# Environmental Audit

Have a look around your setting and see if you can do a setting audit.

Shadow the child in setting – What is their experience like?

As well as an environmental audit, it may also be worth doing an adult response audit; considering how the adults in the setting currently respond to situations and how these responses could be improved or optimised so that they effectively support and encourage the children in your setting. An example of an adult response audit is available on Dingley’s promise.

Some examples of considerations for an environmental audit are listed below. As discussed during the training, this list is not exclusive, and you may identify other influencing factors in your own environment for consideration.

What happens when the child first arrives? Is there a clear welcoming routine?

How are they greeted? By name, familiar adult?

Do all the children arrive at once?

Is the cloak area busy?

Are parents given time to transition child into setting in the morning and share information with staff?

Can the child bring a transitional toy/object if needed?

Do they know where to go?

Do all the children have to sit and wait for the others to arrive? Could there be an open registration?

How is the staffing organised? Do the children get a good balance between working with familiar staff and getting to know new people?

For children to feel secure and settled they need to have a special connection with at least one member of staff – a key person. However, children need opportunities to build relationships with other adults – what if their key adult is absent?

How is the space organised?

Can children access resources independently? Children can become frustrated if they can’t communicate what it is that they want.

Are there enough resources to go round, particularly for very young children who are still developing the ability to share?

How do you provide for solitary play?

Are activity areas around the room, not just the edges with empty space in the middle?

Is the main pathway through the setting well defined, so children, including those with developing movement skills, can move easily through the setting?

What is the staff interaction like?

Does the environment feel happy and supportive as well as encouraging independence?

Are other adults aware of the child’s needs? The strategies for support?

Tone of Voice- Are the adults in the setting always using a calm and measured tone of voice when supporting the children? When presenting a new activity, are they using an exciting, motivating tone to encourage the children to take part?

Consistency- Do all the team have a consistent approach to both happy behaviours and to distressed behaviour?

If there is a praise and reward structure in the setting, is it clear and used consistently by all staff?

Adaptation - Do the supporting adults adapt their language and their requests based on the developmental level of the child? Do they break down requests into smaller steps for those who need it or use pictures to support key information?

What is the daily routine?

Does the way your timetable is organised provide opportunities for children to return to their activities throughout the day without having to tidy up repeatedly? Time needs to be set aside at the end of the day for everyone to tidy up, but it should not be necessary to clear everything away at midday.

How long do children sit before snack/mealtimes? Plan the timetable so that there are not unnecessary breaks in the day.

Is the routine consistent?

How do the children know what’s happening next?

Are the activities too hard or too easy?

Who is doing the most during the activity – the adult or the child?

Think about where the child is developmentally – do you have access to developmentally appropriate toys e.g. a simple shape sorter, cause and effect toys?

Do you support schemas such as transporting, connection, enveloping, scattering and positioning?

Is there anything that may be preventing a child from accessing an activity?

Does the activity need adapting e.g. less choices?

Do they need visual prompts?

Do they need solitary access the activity?

How often are you changing activities? Keep focus activities for several days or even weeks.

Allow children to repeat activities and pursue interests in depth.

Is the space providing good stimulation without being overpowering?

One of the quickest and most effective ways to transform a setting is to de-junk! Get rid of broken and incomplete resources; reject any resources or furniture if they are unsafe or rarely used. Group resources together and label storage clearly.

Are there lots of things on the walls and hanging from the ceilings, particularly in carpet areas where focus is expected to be on the adults – sensory overload.

Could you provide a quiet ‘clear space’ for when a child is over-stimulated?

What are the toilet and changing areas like?

Are the lights too bright/dark?

Is it too noisy e.g. lots of children accessing/flushing toilets at the same time? The acoustics of bathrooms can often elevate sounds causing some children sensory overload.

Are there strong smells e.g. nappy bins, disinfectant, air fresheners? Could you open a window to reduce strong smells before the child uses?

Is the changing mat cold or sticky to touch from being disinfected? Could you use a cover on the mat for the child?

Can the child take in an item to hold during changes as a distraction?

Too light too dark?

Could you cover a window, or turn off fluorescent lights and use natural lighting when possible?

Sound

Is it too loud?

Is there music playing all the time?

Is there a quiet area that can be accessed during loud activities such as song time? Ear defenders?

Low-level noises like a buzzing fluorescent light or a humming fridge go mainly unnoticed, but some children may find these sounds overpowering and relentless.

Smell

Children can be over or under sensitive to smells. Washing powder, deodorant, air fresheners and perfumes introduce lots of different smells that may cause problems for some children.

Try working out which smells cause reactions by playing smelling games and avoid the problem scents.

Are smells from the kitchen overpowering? If their behaviour changes around lunchtime, it may be worth looking at what you could do to help this situation – opening windows, scheduling outside play