

# Individualized Supports

## Accommodation Considerations



### Early Preparation

Having proactive conversations with families and children with disabilities can help identify whether further accommodations may be needed, beyond an Environmental Supports lens. If time or resources allow, consider offering some of the following before the program starts:

- setting up a meeting with the family and child in advance
- sharing information about what the program will involve, including a sample schedule or common activities
- offering a tour of the program space to reduce anxiety and troubleshoot any concerns
- providing pictures of leaders or program spaces
- communicating about program rules and expectation



### Individual Schedules and Routines

A standard program-wide visual schedule is a great tool but some children with higher support needs may benefit from a few targeted strategies to support their participation. These may include:

- a modified schedule (arriving early, starting late, leaving early etc)
- longer or more frequent breaks
- a personal-sized printed visual schedule
- routine cards, which outline the steps needed to complete a particular activity (such as the sequence of having a snack - washing hands, getting out snacks, eating, cleaning up)
- use of 'first/then' cards

Changes to schedules or routines may be extra challenging for children who thrive on consistency. While it is inevitable that there will be unexpected changes, program leaders should do their best to prepare children for known adjustments to schedules or activities.



### Transitions

A transition involves moving from one activity to another, one room to another or one location to another. Transitions can be especially challenging for children with higher support needs.

Overall, program leaders should work to limit the number of major transitions each day. Just like activities themselves, well-planned transitions have a beginning, middle and end. The best transitions reduce waiting or build in activities to ease the shift (singing a song, walking like a snake)

Strategies to help children with higher support needs prepare for and move through a transition:

- using visual schedules or 'first/then' cards
- using cues, such as verbal warnings and countdowns (10 mins, 5 mins, 2 mins etc), visual timers or specific noises or gestures
- if staff or volunteer resources allow, creating opportunities for specific children to either transition ahead of or after the larger group

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#### Sensory Inputs

A broader Environmental Lens involves considering how the lighting, noise, temperature and smells in your program environment may impact children with sensory sensitivities. The reality is, it's not always possible to avoid or reduce visual distractions, high noise levels, harsh fluorescent lightening or other factors that may be extra challenging for some children. However, being aware of these elements and how they may impact particular participants can help you prepare to respond appropriately and offer effective supports.

When a child experiences sensory overload or underload, they may have difficulty focusing, following instructions or regulating their emotions. Hitting a 'sensory roadblocks' is not related to the child's personality or behaviour - it is a response to either too much or too little sensory stimuli.

There are a variety of activities, strategies you can use, in addition to your calming or movement tools, to help a child avoid or work through these roadblocks, such as:

- touch/tactile:
  - more: children seeking extra touch sensations may enjoy playdough, sand, slime or fidget toys
  - less: adapt activities that use slimy or messy textures by putting the material inside well-sealed ziploc bags
- balance and movement:
  - moving the body by balancing and bouncing can be particularly helpful
  - almost anything can become a balance beam - a curb, piece of table, log, line of chalk
- body awareness:
  - yoga poses and stretches can support increased body awareness and offer a calm, grounding experience
  - resistance bands can be used in various ways - above their head, behind their back, in pairs
- noise/hearing:
  - more: use music or items that have a variety of sounds, such as easter eggs filled with different items
  - less: children sensitive to sound can benefit from the use of noise cancelling headphones



#### Skill Development

No two children in any program will be exactly alike or have exactly the same strengths. Plan ahead when choosing activities and think about ways to adapt the activity for children with various skill sets. Offer substitutions such as walking instead of running and stay focused on the improvements participants are making rather than only praising achievements. Another technique to support skill development is called scaffolding, which breaks more difficult skills down into tasks or progressively increasing the difficulty level.