

ECM Environment

For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. (Hebrews 3:4)



The environment created for the early childhood ministry (ECM) will reflect the mission and philosophy and mirror the purpose and goals. Create a Christ-centered, child-focused environment where children are loved, kept safe, and encouraged to be active learners. Environment is so much more than a physical facility—children, adults, classrooms, furnishings, equipment, materials, and activities. It is the job of the director and teachers to become managers, arranging and rearranging until everything works together for maximum benefit to the children. Now, more than ever before, educators are intensely aware of the powerful influences of the physical environment on all aspects of a person’s life, especially for very young children.

The Early Childhood Ministry Site—New Church

The choice of a physical site for the ECM if planning a new church has a significant impact on the future success of the mission. The following questions provide an excellent tool for decision-making regarding a site:

- Can the user afford to purchase the site?
- Are all utilities available and adequate for ECM use?
- Will unusual “hard” or “soft” development costs be added?
- Is the site adjacent to any inhibiting barriers that may affect future development?
- Might environmental problems affect site development?
- Does the site have good accessibility?
- Is the site large enough?
- Do any physical characteristics of the land make its use difficult?
- Will the purchase of the site meet the investment test?
- Is there a political/community environment that might adversely affect the site?
- Consider the state’s regulations and requirements when building on a site.

The ECM Site-Existing Congregation

- Can an existing building be renovated to meet local code, zoning and licensing requirements (a minimum of 35 square feet per child indoor space) at an affordable cost?
- Is there enough outdoor play area to allow a minimum of 75 square feet per child?

(a minimum of 100 square feet is the preferred)

- Is there sufficient space for staff parking and a safe traffic flow area where parents can drop off/pick up children?
- Is the building set back far enough from major roads, yet visible and easily accessible? Does space in the building and outside include 110 square feet per child

Choosing and Involving an Architect

If the congregation decides to build, renovate or expand an ECM center, choose an appropriate architect, contractor and project manager, based on training, ability, concern for the client, ability to respond to the specific mission of the ECM, experience with early childhood centers and reputation for excellent work. The building should reflect the mission and ministry of the ECM and the congregation. Involve Forward with Lutheran Schools consultants very early in the decision-making process if possible.

The consultant team will help the church planners or existing congregation planners determine the proposed size of the early childhood center. A market study may find that a center is designed to serve 100 or 200 children and families will be fully used. If either is the case, be sure to understand the design and program needs of this center’s size. No matter what the size of the proposed center, be sure the building team listens to the special needs and concerns needing to be addressed to provide the best center possible.

D Children's Needs

Focus on the needs of the children to be served as the ECM environment is created.



Children need to:

... be assured of the love and forgiveness of Jesus. The environment will show evidence of Jesus' love through the displaying of pictures, the worship center, and the words and actions of caring adults.

... be treated as unique children of God, each with individual needs, strengths and developmental goals. The environment will be well-equipped with materials and activities appropriate to children's developmental needs. Provide active and quiet areas to ensure opportunities for both group and solitary play.

... have opportunities to make choices and participate in independent learning. The environment will be arranged to encourage children's exploration and give them easy access to the materials and equipment provided. Offer a variety of books, activities, and centers so that children will be invited to explore, manipulate and experiment.

... learn to be part of a group and become aware of behavior limits within the group setting. The environment will include space, materials, and equipment that support play in large and small groups. Examples could include but are not limited to:

- Several chairs around a table
- Easels next to each other
- A well-equipped dramatic play
- A water and/or sand play table

Alternate the scheduling of small and large group times in which children are expected to participate. Plan activities designed to encourage cooperation and social interaction.

... practice responsibility for the classroom setting, equipment and materials. The environment will be set up so children have opportunities to learn the proper use of and care for materials. Schedule clean-up times as a regular part of the daily routine. Foster opportunities for teachers and children to work together to keep rooms orderly.

... experience being with adults who will guide, facilitate and supervise play, and foster learning throughout the session. The environment will be set up prior to the arrival of children to allow teachers freedom to greet each child and encourage interaction and discover.

... feel safe and secure. The rooms will be arranged in such a way that avoids runways or potential hazards to children. Furniture and equipment will be designed with safety in mind.

... have ownership in their classrooms. Create an environment in the ECM that is child-friendly, where children feel welcome and want to stay, and where a parent will feel at ease leaving his or her child. As the environment is prepared, kneel or sit on the floor to view the classroom from a child's perspective. What is seen? Heard? Smelled? The children should see "their" room as a clean, healthy, safe, beautiful

place to be where Jesus' love is in action.

- Place bulletin boards and whiteboards at children's eye level.
- Cover backs of storage units with corkboard to display children's work.
- Hang children's photos, art work, and items that stimulate creative learning.
- Design child-accessible storage areas (shelves, cubbies, coat racks).

. . . have appropriate conditions inside and outside. Be sure the ECM environment provides:

- natural lighting in every room
- windows with screens and the ability to open windows
- appropriate colors and textures; walls painted in washable, neutral colors; corkboard for display space and acoustic benefits
- proper heat and ventilation (68-72 degrees F, within two feet of floor)
- draperies, carpets, wall hangings, textured walls, proper ceilings to absorb noise
- warm, easy-to-clean floor space, fire-retardant
- doors that open outward for safety; lightweight with low doorknobs
- running water, sinks, toilets located in or near classrooms; faucet water controlled to prevent scalding; one toilet for every 10 children; toilet and sink heights for young children; benches and step stools; drain in bathroom floor
- classroom materials stored in an orderly, appealing way
- adequate storage space; shelves at children's level
- teacher supplies out of children's reach
- creative and developmentally-appropriate materials and equipment
- child-appropriate, safe, well-built outdoor playground equipment



Safety Considerations

- Consult state regulations and the local health department for guidance.
- Follow codes for electrical services and fire regulations.
- Conduct fire drills and schedule inspections on a regular basis (Cf. Appendix 9.1 Fire/Emergency Record or in the Chapter 9 folder).
- Designate areas to be used in the event of natural disaster alerts.
- Post evacuation procedures in the classroom and hallways. Conduct drills regularly.
- Provide adequate space and prevent overcrowding.
- Be aware of potential problems of lead paint, slippery floors, and sidewalks, storage of cleaning solutions, housekeeping supplies, uncovered electrical outlets, clutter, obstructed passageways.
- Teach children simple principles of self-protection; repeat them often.
- Use care when purchasing toys; avoid those that break easily, burn, cut or puncture, can be easily swallowed, are toxic/unclean.
- Have a first aid kit in each classroom including mild disinfectant, first aid cream, bandages.
- Notify parents and emergency medical assistance in case of major accidents (Cf. Appendix 5.8 Injury, Accident, Hospitalization, or Fatality Report or in the Chapter 5 folder).
- Keep all emergency records in classroom and in office for accessibility.
- Director/teacher keeps a bound accident/incident log, fills out a report and notifies parents (Cf. Appendix 9.2 Sample Accident Report or in the Chapter 9 folder).
- Meet and exceed state/local food service regulations.
- Conduct monthly checks for safety/health features of the facility (Cf. Appendix 9.3 Environment Safety Checklist or in the Chapter 9 folder).
- Train staff members to observe daily and report any hazards.

Furnishings

The following furnishings will help create a child-focused, well-organized learning environment:

- sufficient number of small tables and chairs
- low storage shelves for manipulatives, toys, and materials
- housekeeping furniture for dramatic play
- sand/water table
- large motor equipment for climbing (indoor or outdoor)
- rugs or carpet squares
- learning center tables and shelves
- individual cubbies and low-hanging coat hooks
- easels, tables and counter tops for art work
- rocking chair
- several adult-sized chairs
- book shelves
- closeable storage cabinets, cupboards with counter tops
- sink(s)
- cots for napping

See Appendix for suggested room arrangements of furniture and equipment. (Cf. Appendix 9.4 Classroom Arrangements or in the Chapter 9 folder)

Equipment and Materials

A variety of equipment and materials are needed to provide for the choices and exploration necessary for learning in young children. Plan interest centers to make use of materials on a daily basis. An interest center can be set up on a table, tray, or on the floor.

Support a curriculum designed to meet children's needs with these suggested materials.

ART SUPPLIES:

- easels
- paints
- watercolors
- brushes
- pens
- pencils
- washable markers
- glue
- paste
- assorted paper
- collage materials
- scissors
- storage containers
- aprons, smocks
- drying rack or clothes line
- infants and toddlers: large crayons, watercolor markers, stickers, finger paints, large brushes, sponges, collage paper



DRAMATIC PLAY ACCESSORIES:

- child-sized furniture
- dress-up clothes and accessories
- dolls with accessories
- kitchen items
- lunch boxes
- purses, tote bags
- suitcases
- table and chairs
- tableware
- telephone
- unbreakable, low-hung mirror

LARGE MOTOR SKILL-BUILDERS

- balance beam
- balls
- bean bags
- climber
- hoola hoops
- jumping boards
- ladder on ground
- large building blocks
- packing cases
- parachute
- riding toys
- ring toss game/rings
- rocking boat/steps
- sand pit
- sand toys
- slide
- tunnel
- wheel toys
- infants and toddlers: balls especially for the very young, low climbers, platform with railings, riding toys, low slide, walking rails attached to the wall 15 inches from the floor

LANGUAGE MATERIALS

- high quality religious and secular books; big books
- flannel board and accessories
- lotto games
- alphabet puzzles
- magnetic letters and shapes
- markers
- paper
- pencils

- picture dominoes
- picture representations of songs/finger plays
- puppets, puppet theater
- signs and labels
- writing center with computer
- infants and toddlers: sturdy books, “chubby” books

MANIPULATIVES-SMALL MUSCLE DEVELOPMENT

- assorted block accessories (wooden or plastic people, animals, cars, air planes, boats, trains, signs, toy construction vehicles)
- beads with string laces
- buttoning materials
- counting discs
- design cubes
- dowel rods in graduate lengths
- locks with keys
- measuring cups and spoons
- mud and water toys
- paper and crayons
- peg boards and pegs
- play dough
- sand
- scissors
- sewing cards
- snap blocks
- turn-a-gears
- infants and toddlers: soft blocks, activity boards, textured balls/boxes, large pegboards, texture cards, wall hangings, soft cloth balls

MUSICAL EQUIPMENT

- compact disc player or other means of playing music (ex. iPod player)
- rhythm instruments
- scarves, ribbons
- xylophone
- infants and toddlers: add musical toys and rattles

SCIENCE MATERIALS

- aquarium
- bird feeders
- bubble pipes and soap
- feathers
- kaleidoscope
- magnets and metal items
- magnifying glasses
- materials from nature
- mirrors
- plants
- prisms
- pulleys and gears
- rocks
- scales
- shells
- stethoscope
- water/sensory table and items
- Infants and toddlers: mobiles, baby-safe mirrors, pictures, wall hangings



A. Fire/Emergency Drill Record

[Name of Early Childhood Ministry-Congregation]
[School year]

MONTH	DRILL DATE
September	
October	
November	
December	
January	
February	
March	
April	
May	
June	
July	
August	

B. Sample Accident Report

Name of child: _____ Age: _____ Date of birth: _____

Child's Class _____ Date: _____ Time: _____

Child's Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Parents' Names: *father:* _____ *mother:* _____

Date of accident: _____ Time of accident: _____

Place of accident: _____

Describe accident (be as objective as possible):

Describe nature of injury:

Witnessed by: _____

Describe action taken:

Parent was contacted by: _____ phone _____ other _____ attempts to contact were unsuccessful
by whom: _____ at what time: _____

Follow-up:

Additional information:

Staff signature

Date

Position

Parent's signature

Date

C. Environment Safety Check List

Inspector: _____ Date of inspection: _____

Indoor Facility (check satisfactory/unsatisfactory. If unsatisfactory, indicate action taken or planned on reverse side.)

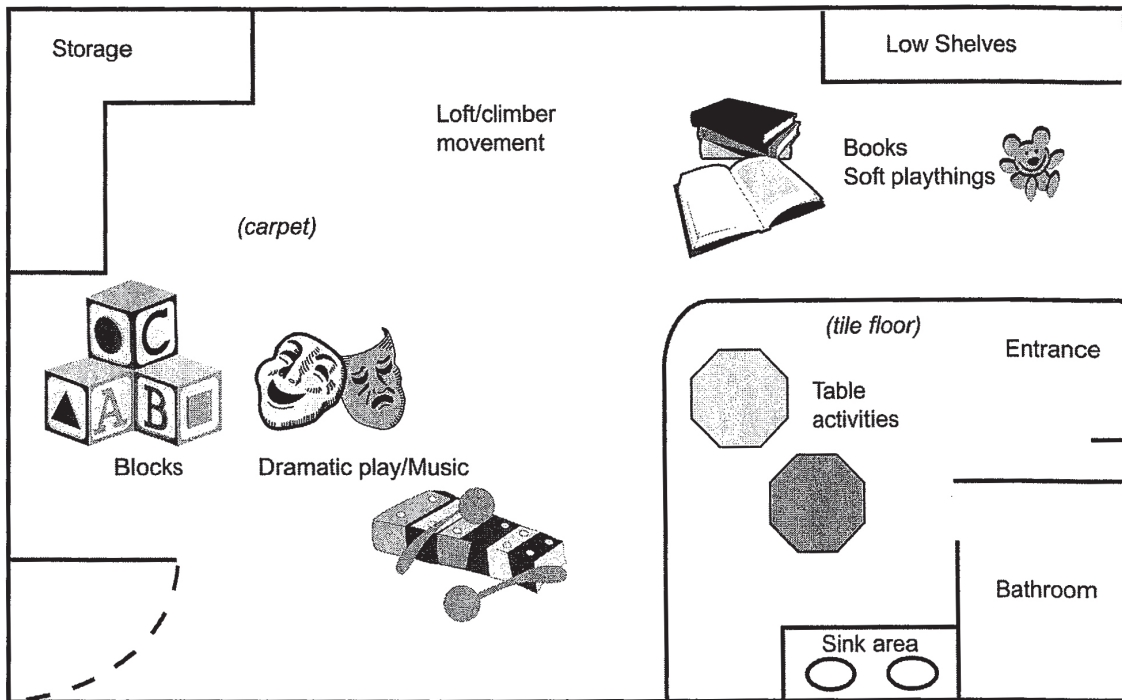
Area	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Smooth floor surfaces to avoid falls		
Clean walls and ceiling; no peeling paint, damaged plaster		
Children always supervised		
No poisonous plants, vermin, disease-bearing animals (no turtles, parrot family birds, harmful pets)		
Trash storage is covered; sanitation adequate		
No smoking in facility		
Plastic bags are safely used		
No use of plastic balloons		
No precariously placed small, sharp, otherwise hazardous objects		
No tacks or push pins used		
Heating/ventilation working; pipes and radiators inaccessible (or covered to prevent bodily contact)		
Outlets covered or grounded; no dangling or covered extension cords or window blind cords		
No pest strips or poisons used		
Safeguards in place to prevent children from entering unsupervised or hazardous areas		

Outdoor Areas

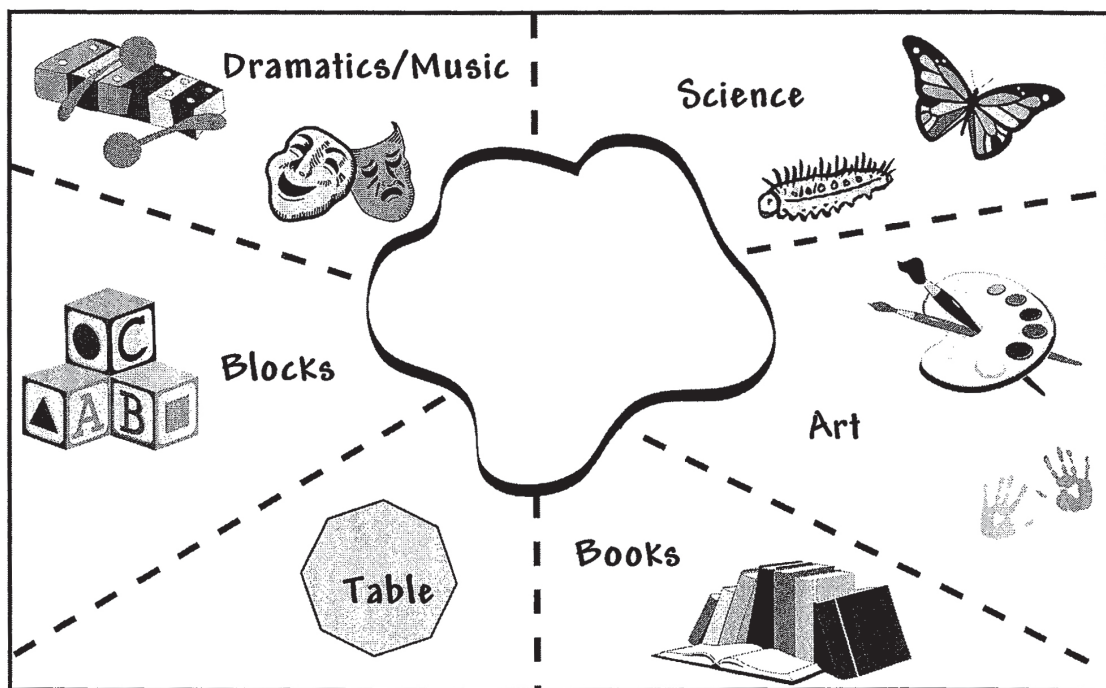
Area	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Walkways to enter/exit maintained to prevent falling		
Play area covered with clean, safe surface		
Play equipment anchored firmly		
No nuts, bolts, screws, nails, other sharp edges on play equipment		
No loose rope, chain, cord		
No lead-based paint used		

D. Classroom Arrangements

Sample Layout-Pre-Kindergarten (Ages 3-5)

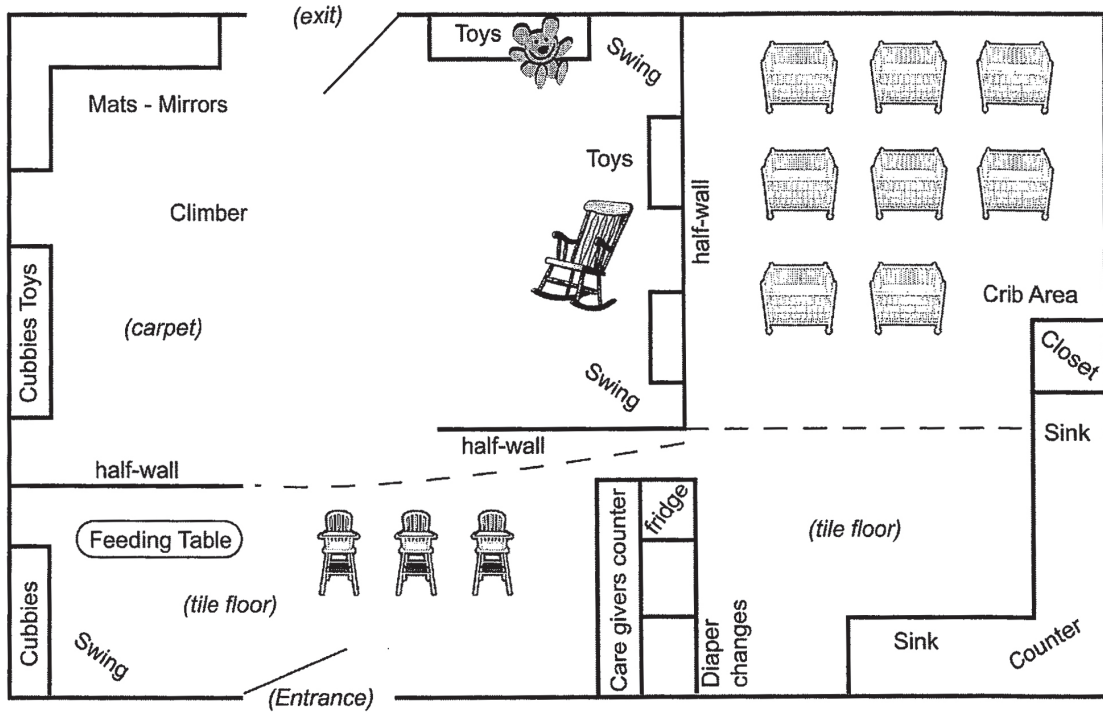


Perimeter Strategy-Pre-Kindergarten



D. Classroom Arrangements

Infant Room



Toddler Room

