

# Using Environmental Strategies to Promote Positive Social Interactions



Project funded by the Child Care and Head Start Bureaus in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services



## What Works Brief Training Kit #6

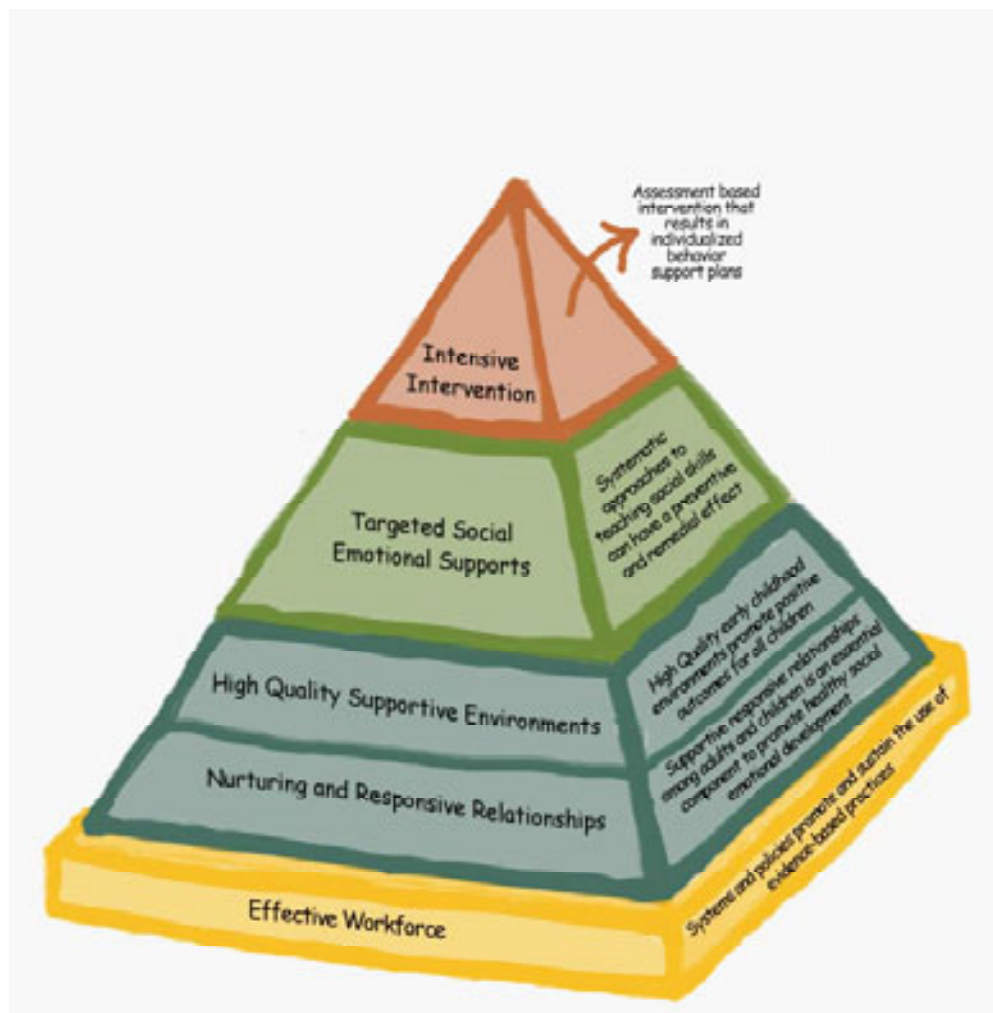


Center on the Social and Emotional  
Foundations for Early Learning  
[www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel/](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel/)

February 2008

The **What Works Brief Training Kits** were developed to help in-service and pre-service providers conduct staff development activities. Each kit is based on one What Work Brief and contains the following items: presenter's PowerPoint note pages, participant handouts, activity ideas, pre-training survey, demographic form, training evaluation, and training certificate.

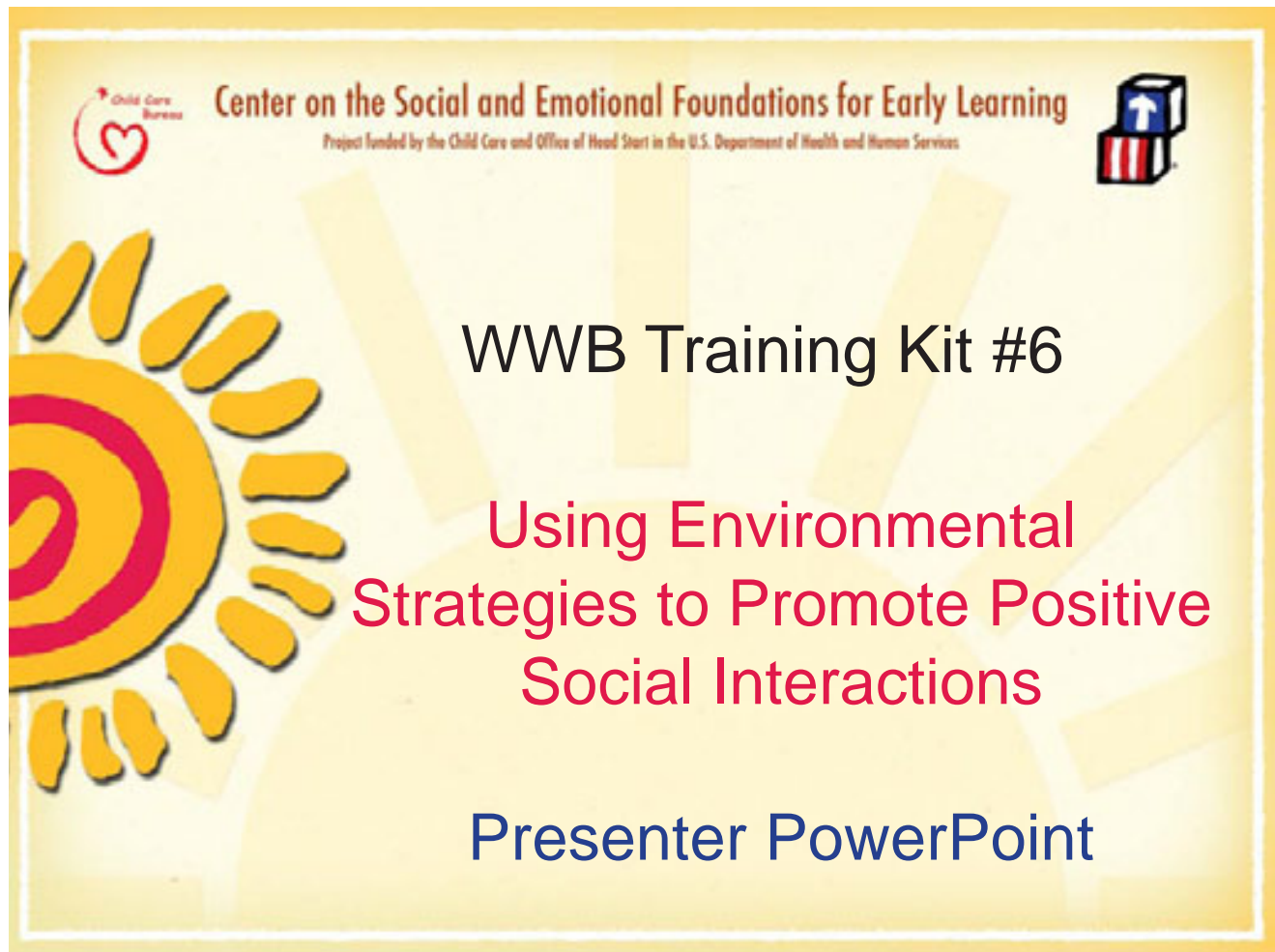
The What Works Brief Training Kits are grounded in the Pyramid model depicted below which provides a framework for describing the four interrelated levels of practice that address the social and emotional development of all children. The Pyramid is designed to guide practitioners in understanding the importance of children's social-emotional competence in terms of school readiness and the prevention of challenging behavior. This What Works Brief Training Kit relates to the "High Quality Environments" level of the Pyramid.



We welcome your feedback as you provide professional development activities with these materials.

Special thanks to the Meginnis Endowment at UIUC for funding to help support this effort and to the following individuals who developed the What Works Brief Training Kits materials: Micki Ostrosky, Hedda Meadan, Greg Cheatham, Monique Mills, Sallee Beneke, Nancy Gaumer, Amy Hayden, Elenor Rentschler, and Angel Fettig.

## Presenter Notes



### ***Speaker Notes:***

- Presenter should be familiar with the content in What Works Brief #6 and Module 1, Section VIII on Planning Activities that Promote Engagement: Large and Small Group Time (available at <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel>).
- Consider using What Works Brief # 6 handout as a supplemental resource.
- Welcome participants.
- Take care of any logistics (e.g., length of time for session, break, handouts, etc.).
- Pass out pre-training survey for all participants to complete and turn in if desired.
- As you present the workshop: Remind participants to take the culture and background of children into consideration and to work hand-in-hand with parents when they select target behaviors, since some behaviors may be part of the child's culture.

## Why is it important to promote positive social interaction?

- Positive social interaction with peers early on can lead to the development of positive peer relationships, acceptance, and friendships.
- Children' social competence is a powerful predictor of school adjustment and success in school, and later success in life.



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### ***Speaker Notes:***

- Researchers have demonstrated the importance of peer relationships in childhood and later life adjustment; for example, connections have been found between peer relationship problems and loneliness, feelings of depression, and feelings of anxiety.
- Peer relationship difficulties in childhood could result in later serious internalizing difficulties, including withdrawal and depression in adulthood. In addition, low acceptance by peers was found to be predictor of grade retention, school dropout, mental health problems, and behavior problems

# Activity 1

## Pair-Think-Share

- **Pair** with a partner
- **Read** a scenario
- **Think** about what the teacher can change in the environment
- **Share** your thoughts



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### ***Speaker Notes:***

- Assign partners.
- Have half the group read one scenario and half read the other scenario.
- Pairs should think about how the teacher can change the environment in the classroom to increase social interaction.
- Share thoughts with the large group.
- Repeat, focusing on the other vignette.

## Mrs. Clara's Classroom

It is Tuesday morning and the 15 preschoolers in Mrs. Clara's classroom are working in the centers they have chosen. Mrs. Clara has opened 3 centers: art, blocks and cars, and the writing table. The children are busy in their centers, but there are frequent outbursts as they argue over materials.

Mrs. Clara takes a moment to look around and reflect on what is going on in the classroom. She discovers that the interactions and communication occurring between children are mostly negative. Mrs. Clara knows how important positive social interactions are for her students. She decides to ask some of the other preschool teachers what she can change in the environment to promote positive interactions.



### ***Speaker Notes:***

Pair-Read-Share

Activity: Think about possible changes in the environment that can lead to increase in social interaction in the classroom.

Possible points for discussion:

- Provide more centers. (It's important to note the balance of having enough centers/materials but not too many so kids play in isolation.)
- Group the children by characteristics within centers (social with not so social).
- Chose different activities (e.g., select activities that are more social in nature such as dramatic play or require team work).
- Modify the directions for playing with the activities (e.g., structure the activities so the children know what to do—for example, suggest that one child hold the puzzle pieces while the other child places the pieces within the frame).

## Mr. Rob and Ms. Laurie's Classroom

The 20 preschoolers in Classroom 5 are busy during choice time. They are washing toys in the sensory table, playing with play dough, listening to books on tape, and making art projects. Five children are seated in bean bag chairs listening quietly to different books, while another 5 children are making paper kites with individual glue sticks, scissors, and boxes of crayons.

The 5 children at the sensory table are arguing over the two squirt bottles and one multicolor water wheel. The remaining 5 children are fighting for the 3 plastic knives to cut the yellow play dough. The two teachers look around the room wondering why half the room is so quiet while the other half needs constant monitoring.



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### ***Speaker Notes:***

#### Pair-Read-Share

Activity: Think about possible changes in the environment that can lead to increase in social interaction in the classroom.

Possible points for discussion:

- Provide more water bottles and knives.
- Group the children by characteristics within centers (social with not so social).
- Chose different activities (e.g., select activities that are more social in nature, such as dramatic play).
- Modify the directions for playing with the activities (e.g., structure the activities so the children know what to do—for example, suggest that one child hold the play dough while the other child cuts with the knife).

## Environmental strategies to promote positive social interactions

- Focus on environmental strategies
- Environmental strategies are changes and adaptations that can be made to a classroom's environment to encourage positive social interaction between children



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### ***Speaker Notes:***

There are different ways to promote positive social interactions (direct teaching, prompting, modeling etc.); this presentation will focus on environmental strategies. Environmental strategies include strategies the teacher can use to change and modify the physical and social environments in the classroom.

### **Discussion question:**

- What can we change in the environment to increase social interaction?
- Environmental strategies include changes/adaptation to physical environment, social environment (groups), schedule, activities, and materials.



## Changing and adapting group composition

- Group children according to their characteristics
- Consider the number of children in each group



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### ***Speaker Notes:***

*Grouping*—Group children with good social skills with those who are less skilled socially. Pair a shy student with an outgoing student. Pair a student with disability with a student who does not have a disability. It is important to provide access to socially competent peers (though that is not enough to promote positive social behavior—adult support is also needed).

*Number of children*—Develop activities that are appropriate for individual children, small groups, and large groups. Encourage children to interact with other children in different group compositions. Adults can provide support (or prompt) both children with and children without special needs.

## Changing and adapting activities

- Limit the number of centers
- Have motivating activities



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### ***Speaker Notes:***

*Limit the number of centers*—By limiting the number of centers open, and rotating or changing them periodically (e.g., weekly or every other week), caregivers can increase the chances that peer interactions will take place. For example, if a classroom has 10 open centers and 14 children, on average only 1 or 2 children will be in a center at a time. By closing 2 or 3 of those centers, caregivers can increase the number of children per center, and they can then rotate the centers that are open, keeping them novel and interesting.

*Motivating activities*—Make sure the activities are interesting, engaging, and motivating. If the children are excited and motivated, they will have more opportunities to interact with others. Remember that each group of children brings with them their own interests. It is important to know children's interests. Provide activities that require teamwork (e.g., board games). Ask families about what's motivating for their children and incorporate those into the classroom.

## Activity 2

### Modifying activities

- How you can design these centers to increase positive peer interaction?
  - Blocks and vehicles
  - Snack
  - Art
  - Housekeeping
  - Board games  
(e.g., Candyland, Bingo, Checkers)



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### ***Speaker Notes:***

- Do as a large-group activity unless the size of your audience is too large; then do this in partners.
- Give participants a minute to think about each center, then share with the large group some ideas for designing the center to support positive peer interaction.

### **Questions for discussion:**

How will the center be arranged? What materials are needed? What instructions will they give to structure the activity?

### **Example responses:**

- In the block center, the adults might help the children cooperatively decide what they would like to build together such as a bridge, house with a fence, or boat. The children might then take turns adding pieces to the construction, or one child might gather the blocks and pass them while other children make the construction.
- At the snack table, children can pass out placemats, snacks, napkins, silverware, etc. as partners.
- At the art center, a limited number of materials (e.g., glue sticks, crayons, markers, scissors) could be made available so that children share, ask for turns, etc.
- In the housekeeping center, adults can support children in assuming roles (e.g., what things might the dad do, how might the little sister act, etc.) and cooperatively accomplishing tasks (e.g., setting the table, washing and drying dishes).
- Children could be paired for board games so that more socially skilled children are paired with children who are less socially skilled.

For an example of a block center that promotes sharing skills, see Clip 2.3 at <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel/modules.html>.

## Changing and adapting materials

- Use novel materials/rotate toys
- Provide social toys
- Suggest new ideas for engaging with the materials



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### ***Speaker Notes:***

*Use interesting and novel toys and materials*—Although children enjoy their familiar toys and materials, new or novel items in the environment can increase social interactions. An excellent cost-efficient way to maintain “newness” of materials is to use a toy rotation system. A toy rotation system simply involves changing and rotating the materials available to children.

*Use toys and materials that will promote cooperation and sharing*—A number of commonly available toys and materials work best and tend to be more fun when two or more children use them together. Materials such as teeter-totters, rocking boats, wagons, and other large play items require that children coordinate their actions. For example, caregivers might replace the bikes and tricycles with wagons that one child can pull another child (or two children) in. Easels that are used in the art center for painting could be replaced with large pieces of paper taped on the classroom wall so that children can paint together.

*Offer new direction for engaging with the material*—Instead of reading a book alone, one child can hold the book and another child can turn the pages. Incorporate turn taking into the activity directions.

## Activity 3

### Modifying Activities and Materials in Your Classroom

Activity/material used in the classroom	Current use	Changes/adaptations
Puzzles	Each child works on his/her own puzzle	Partner children to work together on a puzzle



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#### ***Speaker Notes:***

- Complete the matrix by thinking about the environmental changes and adaptations you can make in your own classroom to increase and promote positive peer social interactions.
- Have the participants go around the group and share 1 or 2 things they will change in their classroom as a result of this session.

## Additional Resources

Odom, S. L., McConnell, S. R., Ostrosky, M., Peterson, C., Skellenger, A., Spicuzza, R., Chandler, L. K., & McEvoy, M. A. (1997). Play time, social time: Organizing your classroom to build interaction skills. Minneapolis: Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota. (The curriculum can be ordered at <http://ici.umn.edu/products/curricula.html>.)

Sandall, S., McLean, M. E., & Smith, B. J. (2000). DEC recommended practices in early intervention/early childhood special education. Longmont, CO: Sopris West.



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### ***Speaker Notes:***

- This slide contains additional resources participants can use to find more information on using environmental strategies to promote positive social interactions.
- Thank the participants for participating and have them complete the evaluation form, if appropriate.
- Distribute the certificate of attendance if appropriate.

# Pre-training Survey

WWBTK #6: Using Environmental Strategies to Promote Positive Social Interactions

☀ Children with what characteristics appear to be particularly at risk for difficulties with peer relationships?

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☀ What are two strategies you use to support peer interactions in your program?

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☀ How can you support children's peer interactions during classroom routines?

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☀ What are the three most pressing issues you face as an early childhood professional?

1. 

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2. 

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3. 

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# Pre-training Survey

WWBTK #6: Using Environmental Strategies to Promote Positive Social Interactions

## Demographic Information

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Describe yourself (check the boxes that best describe you):

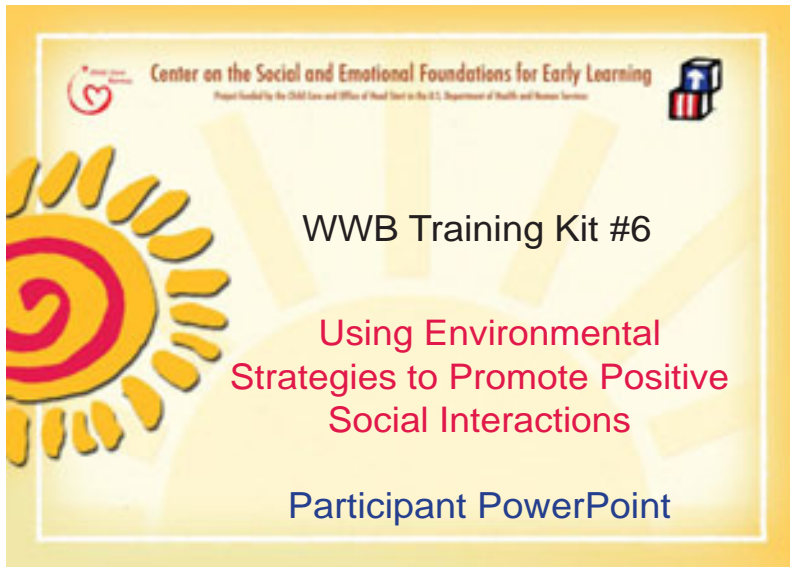
- Your gender:  Female  Male
  
- Your age:  under 30  31 to 40  41 to 50  
 51-60  61 and above
  
- Your ethnicity:  European American  Asian-Pacific  Hispanic  
 African-American  American Indian  Other (specify)\_\_\_\_\_
  
- Check your current teaching certificates:
  - Early Childhood Education
  - Elementary Education
  - Special Education
  - Other (Specify)\_\_\_\_\_
  
- Check the one that best describes your education:
  - High school or GED
  - Some college
  - Associate's degree
  - Bachelor's degree
  - Master's degree
  - Other (Specify)\_\_\_\_\_
  
- Your teaching experience:
  - How many year(s) have you taught preschoolers? \_\_\_\_\_
  - How many year(s) have you taught preschoolers with IEPs? \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for completing this survey.



# Participant Notes

## Notes



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WWB Training Kit #6

Using Environmental Strategies to Promote Positive Social Interactions

Participant PowerPoint

Why is it important to promote positive social interaction?



Environmental strategies to promote positive social interactions

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## Changing and adapting group composition

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## Changing and adapting activities

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## Notes

## Additional Resources

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## Notes

# Activity 1

## Pair-Think-Share

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### Directions:

*Read one of the following case studies, think about how the teacher could change the environment in the classroom to increase social interaction, and share your thoughts with the person next to you.*

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### **Mrs. Clara's Classroom**

It is Tuesday morning and the 15 preschoolers in Mrs. Clara's classroom are working in the centers they have chosen. Mrs. Clara has opened 3 centers: art, blocks and cars, and the writing table. The children are busy in their centers, but there are frequent outbursts as they argue over materials.

Mrs. Clara takes a moment to look around and reflect on what is going on in the classroom. She discovers that the interactions and communication occurring between children are mostly negative. Mrs. Clara knows how important positive social interactions are for her students. She decides to ask some of the other preschool teachers what she can change in the environment to promote positive interactions.

### **Mr. Rob and Ms. Laurie's Classroom**

The 20 preschoolers in Classroom 5 are busy during choice time. They are washing toys in the sensory table, playing with play dough, listening to books on tape, and making art projects. Five children are seated in bean bag chairs listening quietly to different books, while another 5 children are making paper kites with individual glue sticks, scissors, and boxes of crayons.

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# Activity 2

## Modifying Activities

WWBTK #6: Using Environmental Strategies to Promote Positive Social Interactions

### ☀️ Directions:

*Think about each of the following centers and share with the large group some ideas for designing the center for supporting positive peer interaction.*

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Centers	How will the center be arranged?	What materials are needed?	What instructions will be given to structure the activity?
Blocks and Vehicles			
Snack			
Art			
Housekeeping			
Board games			

# Activity 3

## Modifying Activities and Materials in Your Classroom

WWBTK #6: Using Environmental Strategies to Promote Positive Social Interactions

**Directions:**

*Complete the matrix by thinking about the environmental changes and adaptations you can make in your own classroom to increase and promote positive peer social interactions.*

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Activity/material used in the classroom	Current use	Changes/adaptations

# CSEFEL Training Workshop Evaluation

WWBTK #6: Using Environmental Strategies to Promote Positive Social Interactions

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Speaker(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Your position: \_\_\_\_\_

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## ☀ Circle the number that best expresses your reaction to each of the following items:

- |  |                       |   |   |   |   |                        |
|--|-----------------------|---|---|---|---|------------------------|
| 1. This topic is important to me.            | (Extremely Important) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | (Not Important at All) |
| 2. The amount of information covered was     | (Just Right)          | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | (Inadequate)           |
| 3. The information covered was clear.        | (Very Clear)          | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | (Vague)                |
| 4. The activities conducted were beneficial. | (Very)                | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | (Not at All)           |
| 5. The handouts provided were useful.        | (Very)                | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | (Not at All)           |
| 6. Overall, this presentation was            | (Very Useful)         | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | (Not Useful)           |

## ☀ Things I liked about this presentation:

## ☀ Things I would change about this presentation:

## ☀ Additional information I would like on this topic:

## ☀ New things I am going to try as a result of this workshop:

## ☀ Additional comments:

# Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning

## *Certificate of Training*

Using Environmental Strategies to Promote Positive Social Interactions

This is to certify that

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successfully completed the above training

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*Trainer*

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*Trainer*



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*Participant*

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*Date and Location*

*Additional training resources are available at: <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel/>*