HOW TO SETUP YOUR

HOME

TO RAISE INDEPENDENT CHILDREN

Introduction

Preparing your home environment to facilitate and support your child's natural urge to be independent, is a great way to support your child develop independence, concentration, sense of order and self-led learning.

A good prepared environment will be orderly, accessible to your child, and promote independence. The materials are curated to your child's developmental needs and interests.

Typically, the process begins by taking stock of your home, how your child uses and accesses things for daily living and then making simple modifications to increase age appropriate independence. When thinking of organizing a space consider following the simple mantra that "everything has a place, and everything is kept in its place." By committing to picking a consistent place for everything it will be easier for your child to help you return something to its predictable spot.

Your Bedroom

- Keep a collection of books in a basket.
- Provide a small reading nook for your child with a pillow or blanket.
- This gives them a small space, in your space, to feel comfortable and invited.

Living Room

- Family board games.
- Provide manipulative toys and art materials on a low shelf or bookcase.
- A child size workplace or a chair.
- Your family's main collection of books can be stored in the living room, and the rest dispersed around the house in thematic baskets.

Kitchen

Below is an example of creating a special space for children in the kitchen. it is divided into a few areas. First, there is the counter space. This is where all food prep is done, and other kitchen work happens. There is enough space to spread out, while keeping their feet firm and flat on the ground.

Under the counter space are two areas. One is the children's tools. These are all the things they use to cook/bake/whatever in the kitchen. These are all child sized and meant exclusively for them.

Next is our self-serve snack area. This area keeps a variety of snacks that are available to the kids when they need them. The exact snacks available vary week-to-week. But, the idea is for them to have independent access to some food. Some ideas are nuts, fruit/veggie, nut butter etc.

Then, there is the children's dishes area. This area holds all of the cups, plates and bowls that the kids regularly use to eat their meals and snacks. The small basket holds their forks, spoons, and knives. This way they can get whatever they need to make a meal or snack all in one place.

And, that's it! They do have access to our refrigerator for some foods that need to be kept cool and to our toaster/oven when necessary as well. If you are interested in your own kitchen here are some tips to keep in mind:

- Allow for independence, keep things low.
- Safety first! Make sure your kids are ready for the tools that are available.
- Have a step stool available for your child that allows her to reach the kitchen sink, see on top of the counters etc. you don't have to create a low work space if it's not possible, the stool will do.
- Hang hooks for kitchen clean up tools such as washcloth, a broom and a dustpan.
- Provide child sized kitchen tools and show your child how to use them safely.
- Use child sized plates, glasses and utensils. Plates should be breakable so that children learn how to handle them with care.







Bathroom

Hooks also help to make towels lower. replace the faucet in the bathroom to one that the children can more easily reach from the stool. This way, they can independently wash hands, brush teeth and get water for cleaning.

a tray is used in the cabinet to hold all the kids' bathroom stuff. Their brushes, lotion, and hair spray {a bottle of water.}

A low mirror on the wall.

the toothpaste is not stored here for safety (the child would surely eat the whole tube) so it's placed high in the bathroom out of his reach. You can get it down twice a day when its time to actually brush their teeth.

A Functional Entryway

Hallway/Closet:

• Hang low hooks for your child's jacket and bag. You can use S-hooks to make it easy for them to hang their bags.

• Check the weather with your child the night before.

Collaborate on any needed snow or rain gear that needs to be prepared for the next day.

• When buying clothing, make sure that your child will be able to open and close shoes and jackets independently. The simpler, the better!

• Remember, one warm coat is easier for your child to manipulate than many layers.

- Mittens are easier for your child to put on than gloves.
 - Dedicate one basket for each child to keep their smaller outerwear such as gloves, hats, scarves, and masks.
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 - Simple chair provides a place for the kids to sit and put on shoes.

















Play Space

- Organizing your play space is an important part of making the room engaging and available to your child.
- You need A Place for Everything and Everything in its Place.
- materials are arranged on open shelving. This is so a child can see all the choices available and easily remove them. As long as a child is able to access the material {and not need to dig in a toy box} then you're good.
- Selecting a few toys and rotating between them is key to making sure that your space is organized, promotes a sense of order, and is not overwhelming.
- Use baskets, trays and containers to organize materials.
- When a work is placed on the shelf, it should be complete -- so children do not have to look around for pieces. It should also be neatly organized with a clear order.
- Choose toys that interest your child Now. keep the rest in storage.
- make sure there is room for the kids to move and engage in play! Keep space clear of clutter. If there isn't the space to actually use the toy, place the toy in a different area.

Art Area

- Prepare trays with art items that are ready to use for younger children.
- For older children make space for storing art supplies such as small markers, yarn, wikki stix, paint brushes, washi tape and binder rings.
- Have a table for collaborative projects or dining table could be used too.
- Use open and low shelves to store the supplies in an attractive manner.
- Use hooks to hang items like a smock for painting, a small broom, a swiffer, and a small mop.
- You can rotate many of the supplies as interests come and go.





Outdoor Space

- Children should be allowed to move freely between the indoor and outdoor prepared environments as they please.
- Make the outdoor area a space where the kids can work and play.
- A large vegetable garden, herb gardens, lots of bird feeders and baths, and several smaller flower gardens. Every space is open for the children just like the inside of our house.
- Shelf: keep a small all-weather outdoor shelf that organizes the kids' materials for outdoor work. This is a mix of practical life tools and art including (top to bottom):
- Vases for flower arranging
- Watering can
- Gardening tools
- Children's gardening gloves
- Extra pots for the kids to plant found seeds
- Containers with bird seed for refilling feeders
- Finger paint
- Air dry clay
- Outdoor play equipment such as balls, bats, badminton rackets, helmets and bicycles
- Growing a variety of food for us to eat including corn, tomatoes, okra, green beans, snap peas and more. The kids are actively involved in helping to plant, weed, water, and harvest each of our vegetables all summer long.

Children's Bedroom

Organize seasonally appropriate clothing by type, on shelves or in drawers, that are at a low enough level to be accessible to your child.

- Less is more! Keep options (clothing, toys, hats, pillows etc.) to a minimum. By having only a few options available, your child will feel successful when making choices throughout the day.
- Create a chart that outlines the steps your child can do to get ready in the morning. This will establish a clear routine for your child and help them to feel prepared.
- Suggested bedroom toys and activities: different types of items out on a low shelf, a collection of books, a map on the wall. o A calendar to keep track of days and activities – cross them off as they are completed! o A reading corner that is inviting; your child will want to read and relax in this space.
- Small self-care area. This includes the laundry basket, a mirror, and small shelf with hair care products.
- The dressing chair is a nice spot to sit and get dressed when needed.



Steps to Create Your Prepared Environment

Here are the 5 steps that I take when creating a prepared environment in my home!

Observation

- The first step is always observation. We need to make changes to ourselves, our children's materials, and to our spaces based on what we are actually seeing. This requires us to put aside all our other work and just really focus on the space we have created. We want to think about how our children are able to move about the space, what challenges we are seeing, what burdens are created for them and for us.
- This is not a time to make changes. Just watch, listen, and observe.
- Try not to interfere with your child. Don't ask questions, offer help (unless asked), or jump into the play.
- Watch without judgment.
- Take notes
- Watch your child's movements, both big and small. Every movement has purpose and can offer hints into what your child needs in the space.

Explore

- Young children do not experience a space in the same way that an adult would. Getting on to our child's level and trying to carry out a task can give us insight into how a space looks and feels. We may notice things that we didn't before and get valuable insights about changes that are needed in the room.
- Lay on the floor, kneel or crouch to see the room as your child does
- Notice what you see what's interesting, what's distracting?
- Look for safety concerns
- Try to carry out a task that might be common in that space can you do it without getting to adult size?
- Is there anything you can't access that you thought you could?

Evaluate

- Everyone starts with something. Take stock of the things you have in your prepared spaces. We need to know what is working, and what is falling short before we make sweeping changes. We can use our observations to inform how we see each of the things that are in our space. This is your time to create a detailed plan.
- Consider how the room works as a whole.
- Make a list of the things currently in your child's space. Include activities, art, toys, and other materials.
- Note which the things are accessible, fit your child's current needs and are used. Plan to keep these in your space.
- Note which things are not accessible or difficult for your child. Do they need a new arrangement or are they not meeting your child's needs? Consider what changes can be made to make the space work better.
- Note which materials, if any, go unused are are no longer appropriate. Plan to remove these.

Organize

- Spending a little bit of time organizing your materials before making a change can help to make the process a lot smoother. Gather the things you think you'll need. Make sure you have little details like hooks, baskets, and trays. Start to take steps to implement the plan you created in the last step.
- Declutter the space you are preparing. Put away or organize adult materials that will stay in the space.
- Make the space safe. Cover cords, outlets and other hazards that will make it difficult for your child to act freely in the space.
- Gather the things you want to keep in or add to the space. You can move them into the center of the room, or into a staging area.
- Place materials into baskets or trays. Organize the trays/baskets so that it's clear how to use the material
- Put away things that won't be in the space.

Make a Change

- Finally, it's time to make a change in your space! Remember to make sure these changes are rooted in the things you learned in your observation and evaluation of the space. And, remember, that no change has to be permanent. Observation should be a continuous practice and should inform how you see your spaces going forward.
- Use existing features to your advantage. How are these things accessible for your child?
- Start with any big furniture. Move shelves, tables, cabinets, or other furniture that you plan to keep in the space into their places.
- Place any materials that help with accessibility stools, small hooks, light switch extenders, for example. Make sure these things have a place in the space.
- Add in materials that you have organized and are keeping in the space
- Remember the details small things like plants, art work at the child's level or even a light at their level can make the space feel more beautiful and inviting for a child.
- The process can feel overwhelming but if you take it step by step, it doesn't have to be.

Steps to Create Your Prepared Environment

Here are the 5 steps that I take when creating a prepared environment in my home!



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Screen Free Kids?

What do we do to fill hours in the day?

The simple answer is play! They have the freedom to play. The freedom to explore their interests. To develop and nurture their sibling relationship. To simply be. What that really looks like changes from day to day. But there are some common factors to our screen free day including:

• Opportunities for Independence

Allowing opportunities for independence are key to our everyday existence. Now, this independence can look different ways depending on the child and on the day. Some examples of this can include:

- Preparing their own snack
- Preparing or cooking dinner
- Self care showering, doing their hair, painting nails, clipping fingernails, etc.
- Practical participation in our home helping with laundry, helping with cleaning, raking leaves/shoveling snow/sweeping (basically any chores we have to complete around our house that they feel called to help with)
- Baking
- Visiting an elderly neighbor
- Opportunities to Read

Creating a culture of readers is important to me and my husband. I want children who feel confident in their ability to read and find knowledge freely. This means creating a culture of reading in our home from the time our children are really young. this does mean avoiding screens in favor of picking up a book, or two, or 10. We do this in a lot of ways including: being available to read

- Visiting the library frequently
- Having access to a lot of books
- Turning to books when questions come up
- Picking up a book to read when I have free time in the afternoon

• Opportunities to Play

The opportunity for free play is very very important to me. As its been said, "Free activity makes children happy. we can see how happy they are, but it is not the fact that they are happy that is important; the important thing is that a child can construct a man through this free activity."

It's through play that children will construct who they will become. Some ways that children can spend their time playing include:

- Open ended toys building with blocks, magnatiles, farm animals, doll house
- Going outside with friends
- Trips to the neighborhood park
- Playing sports/outdoor games
- Nature walks
- Playing indoor games
- Art projects constructing with art materials, building things with cardboard boxes/found materials, nature based art, simple coloring, painting, stickers, sewing
- Explore academic interests that they might have using a toy to explore geography/language/math/science
- Conduct experiments/make science discoveries/research - using microscope, researching in a book, using a toy or work designed for discovery
- Engaging in a hobby bird watching, rock collecting, bug collecting, etc
- Create games with each other, or friends

• Space to be Bored

Finally, there should always be space to be bored. Boredom is the fuel to so much creativity, so much fun, so many discoveries. It's not something we have to be afraid of as parents. It's not something to be avoided. It's what drives all these other wonderful things. And, that just requires space! That requires free time. It requires time to move, explore, grow, and play.

I'm not going to lie and say it's super easy all the time. There are plenty of afternoons where I feel like I'm going to lose it. And, there are plenty of afternoons where none of this happens because we have an appointment or errands to run.







Homeschool Space

- It helps to have a space as big as a room or as small as a nook in the house to keep materials that are used for your children's growing intellectual needs.
- Use open and low shelves.
- Present materials that fulfill your child's current interests and needs. Keep the rest of the materials in storage.
- Display the materials neatly in trays and baskets.
- Regularly update the materials.

Reference Books & How to Use Them

As children get a little bit older, it's important to have books available that give them information, not just stories. This way if they have a question, they have the resources available to them to be able to find information about that topic. Plus, these books open up so much information about the world that my children may not have learned otherwise.

organizing them into a reference library is a wonderful way to keep the books organized and easy for kids access independently. Basically, these books are not rotated like picture books, but are on their ownshelf available all the time.



Book Rotation & Storage

It is important to have a nice little library at home.

don't keep all the books we have out all the time if you have toddlers who like to pull all the books available at the shelf. plus would be too overwhelming for them and likely lead to less reading and more mess. Instead, choose a few books to have out at any one time, then rotate - much like other materials. However if you have older children, you can keep all the books on display in a normal bookshelf with the spine showing the title.

Storage

The storage system can be pretty straightforward and uncomplicated. You can have sime shelving out of reach of young toddlers and keep any children's book that is not available to the children, at this moment, on this shelf. These books can be organized with the spine out, just in a typical "bookshelf" arrangement. You can separate out the board books, but only because they tend to get pushed back behind the bigger books if left on the shelf with them. children typically don't have access to these books. If they ask for something specifically you might go get it together, but this is not an area where you would expect them to access, read, or choose books on their own.

Rotation

you do NOT need to rotate books based on a schedule or timeline! Ever. rotate based on interest and need. If you notice that your children aren't choosing books or have specific interests that aren't being addressed by the books you currently have out (and you have something to fill that need), then you may rotate. Much like materials, you do not need to rotate ALL the books in your home at once. It's usually a book here and there. If a book hasn't been touched for a week or two, that's a pretty good sign that no one is interested in it. If it's read every day then do not to remove it just because of some adult created schedule.

When you see a need for new books, a few considerations go into deciding what books you might pull out to replace them with. These include:

- Any interest my children may have
- Any /festival seasonal need
- Any new book that you might want to introduce
- Any book that we haven't had on the shelves in awhile
- You don't really need to create "themed" bookshelves outside of festival and season changes. Otherwise, try to make it a random collection of books that will appeal to the kids. This means mixing subjects, reading levels, and book types (board book/chapter books/picture books and fiction vs. nonfiction.) Having a good mix keeps everyone happy and engaged.

you also don't need to have a set number of books to take out at one time. The kids can have books in their rooms, and you may have one main reading area in our living room. just put out what looks appropriate for the space.





Organising Your Home

Here are a few ways that you can organize your home:

Shelves

Shelves can be used to organize everything from toys to kitchen tools. Adding the right shelf to your space can change the entire feel of a room, allowing your child to see exactly where things need to be. There are many types of shelves that can be added to a home on a variety of different budgets, sizes, colors and designs.

Trays

Trays are essential to organizing in a prepared home environment. They help to keep work together, and make it accessible for a child. When materials are on a tray, a child knows exactly what goes together for that particular work.

Baskets

Baskets are the perfect way to organize many materials in a prepared home environment. Often baskets are the perfect solution for open ended toys including blocks, train sets, and model animals. Deciding between a basket and tray often hinges on the purpose of the materials. Small baskets are also perfect for keeping trays organized.

Letter Organizers/Napkin Holders

Letter organizers and napkin holders seem like a weird one to include on this list! But, they are an easy and quick way to organize so many little things for children. From paper in an art area, to puzzles, and even stencils. letter organizers make things visible and accessible for children. And, provide a visual appeal to things that often end up scattered on a tray or basket.

Hooks

Hooks are the unsung hero of a prepared home environment. a good low hook can be a game changer for organizing everything from play silks to utensils, to aprons and clothes. They are a cheap and easy change that really make a huge difference - making things accessible and organized.

Small Cups & Containers

Whether they are plastic/acrylic, glass, or wood, small cups and containers can be a lifesaver in organizing toys and materials. They can be used alone, or on a tray to keep all those little pieces together in one spot. Using the right small container can also double in keeping younger siblings away from work that they aren't quite ready for.

Inside the bins, the organization is pretty simple. use Ziploc bags and small boxes to contain anything with pieces. If the manufacturer's box is sturdy, then the material stays in that. Otherwise, label it yourself.. I have found that 2 gallon Ziploc bags work great for puzzles. This way the entire puzzle can be stored together with all the pieces. If something gets knocked out of place, it won't get lost in the bin. If a material is on the shelf, then the storage bag/box stays right in the bin waiting for its return.

Toy Rotation in Your Home

This idea that you put out some toys now, and then store the others. You then rotate the toys as needed so that your children have things that fit their interests and present the appropriate amount of challenge. But, what does that practically mean in a Prepared environment? I'll tell you right away what it does NOT mean - rotating your toys on a specific time schedule. Keep some of these ideas in mind as you think about rotating toys!

Sense of Order

Young children (birth to around age 6) are in the sensitive period for order. They have this incredible sense of order that can be disrupted with changes in environment and routine. If we are frequently changing toys in the environment, we can disrupt this sense of order in our children which can lead to undesirable behavior. In order to help preserve that sense of order, try rotating just one or two things at a time. Avoid massive, sweeping changes in a child's environment -- again, especially one some random predetermined adult-led time table.

Concentration

concentration is such an important topic! We try to create environments where children are able to deeply concentrate on their own interests. Research has found that when children were able to concentrate, they had great joy and satisfaction in their work. Children are naturally driven to explore their environments, so when something new is added, they may feel this pressure to bounce around checking out every new thing. Therefore, rotating too often or too much really is a concentration killer. Children become unable to focus, and settle into the things they have available. So make sure your children not only have enough time to play, but that they have enough time with their things to really deeply concentrate on them. Don't rotate too often, but let your children have time to explore each option to the fullest.

Repetition

"Repetition is the secret of perfection." Children have a deep need to repeat activities over and over and over again - even after mastery. Only they know when they have attained perfection. The adult's judgment about how much a child chooses a work has no place in a Prepared environment. If a child is still called to a material, then the child should be allowed to use the material, even if they can use it perfectly. So, be careful not to rotate toys simply because your child has mastered the work. Give your child space and time to repeat until he or she is done with the work. Do not place a value on the work your child is doing, instead respect it. Therefore, be careful not to rotate things that your child is drawn to and uses.

Child's Interests

a child's interests should drive the activity that your child participates in throughout the day. A child should be given the freedom to explore his or her interests as deeply and freely as possible. This does not change when we think specifically about toys. Your children's things should be things that deeply interest them. And, when they do interest them, they should have as much time and space as they want to explore those interests.

Therefore, toy rotation should also be based on a child's interests. This means, sometimes toys stay out for months (even years) at a time. They don't need to be taken away if the child is still using them. It also can mean that a toy (even if its awesome) is removed (or never introduced) because the child just isn't interested.

Child's Interests

So this has been a lot of what not to do when rotating toys, so what SHOULD you do? The answer - observe, observe, observe. Observation is one of the central roles of an adult in a prepared home environment. Without observation, you can't determine your child's interests, you can't see if they are able to concentration, you can't see if they are able to rotate, how to rotate. Observation is key.

Rotation should be based on your observations. It should be based on your child's interests. It's that simple. No rotation schedules. No huge sweeping changes. No adult-led desire to use all the new toys. Simply child-led.

Purging Your Toys

The key here is to follow your child's own path and respecting your child as a whole person. So, if your child has a toy, lovey, book, or whatever that your child super loves or is super attached to, but it doesn't, don't take it away.

How to Purge Your Toys

Here are a five steps to help you decide what stays and what should go. This process when you're drowning in toys is not an overnight process, but it is possible. I suggest sitting down in your child's play space and going through EVERY toy. Put the keep toys in a pile and the toss/donate/sell toys in a pile using the following order:

• Electronic Toys

First, remove all battery operated toys from your playroom. They aren't needed. They serve only to entertain, crush a child's concentration, and inhibit creativity. This one is really the most clear cut line and the easiest place to start.

Duplicates

Second, gather all toys that have a similar or the same purpose. For example, do you need two types of ring stackers? Or 14 stuffed animals? Or 25 pretend cars? Nope. Here's a little harder example -- do you really need mega blocks, duplos, unit blocks and alphabet blocks? Maybe not. The specific examples and answers will depend on your family and what your children actually use and play with. What are their preferences? What best suits their needs? If both are about even, then I would keep the one that best fits with the other qualities listed here.

One exception to this, puzzles. I tend to keep more puzzles than I need so I'm a hard judge here. But, I think it's nice to have a small variety of puzzles on each level of difficulty to rotate through.

• Realistic Toys

we want to provide children with real experiences as much as possible. Children, especially under 6-years-old, crave the concrete and want to focus on the world around them. This applies to their play. So the next thing to look for is all unrealistic toys and remove it all. This can include cartoons, characters, and fantasy based play. If you have duplicates -- let's say a plastic/metal toy car and a wooden car -- choose the most realistic one. Remove the others.

This also includes some pretend play, specifically pretend play that has a real life counterpart. In other words, if your child can really clean, for example, there's no reason to have pretend cleaning tools. The play kitchen is probably the easiest example of this, but I know it's a hard one for many families to accept. While other pretend play, baby dolls for example, cannot be duplicated easily and therefore can be kept (although they should still fit into these other categories -- be realistic, without batteries, etc).

• Age Appropriate

Find all the toys that just aren't age appropriate any more and remove them. If your child has mastered the material, has outgrown it, or doesn't need it anymore remove it. Also, remove things that are too advanced for your child. If your child is really struggling to use the material independently, try again later.



from this Purging Your Toys a Montessori approach



• "Learning" Toys

Finally, learning toys. Specifically this is a note for under 3's. do not emphasize academics with toddlers. This means, no alphabet or numbers. So, if your child is under 3 and you have toys trying to "teach" them academic skills, remove those as well.

• What to Keep

There are a few things that you can prioritize keeping if you still feel like you have too much after you have gone through the list. I tend to say err on the side of having too little than having too much.

• Open Ended

Open ended materials are always great for children of all ages. These include blocks, model animals, creative building materials, and art supplies.

• Natural Materials

Natural materials are almost always preferred to plastic.

Gross Motor

With the exception of baby containers (like exersaucers, swings and bouncy seats) that claim to help with gross motor skills, most gross motor toys are fine to keep. Bikes, trampolines, scooters, etc. are all great ways to get some wiggles out and keep kids moving.

Once you have gone through all of your toys, you should have one pile to toss/donate/sell and one to (hopefully, much smaller) pile to keep.

The Key Components of a Prepared Home Environment:

• Respect

There is a profound respect for the child, the child's personhood, the child's choices, the child's independence and the child's abilities. This can be seen in how we speak to a child, trust a child, and how we lead a child.

• Education from Birth

A prepared home environment is for people of all ages. From the moment a child is born, a prepared home environment, in all its beauty, can be applied. It starts not only with a carefully prepared environment, but also with a parent's attitude toward a new baby.

• Work & Play

To us what seems like play, to children its their work. This realisation adds to the respect that we give the child by acknowledging the important tasks that they are undertaking. It also reminds parents and the guide about the very real goals the child is setting and meeting on the child's own.

• Prepared Environment

A prepared environment is orderly, beautiful, and centered on the child. This can be done at home or in a classroom. A prepared environment can look many different ways and be created on many different budgets. It often includes child sized furniture and carefully selected materials.

• Practical

practical activities are very important and loved from a very young age. Cooking, cleaning, sewing, pouring and washing are all commonplace.

Freedom

give children freedom WITHIN limits. A child should be given as much freedom as that child can handle in a particular environment or situation. This includes freedom of movement, freedom to choose the child's own activities, freedom to repeat work, and freedom over other aspects of the child's life as situations arise.

Prepared Home Environment is Not...

• Strict

A prepared home environment is not chaos and there are consequences. On the opposite spectrum of strict there can be a view that children are in control and that the adult must give up all limits. Instead, natural consequences and limit setting is in place in a prepared home environment. These limits help children exercise as much freedom as possible while the adult still maintains order.

• Chaos

Sometimes children in a prepared home environment can seem quiet, sullen, or serious. This is not because of some strict system of control over the child, but because children are given the freedom to deeply concentrate, which is something that most people assume children are unable to do without some punishment system in place.

Wooden Toys

A prepared home environment is not about wooden toys. Yes, natural materials are often preferred in a prepared home environment, but so much more goes into what makes a material suitable including whether it isolates concepts, whether it is self correcting, if it's developmentally appropriate, and if it is realistic. Not all wooden toys are equal and not all wooden toys are suitable. Additionally, many non-wooden options may fit better with the method than their wooden counterparts.

Busy Work

A prepared home environment is not about creating busy work, especially for toddlers. it is not cute little trays pouring beans or placing counters along letters. It is about engaging a child in meaningful work. Allowing a child's potential to shine through and his/her authentic self to grow at the child's own pace. Busy work is the opposite of all that, it is for the adult's gain, not the child's benefit.

• Perfection

A prepared home environment is not about creating perfect children, spaces or homes. It can be messy, and a lot of work. children are not perfect, they have meltdowns, and tantrums and whine and get hangry. prepared home environment spaces can get messy and cluttered.

• School for Toddlers

A prepared home environment is not about introducing academic concepts to toddlers. It is not a way to get a "jump" on your child's education in an academic sense. Instead, it creates and lays the foundation for later academic learning. In fact, academics should be delayed with toddlers until the child is showing true readiness between 2.5 and 3-years-old.

What is The Prepared Environment?

I spend a lot of time thinking about our environment here at home. I think about why we need to put something in a low spot, or why we need to add something, or often why we need to take something away. The prepared environment is essential. It's the cornerstone of a prepared environment at home, and it's importance in a school cannot be overstated. But, why? What does the prepared environment include? What does it look like? What does it feel like? Those are harder questions to answer.

Here are some quotes from an Educationalist that help to answer those questions.

"So the first thing his education demands is the provision of an environment in which he can develop the powers given him by nature. This does not mean just to amuse him and let him do as he likes. But it does mean that we have to adjust our minds to doing a work of collaboration with nature, to being obedient to one of her laws, the law which decrees that development comes from environmental experience."

"I then came to realize that everything about a child should not only be in order, but that it should be proportioned to the child's use, and that interest and concentration arise specifically from the elimination of what is confusing and superfluous."

"He has no need of adult influences to call out his activity, a tranquil environment suitable to the interests of his age an the freedom to follow the promptings of his own inner need are sufficient for him."

"We must give the child an environment that he can utilize by himself: a little washstand of his own, some small chairs, a bureau with drawers he can open, objects of common use that he can operate, a small bed in which he can sleep at night under and attractive blanket he can fold and spread by himself. We must give him and environment in which he can live and play."

The Six Principles of The Prepared Environment Explained

The first aim of the prepared environment is, as far as it is possible, to render the growing child independent of the adult. In the prepared environment everything the child come in contact with should facilitate and maximize independent learning and exploration. This calm, well-ordered environment should have a lot of movement and activity. Children are free to choose and work on activities at their own pace. Here, they experience a combination of freedom and self-discipline, as guided by the environment.

The Principles of the Prepared Environment Explained

• Freedom

A child must be free to explore and follow his own natural impulses, thus developing his potential and increasing his knowledge of the world around him. Within the prepared environment, the child must experience freedom of movement, freedom of exploration, freedom to interact socially, and freedom from interference from others. This freedom ultimately leads to a greater freedom: freedom of choice.

• Structure and Order

While Structure and Order seem counter-intuitive to the aforementioned freedom, nothing could be further from the truth. Structure and Order in a prepared home environment accurately reflect the sense of structure and order in the universe. By using the a prepared home environment as a microcosm of the universe, the child begins to internalize the order surrounding him, thus making sense of the world in which he lives. there is a sensitive period for order which occurs between the ages of one and three years of age. This is when the child begins to draw conclusions of the world around him. If there is not order to his environment, the child's sense of reason may be off since he will not be able to validate his findings.

This is not to say that routines or home set-up or ways of doing things can't change. However, it does mean that change should be carefully considered. Is this change for the good of the children? If so, it should be done carefully and its after-effects should be observed to ensure that it is of benefit to the children.



• Beauty

A prepared home environment should be beautiful. Whether your home is in an old Victorian mansion or in a strip-mall or in the living room of your home, the environment should suggest a simple harmony. Uncluttered and well-maintained, the environment should reflect peace and tranquility. The environment should invite the learner to come in and work. This atmosphere is easily seen by the attitude of those working there, both child and adult.

• Nature and Reality

We should use nature to inspire children. Parents should take the children out into nature, rather than keeping them confined indoors. This is why natural materials are preferred in the prepared environment. Real wood, reeds, bamboo, metal, cotton, and glass are preferred to synthetics or plastics. It is here where child-size real objects come into play. Furniture should be child-size so the child is not dependent on the adult for his movement. Rakes, hoes, pitchers, tongs, shovels should all fit children's hands and height so that the work is made easier, thus ensuring proper use and completion of the work without frustration.

• Social Environment

Where there is freedom to interact, children learn to encourage and develop a sense of compassion and empathy for others. As children develop, they become more socially aware, preparing to work and play in groups. This social interaction is supported throughout the environment and is encouraged with the nature of homeschool setting.

• Intellectual Environment

If the above aspects are not recognized, the intellectual environment will not reach its purpose. The purpose of the prepared home environment is to develop the whole personality of the child, not merely his intellect. By guiding the child through his developmental needs, the child has the structure which should be at the forefront of the creative work in a homeschool environment. A lot of time and effort is involved in creating a a prepared home environment that is designed to meet the individual needs of all children. Through developmentally appropriate material that moves hierarchically from simple to complex and concrete to abstract, children should be given the freedom to fully develop their unique potential through a carefully prepared learning environment.



The Prepared Environment For Newborns

We must let go of traditional attitudes towards education. This is a model that honors learning as it intersects with living, where the goal is to help each child realize their full potential. "The education of even a small child, therefore, does not aim at preparing him for school, but for life. Babies are wired to learn through their senses: the scent of mom, the sound of the birds, the sight of bright lights, and the touch of the grass. While it is true that babies are heavily dependent on our caregiving - from one diaper change and feeding to the next - it is also true that they are astonishingly capable. We see this with the rapid development of expressive language and movement skills - going from supine to walking, crying to speaking, all at their own lead. The "why" is simply the acknowledgment that we as parents have a crucial role in our baby's development - one that supports their capabilities, not just their dependencies. By learning how our children learn, we empower ourselves to move away from reactive overwhelm to proactive connection – achieving a state of peace, love, purpose, and respect.

"It is tremendously important that we should understand the spontaneous way in which the child develops himself. We are so anxious to help, to us it seems the burden of growth and development is so great that we must do all we can to make the pathway easy. And so, our love may easily overreach itself, and by providing too many urges, too many cautions and corrections, turn the child from the natural path of his development and cause his energy to be diverted. Our role is to

guide, not to direct. • The Absorbent Mind

Infants and young children share a time-sensitive "absorbent mind," where the capacity to learn is as effortless as it will ever be. Often compared to a sponge, babies can soak up knowledge around them just by being in their environment. Conscious learning doesn't kick in until around age three, and before that, we are "unconscious learners." We can't remember learning during this time, but we know that it is foundational. "The things he sees are not just remembered; they form a part of his soul.

• **Sensitive Periods**

These are times of intense interest in acquiring particular skills, like language, order, movement, and social relations. During these windows, babies and young children are intrinsically driven to master related skills. If we overreach with our own agendas or miss these windows, it can make learning - and parenting - harder than it needs to be. Thus, when we talk about treating our babies as capable, this is what we mean. The power to learn comes from within - it's not on us to lead.

Baby's First Prepared Environment

Preparing the environment is about respect for the child, and not the stuff, why is the Prepared Environment such a focal point? The Prepared Environment is the way of intentionally setting up a child's space so that the child can feel purposeful, capable and connected. Young children are constantly getting feedback from their surroundings. If your workspace is calm and organized, you feel more focused. The same relationship exists for babies and children but with even greater sensitivity due to their absorbent minds. Hence, preparing their space purposefully – free of excess and with a clear invitation for self-discovery – is the cornerstone for preparing your home environment for your little one to thrive.

This often gets conflated with needing to buy stuff, which is a misconception. Your baby's first Prepared Environment is a framework to help them orient, explore, and act on those inner drives. You can achieve this goal without materialistic items.

Unlike a traditional nursery designed around the parents, a mindfully prepared nursery is designed around the baby. Many families leave open floor space where the baby can safely play and move, rather than filling the walls with adult-sized furniture. Artwork and mobiles are lowered to the baby's eye level. Even the sleep surface is lowered, with preference given to a floor bed in place of a crib. this nursery is a flexible space that evolves with the baby's capabilities. It typically entails:

- A floor bed
- Muted, calm colors
- Artwork hung low (with imagery that reflects reality)
- A rug or play mat for floor time
- A low mirror for visibility of the room and eventual care of self
- A basket or front-facing display for books

Freedom of Movement

We also need to prepare for baby's wakeful space. While baby gear is the default today, it is too restrictive for their developing mobility. From birth, the desire to move is purposeful and is one of the sensitive learning periods. Motor milestones progress from head to toe as part of the body's development with the nervous system. Though this process occurs naturally, cultivating opportunities for babies to move helps them gain related strength and coordination.

There are benefits to free movement beyond motor skills. Instead of placing baby into something that offers the same experience every time, like a jumper, you place baby in an open, but defined space called a movement area. Here, the baby gets to choose how to move and what to explore, all within the safe limits of what you've made available.

This self-directed exploration means the baby is an active participant – not just a passive observer. This builds their confidence and ability to concentrate, planting the seeds for independent play, thus, better supporting a parent's need to be "hands free" in the long run. They internalize the message, "I can do this," when we respect their first moments of play as their own.

A Note on Clothing

In the womb, babies have free access to their hands and feet. Instead of immediately swaddling baby down, covering their hands with mittens and feet with socks, we can skip those restrictive clothing items all together. The outfits we choose throughout all stages of their motor development should be practical and properly fitting. Non-restrictive clothing minimizes frustration with their first movements and sets them up for success with respect to freedom of movement. If we place our baby down at a time when they are working to crawl, for example, but they are wearing a dress that catches their knees, then we have added an obstacle for them. Too many obstacles can lower their self-motivation.

Common items in a prepared environment for newborns:

Topponcino

This is a thin, flat infant security pillow. Its purpose is to aid in the baby's transition from womb to world. Consider how many different places a baby will go after birth — from dad's arms to a changing pad, bassinet, pediatrician's office. These surfaces are unfamiliar and can be startling. This pillow helps the baby acclimate with a warm, consistent touch.

Movement Area

Families will define a space in the home where baby can move freely as an alternative to baby gear.

This consists of:

- Alow shelf or baskets to hold toys
- A mirror to give visibility of the room
- A mat or rug to define the space. It's helpful for the rug to be solid in color or with a simple pattern so that the baby can better focus on the toys that will end up on it
- A wall hook or play gym to hang mobiles

Mobiles

Visual and tactile mobiles support baby's developing vision and coordination skills during the first four months. While a traditional mobile is offered as a stationary decoration – out of reach over the crib – the hanging mobiles are seen as baby's first work. They are offered at the baby's level during wakeful periods, generally in their movement area and separate from their sleep space.

A Mindful Approach with Baby's First Play

Is it an "active" or "passive" toy?

Toys should be "passive" in order to promote activity, as opposed to being "active" and promoting passive entertainment. Battery-operated, tech-enabled toys, for example, often ask the child to sit and watch – making the child an observer. The child should be the one playing; not the toy.

Does it isolate the senses?

Research has found it important to isolate sensory experiences, not combine them. Toys like busy boards or activity centers that have multiple components can be overstimulating. The less busy something is, the deeper your child will be able to engage – just like how we close our eyes when trying to smell a flower.

Is it realistic?

Toys and books largely emphasize fantasy and cartoon-like imagery, but research has found that young children craved a strong exposure to reality due to those biological drives aimed at orientation.

Is it breakable?

Wood, metal, and even breakable glass are preferred over plastic.research has found that children more readily care for their belongings when given responsibility to do so. When we shield them from the natural consequences of damaging something, we also minimize the learning opportunity to respect valuables.



CONTACT US ON: +92 323 8919215 (Maryam Yasin)

Further queries and access to the handout and to join the Prepared Environment WhatsApp group:

Credits: Kavangaugh Report

