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Establishing a Safe Children's Play Area





Workshop Objectives

- Understand how *play* supports and meets the unique needs of children
- Be confident in establishing a safe play area for children
- Understand the types of activities needed to support a child's development
- Understand best practices in managing a safe play area
- Ensure your facility is an enabling environment for children's safe play



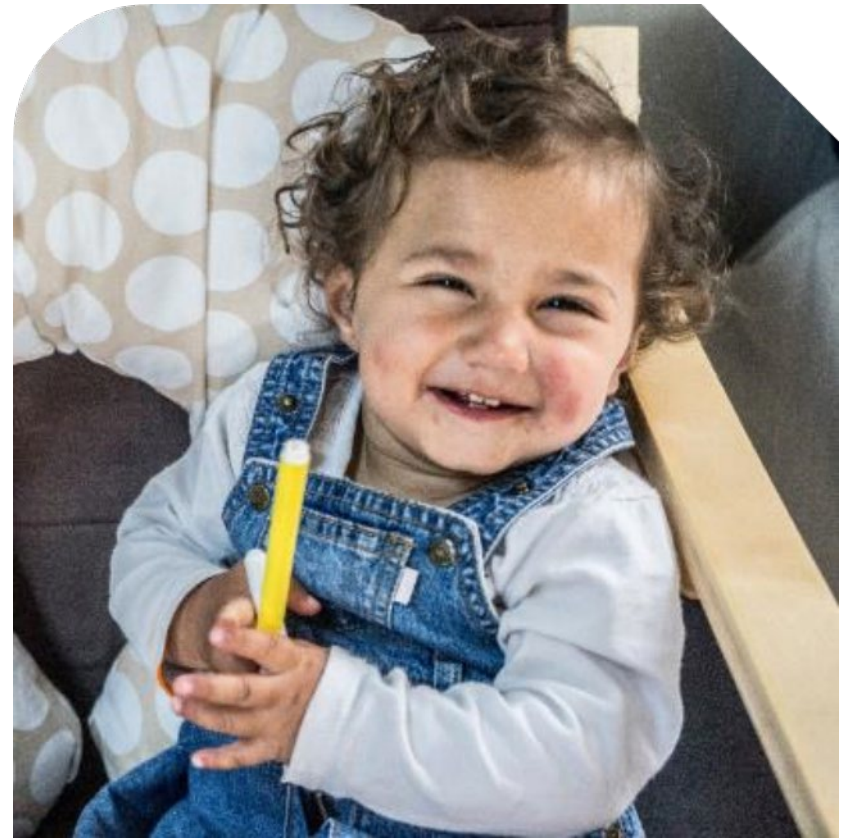
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Getting To Know You

Think about a childhood memory that brought you joy.

Think of one word to describe that feeling.

Introduce yourself to the group in the chat and share your word.





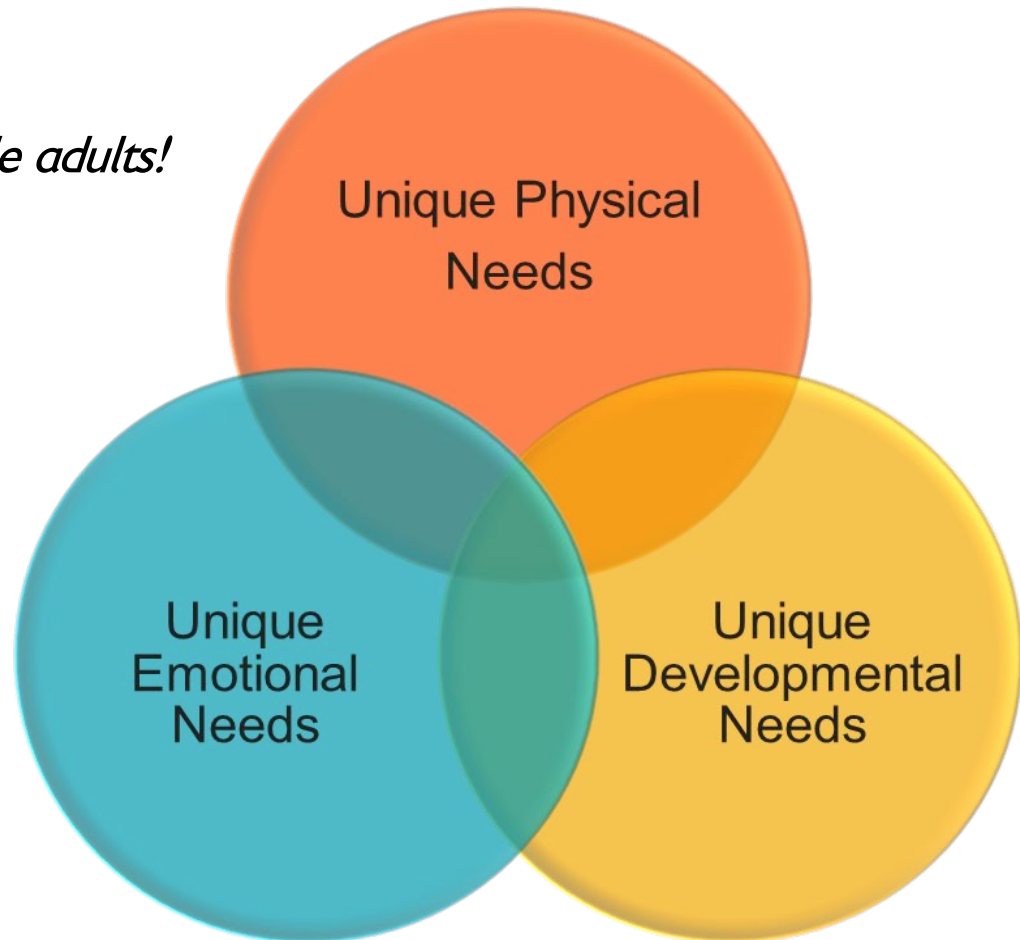
Needs of Children



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Protecting the Most Vulnerable

Children are not just little adults!





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Adverse Childhood Experience (ACEs)

ABUSE



Physical



Emotional



Sexual

NEGLECT



Physical



Emotional

HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION



Mental Illness



Incarcerated Relative



Mother treated violently



Substance Abuse



Divorce



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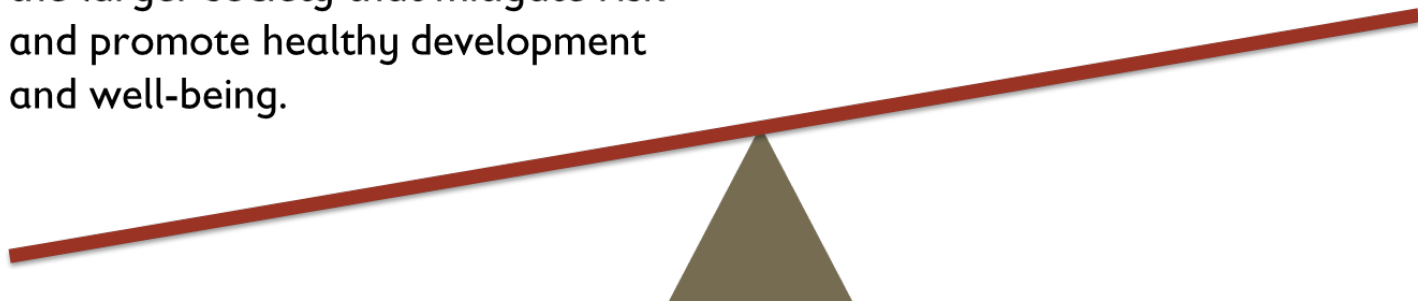
Risk and Protective Factors

Risk Factors

Stressful conditions, events or circumstances that increase a child's chances for poor outcomes

Protective Factors

Conditions or attributes of individuals, families, communities or the larger society that mitigate risk and promote healthy development and well-being.





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Interpreting children's reactions can be challenging

Children may:

- Regress from developmental milestones
- Have difficulty expressing themselves
- Exhibit extremes- hyperactivity or withdrawal
- Misunderstand their own feelings
- Take time to exhibit any outward signs or behaviors





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Misinterpreting Reactions

Stress-induced behavior: When a child is negatively impacted by stress, has limited capacity to make sound decisions and acts largely due to physiological reasons.



Misbehavior: When a child is not impacted by stress, has the capacity to make sound decisions and acts largely due to forethought and intentional choice.





Helping Children Cope



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What a Child Needs

- Calm presence and consistent contact with children, families and adults who are there to help
- Assurance of safety and security
- Explanation of what happened in ways they can understand
- Encouragement and acceptance to act out and play out their feelings
- ❖ **Value of play:** Research shows play is the means for a child to learn, explore and experiment. Play is therapeutic and is a child's work.





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Establishment of Safety and Control

- Reassure children that there are caring adults working to keep them safe.
- Create cozy, safe spots where children can sit quietly or talk with an adult.
- Increase children's sense of control by letting them make choices that affect their day and help in planning activities.





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Set Up Routines With Children's Input

- Maintain routines and schedules or establish new ones with children's input
- Create opportunities for children to play together
- Plan activities, rituals and celebrations for children to look forward to-especially around holidays.





Normalize and Validate

- Validate their feelings and experiences
- Let children know that it is normal to feel angry, or fearful or upset in this situation.
- Be sensitive to changes in children's emotions or behaviors
- Children may be giddy (inappropriately laughing), or aggressive to avoid difficult emotions.
- Remind children it's okay to laugh and have fun.



Introduction to Children's Play Spaces

Set Up Activities

The Purpose of Children's Play Spaces

The purpose of a Children's Play Space is to provide children with a **protected environment** in which they can **participate in organized activities** to **PLAY, SOCIALIZE, LEARN,** and **EXPRESS THEMSELVES** as they rebuild their lives.

Safe Children's Play Area - 2020



Objectives of the Play Space:

The two most common objectives of Children's Play Spaces are:

1. To offer children opportunities to develop, learn, play, and build/strengthen resiliency after an emergency or crisis.
2. To identify and find ways to respond to particular threats to all children and /or specific groups of children, such as those with particular vulnerabilities, after the emergency/crisis, or during a protracted emergency.



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Questions

What are some of the safety considerations when setting up a play space in a shelter?

How would you mitigate the risks of those safety considerations?





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How Can A Children's Play Space Support Children's Resilience?

Sense of routine:

- Children re-establish routines or build new ones; provide structure

Communication:

- Children need to be able to have somewhere to talk, express opinions, ideas, hopes for the future, natural fears

Sense of optimism:

- Children are in an environment that is focused on the positive and the future

Provide opportunities to play:

- Children are able to play on their own and with their peers in creative, positive ways

Transforming a Space



Be creative in making the space inviting for children!

What else could you use to make the place more inviting?

Space Set-Up



Sample Play Space Layout

Quiet Play:

Puzzles

Games

Books

Play dough

Structured Activities:

Arts and Crafts, Reading Circles,
Workbooks, Journals, Life Skills

Ages 4-7

Ages 8-12

Ages 13-
17

Active Play Area

Team Building Games

Sports

Jump ropes

Balls

Dramatic Play Area

Cars and Trucks

Blocks

Stuffed Animals

Action Figures

Post rules and policies
agreed upon and developed
with children.

Establish and Post Policies

- Post policies where children and parents can see them
 - Clearly communicate policies to guardians
 - Work with families, staff and volunteers to ensure policies are translated and understood
- ❑ **Parents/Guardians must remain in or within eyesight when their child is in the space**
 - ❑ **Children's Play Spaces do not administer medicines, change diapers and/or provide snacks or meals**
 - ❑ **The Children's Play Space is open from ___ to ___. Please pick up your child prior to closing**

Other Considerations for Space and Materials

- Adhere to site policy regarding donated items, but be sure to screen any items that may be donated or purchased.
- Clean materials daily or as needed

A solution of 1/4 cup of bleach + 1 gallon of cool water works well





Activities

Children's Play Spaces Materials

Five types of play:

- Physical
- Imaginative
- Communicative
- Creative
- Manipulative



Physical

Examples: football, volleyball, outdoor team games, handball, local traditional children's games

Benefits:

- Develops self-confidence
- Builds relationships and teamwork skills – interaction with peers, rules, and cooperation
- Develops motor skills, muscles, coordination



Points to consider

- Designate specific safe areas for sports and games
- Create a rotation system for sports equipment
- Form teams
- Hold tournaments
- Schedule different times for boys and girls if needed

Imaginative

Examples: Dance, theatre/drama, music, singing, role play acting performances (dance, drama, singing)

Benefits:

- Develop creative and social skills, coping skills, self-esteem
- Creates fun, relaxes, and promotes team active participation



Communicative

Examples: Story telling – books, reading, story time, conversation time, discussion groups

Benefits

- Helps children express feeling in words without personalizing
- Appreciates local culture and tradition
- Develops imagination
- Allows children to discuss issues that are important to them



Points to consider

- Promote storytelling time for children to make up stories
- Start a story with one sentence and ask the children (add on) to the story

Manipulative

Examples: Puzzles, building blocks, and board games.

Benefits:

- Improves problem-solving skills
- Builds self-esteem and cooperation
- Improves concentration and focus

Points to consider:

- Children can work alone or in groups
- Set aside a quiet area



Creative Play

Examples: Painting, drawing, clay, collages, making dolls, puppets, and animals, pasting pictures etc.

Benefits:

- Helps children to express their feelings and ideas
- Externalizes emotions, promotes understanding, self-esteem, and empathy
- Promotes experimentation

Points to consider:

- Encourage children to decorate an area
- Organize displays and invite caregivers to see them



Exercise: Setting Up a Children's Play Space

Based on what you currently know, work together to design a Safe Play Space with your group.

Your mission is to set up an inviting Safe Children's Play Space in the best way you know possible.





Program Management Best Practices

Recommended Caregiver to Child Ratios

There should always be at least two trained, background checked, adults over the age of 18 at all times in Children's Play Space!

| Age of Child | Number of Children-to-Caregiver Team Members |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Toilet-trained through five year olds | 5 children to 2 Caregivers |
| 5 through 9 year olds | 20 children to 2 Caregivers |
| 10 through 12 year olds | 25 Children to 2 Caregivers |
| 13 through 18 year olds | Encouraged to participate and support younger children |

Child Bathroom Procedures

- Always have two adults accompany children, or groups of children to the bathroom.
- Never go one on one with a child into a bathroom.
- If you need to accompany children of a different gender to the bathroom, stand at the door, make sure the bathroom is vacated and then stand in the doorway and talk with the child while they use restroom. If others come to use the restroom, politely ask them to wait until the child/children are finished.
- Make sure children wash hands and practice good hygiene!

Create and Post a Daily Schedule

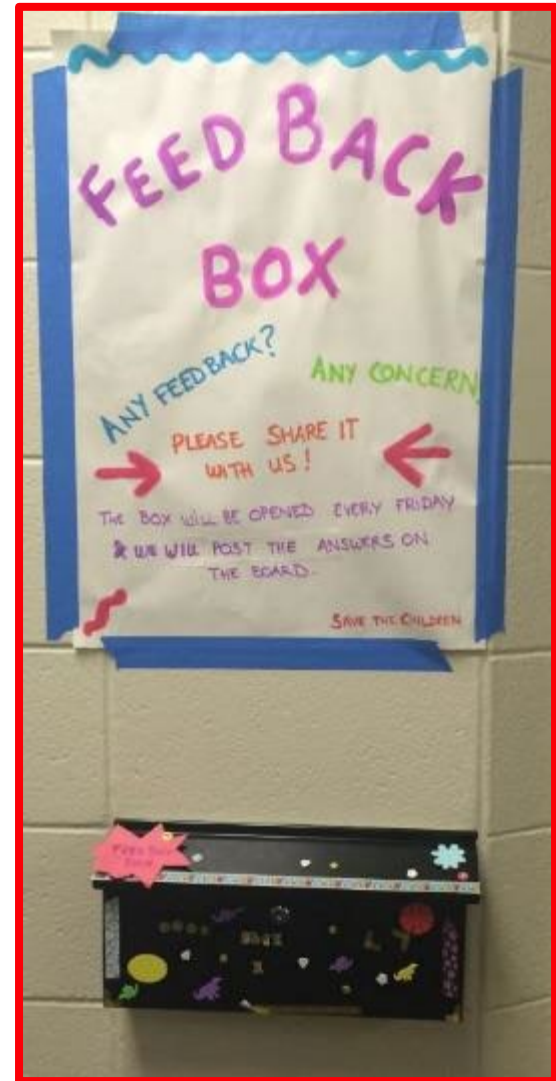
| Time | Pre-School | School-Age | Youth |
|---------------|--|--|--|
| 9:00 – 9:15 | Registration/Meet & Greet | Registration/Meet & Greet | Registration/Meet & Greet |
| 9:15 – 10:30 | Team Building Games | Team Building/Life Skills Games | Service Learning |
| 10:30- 10:45 | Group stretch, physical activity break | Group stretch, physical activity break | Group stretch, physical activity break |
| 10:45 – 12:00 | Free Play: puzzles, games, reading | Free Play: puzzles, games, reading | Free Play: puzzles, games, reading, Conflict Resolution Activity |
| 12:00- 1:30 | *LUNCH BREAK* | *LUNCH BREAK* | *LUNCH BREAK* |
| 1:30- 2:30 | Arts & Crafts | Arts & Crafts | Arts & Crafts |
| 2:30 – 4:00 | Outside Games | Outside Games | Outside Games/Sports |
| 4:00 | Parent/Guardian pick up | Parent/Guardian pick up | Parent/Guardian pick up |

SAMPLE ONLY
Be creative and let children help develop their schedules!

Encourage Child Participation

Children can help:

- Establish guidelines for interaction while in the space
- Suggest activities for the daily schedule
- Identify responsible youth to lead activities for younger children
- Set up feedback box for children, parents and shelter staff



Include Children of All Abilities

- Encourage children of all abilities to join in the fun and activities!
- Least Restrictive Environment - Ensure children with ongoing and new functional needs are able and encouraged to participate
- Trained Personnel - If a child needs a one-on-one caregiver daily, the caregiver must accompany the child
- Outreach to those that are not able to participate
- Link with Other Sectors: utilize support mechanisms with the community or other responders



Strategies for Handling Difficult Situations

Children may have trouble coping with what has happened, with the environment or may just be having a bad day

- Redirection
- Time out
- Call caregiver or child's counselor over
- Gently refer caregiver to other resources that may be available



Celebrate Special Occasions!

Observe and celebrate holidays and birthdays!



Celebrating a boy's 10th birthday at the CFS in McAllen, Texas

- Creates sense of comfort and normalcy
- Reminds children that some days are still special and fun, and that not everything they know has gone away
- Culturally important
- Use what you have at hand and incorporate the shelter staff if possible



Child Safeguarding

Why is Child Safeguarding Important?

1. To ensure that children are safe with all staff, partners, representatives & guests;
2. To ensure that children are safe within your programs;
3. To ensure that all processes and operations are safe for the children you serve; and
4. To mitigate the possible or potential risk of a power imbalance between adult and child and guests.



Processes, Procedures & Protocols

Making **your organization** *Safe* for Children

1. Safe Recruitment - Background Record Check for all employees, representatives and visitors;
2. Social media and photography policies
3. Establishing written processes, procedures and protocols designed to keep children safe;
4. Clearly communicating processes, procedures and protocols with staff and representatives;
5. Ensuring that the physical space is safe;
6. Correcting any hazards in the physical environment;
7. Anticipating environmental or behavioral issues that could harm children; and
8. Protecting children's data

What is a Reportable Incident?

- If you suspect that a child is at risk of abuse;
- If you suspect that a child has been abused;
- If you know that a child is at risk of abuse; *and/or*
- A child has been harmed or injured.



How to Report

IMMINENT RISK – 911

SOCIAL SERVICES – 211

CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT REPORTING

- National Childhelp Child Abuse Hotline **1.800.4.A.CHILD**
(1.800.422.4453) **adult/child call/text 24/7**

CHILDHELP NATIONAL CHILD ABUSE HOTLINE

Call or text **1.800.4.A.CHILD** (1.800.422.4453)

Ultimate Goal of our Programs:

The safety and well-being of children in our care!



THANK YOU



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