a toy that you want the child to engage with or focus on



# Simplifying



Simplifying usually refers to **reducing** the steps, **removing** the number of pieces necessary to complete a task, or **replacing** pieces for an easier fit

- When a toy or activity requires a child to complete certain steps for the toy to work, such as putting a certain number of pieces into a puzzle or matching items by color or shape, the sheer number of pieces or steps required might be overwhelming or difficult for some children
- Possible adaptations to simplify a toy:
  - Reduce the number of pieces available to a child
    - For example, cover up a portion of a puzzle and provide the child with just those pieces that are showing. As the child becomes more successful adjust the expectations for the task by providing additional options.
  - Remove a part of a toy that makes a task too difficult for the child to complete
    - For example, remove stoppers or barriers that make an item frustrating for the child (see middle picture above). If items are difficult for a child to place into an opening or space, you can replace the item with something smaller, such as a smaller ball, so that it fits more easily or, if possible, make the opening larger.

Always keep in mind the goal you have for the child and match the adaptation accordingly.



# Key Points to Remember

Whenever you make an adaptation for a child:

- Keep in mind **WHY** you are making the adaptation
  - What is the goal for the child?
    - To interact with friends and learn social skills?
    - To practice a skill?
    - To work on persistence or remaining on task?
- Remember that you are trying to increase **accessibility** and **functionality** for the child.
- You are trying to decrease those things that make a task too difficult or that cause the child to become frustrated.
- The goal is to improve participation and increase opportunities for the child to practice important developmental skills.

Adaptations are meant support learning, not interfere with it.

