

The Benefits of a Home-Like Environment

Why Home-Like Environments Are Important

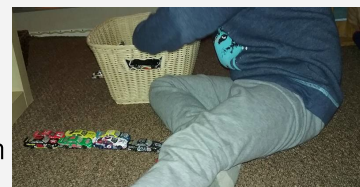
As more young children spend considerable amounts of their day away from their families and away from familiar family settings, it is important to examine the environments where they are spending this time. Children as young as 6 weeks old are spending upwards of eight to ten hours in settings that include center-based and home-based care. Many parents, in fact, are choosing home-based family options in order to provide their children with a more familiar and home-like setting. This is especially true for the parents of infants and toddlers. As it turns out this choice has been backed up by recent research that is encouraging even center-based programs to take on a more home-like feel. A home-like environment helps children feel safe and comfortable. It also encourages positive, nurturing, and stress free interactions and relationships.

Many Right Ways

At Town Square we understand that home-based settings may be organized in many different ways. Some providers may have designated separate spaces in their homes for the children in their care. These spaces may be an extra bedroom, a finished basement, or even a great room. This allows for more separation between the provider's personal home and business spaces. Providers who do not have these extra spaces in their home will more likely be integrating their child care program throughout their home in more combined ways. We do not suggest that one organizational strategy is better than another. In fact, they both have their benefits and challenges. However, no matter how a provider organizes their environment they should always strive to make it feel more home-like.

Research tells us that learning spaces should:

- **Be less cluttered:** Clutter is distracting and can actually create a stressful environment. The rule everything has a place and everything in its place is a good rule for any care setting.
- **Limit visual distractions:** When children are bombarded with visual images, such as too many things or too much color on the walls, they are less able to focus.
- **Be well organized:** Poorly organized spaces can cause distraction and stress and make it difficult for children to put things away.
- **Encourage self-regulation:** Environments can encourage children to self-regulate through organization and predictability so that children can become more self-reliant.
- **Use natural lighting:** Harsh lighting can cause distraction, stress, and even cause headaches.



An unexpected benefit of a home-like space



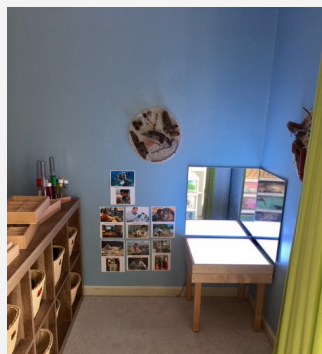
In creating a space that is more homelike you may discover it actually cost you less.

Forgo those expensive educational catalogs and search for home-like storage solutions at your local thrift store or use pieces you already have.

Creating a home-like space:

De-clutter and Remove Distractions

Many distractions can be addressed by simply creating environments that keep the home in mind. When deciding what to put on the walls, consider choosing items that are child-centered (such as a child's artwork), items that are meaningful to the children, and only put up what is necessary. Rather than using large brightly colored commercial posters, try having the children create an alphabet using natural materials. This has a much more natural and calming feel and is more meaningful. Also choose wall colors that are calming and don't create a stressful environment. For example, a room with yellow paint that gets bright sun all day can create a stressful glare. If you want color in your space try using one colored accent wall. This brings color into the space without being overwhelming.



Organize and Encourage Self-Regulation

Home-like spaces are also well organized and encourage children to regulate their behavior and interactions in the space. Home-like spaces use more things like baskets, drawers, or other containers to organize learning materials in a way that does not feel overwhelming and fits into the home. For example, using similar kinds of baskets for storage give the space more visual appeal and that cohesive homey feel. Rather than random mismatched storage containers that add to the disorganized and overwhelming feel. This also encourages children to regulate their use of the space by allowing them easy access to materials and the ability to put things away rather than always having to ask for help.

Lighting and Air Quality

Perhaps two of the most important aspects of the home-like environment are the lighting and air quality. Choose softer ways to light a space. Natural light is best, but if the space doesn't allow for much natural light, choose floor lamps and warmer light bulbs. These lights don't cast as much glare and can be moved around where needed. Take children outside every day to get fresh air and control allergens by using rugs instead of carpet and cleaning often.

Furnishings

Choose furnishings that are both child and adult sized. Again, your space should feel like a home, so forgo the expensive cubbies and other furnishings found in catalogs and look for more home friendly solutions. An old wardrobe can be repurposed into cubbies or an old TV armoire can be turned into an art station that closes away at the end of the day. Choosing wood furniture is another easy way to make a space feel homey. Avoid a lot of plastic furniture, it won't hold up as well and will make your space feel less homey.



Sharing Your Practice with Parents

Many providers may feel that parents are more comfortable with an environment that looks and feels like a child care center. However, when parents understand the benefits behind home-like spaces they will likely become your biggest supporters. All parents want the best for their children, so sharing the research and your reasons for creating a home-like space will help them understand the benefits.

Resources:

Barrett, P., Zhang, Y., Moffat, J., & Kobbacy, K. (2013). A holistic, multilevel analysis identifying the impact of classroom design on pupils' learning. *Building and Environment*, 59, 678-689.

OWP/P Architects, VS Furniture, & Bruce Mau Design. (2010). *The third teacher: 79 ways you can use design to transform teaching and learning*. New York, NY. Abrams