

Responding to Children's Success: Individualizing Every Day

Taken from [Training Guides for the Head Start Learning Community](#)

In this module, participants learn how to individualize all elements of their program's curriculum in response to children's individual characteristics.

Outcomes

As a result of completing this module, participants will be able to :

- Create indoor and outdoor environments that encourage the growth and development of all children, including children with disabilities;
- Offer materials and equipment that reflect children's cultures, home language, skills, needs, interests, and abilities; can be used in many different ways; and encourage growth and development through exploration, decision making, and self-exploration;
- Plan and carry out activities that support the development of children at different skill levels and encourage children to make choices and participate in their own unique ways;
- Use an approach for carrying out routines that responds to the and needs of individual children; and
- Tailor interactions to match each child's needs for guidance, support, and encouragement.

Key Concepts

The key concepts of this training activity that support the skills needed for crisis prevention include:

- It is not necessary to provide a separate set of materials or plan one-on-one activities for each child to provide an individualized program;
- Strategies for supporting each child's development can be

developed during the daily and weekly planning process and arise in response to teachable moments.

- To respond to each child's unique characteristics, Head Start staff and families can individualize the following elements of the curriculum:
 - Indoor and outdoor environments
 - Material and equipment
 - Routines and transitions
 - Schedule
 - Activities
 - Interactions

Background Information

Individualizing is an integral part of implementing a developmentally appropriate curriculum. It is an approach that Head Start staff and families can use throughout the early childhood years at home, at the center, at an FCC home, and/or during group socialization sessions. All elements of the program's curriculum can be individualized. Some examples follow.

Individualized Elements of a Child Development Program

An individualized *environment* allows all children, including those with disabilities, to

- Move freely without bumping into objects or other people
- Choose and replace materials on their own
- Take part in activities that support development in all domains

Materials and equipment that support individualizing:

- Respond to a range of skills and interests
- Reflect and support children's cultures and home language
- Offer challenges that are not too difficult for frustrating



- Encourage exploration and self-expression
- Can be used in different ways by various children
- Can be adapted for children with disabilities

Planned *activities* can support individualizing by allowing children to:

- Choose which materials to use
- Decide how they want to use the materials
- Take part at their own skill and ability levels
- Choose to participate or not to participate
- Express their own ideas and feelings

A *schedule* can support individualizing when it:

- Is flexible
- Responds to *teachable moments*
- Reflects children's needs and development stages

Adult interactions with children should match each child's need for guidance, adaptations, support, and encouragement. It is important to observe children to learn when and how to interact with them in ways that foster growth and development.

Developmentally Appropriate Practices Support Individualizing

In most instances, individualizing takes place when staff and families use developmentally appropriate practices. For example, if a child seems ready to learn to ride a tricycle, staff and the family can work together to provide the tricycle and a place to ride it, offer encouragement, and build on the child's interest.

Many practices typically used by staff and families reflect an individualized approach. For example staff and families can:



- Provide materials such as blocks, pots and pans, and dress-up clothes that children can use in different ways and according to their abilities, interests, and skills
- Introduce new materials and activities in response to children's changing needs, interests, and skill levels
- Offer outdoor play opportunities in an environment that includes a variety of equipment and activity choices
- Plan small group activities that include built-in opportunities for children to decide how they want to participate
- Reflect the children's cultures and home languages in play materials, songs and stories, books and tapes, activities, labels, and signs
- Use a flexible approach to routines and transitions so that a child can eat when hungry or finish a painting before getting ready for the next activity
- Include large blocks of time in the daily schedule when children can decide what to do, what materials and equipment to use, and with whom to play
- Use positive guidance techniques that match a child's temperament and ability to use self-control
- Tailor the level of encouragement and support in response to each child's ability to handle frustration and challenges

Head Start staff and families probably use many of these practices and others that respond to each child as an individual. It is important to adapt the curriculum to fit the needs of the child, rather than expect young children to change so that they will fit the curriculum.

Including Children with Disabilities

Head Start is committed to including children with disabilities in all aspects of the program. Staff work with families, the education coordinator, the disabilities services coordinator, the Local Education Agency (LEA) or early intervention program representative, specialists, and other consultants to make adjustments that allow children to learn in the least restrictive environment and to provide materials that encourage the child's development. Here are examples of accommodations to the environment, materials, and equipment that specialists such as occupational or physical therapists might recommend:

- Adjust tables so that wheelchair arms fit underneath. If tables are not adjustable, raise legs by placing blocks under them, shorten legs by sawing off pieces, or exchange tables with another group. If tables are raised, provide tall stools so that other children can also sit comfortably.
- Use bolster, wedges, or platforms, indoors and outdoors, to increase the comfort of children with mobility impairments.
- Use puzzles with knots for children with fine motor impairments.
- Use large-sized books and magnifying glasses for children with visual impairments.
- Place items on the floor or ground for children who are most comfortable at this level.
- Arrange the furniture and equipment so that there is sufficient space for a child to turn and maneuver a wheelchair or walk with crutches.
- Provide eating utensils with special grips and edges. Offer alternatives to water fountains (such as drinking water dispensers).
- Apply masking tape to brush handles and crayons or insert handles through a slit in a small rubber ball so that children can get a firm grip.
- Make a book of textured fabrics to provide tactile experiences.
- Adjust easel heights to accommodate all children.
- Provide a ramp leading from indoor to outdoor areas for children who use wheelchairs or who cannot easily use stairs.
- Provide computer adaptations such as voice-activated programs for children who have problems with manual dexterity.
- Install a visual system, such as flashing lights, that can be used to get the attention of a child who has a hearing impairment.
- Use containers mounted on legs and hand-held tools for gardening so that children with mobility impairments can plant, weed, and pick crops.
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Specialists might also recommend specific accommodations related to the schedule, routines and transitions, and interactions with children. Such accommodations should be tailored to address the goals in a child's Individual Family Services Plan (IFSP) or Individual Education Program (IEP).

Test Questions:

1. *Individualizing is an integral part of*

- a. the early stages of bringing a child into Head Start.
- b. each staff's personality in contributing to the environment of the center.
- c. implementing a developmentally appropriate curriculum.
- d. only a disabled child's Head Start program.

2. Individualizing elements of a child's developmental program would include

- a. a child's schedule, activities and the IEP.
- b. a child's environment, activities and family.
- c. materials and equipment.
- d. the Individual Family Service Plan and the Individual Education Program.

3. An example of a developmentally supportive practice to support individualizing would be

- a. planning small group activities that include built-in opportunities for children to decide how they want to participate.
- b. offering outdoor play opportunities starting with a little equipment and few activity choices until the child masters these.
- c. keeping routines and schedules firm to provide security and accountability to the child.
- d. having children with special physical needs attend special classes.

4. Which item listed below would not be considered appropriate for inclusion of children with disabilities?

- a. Have all the children with disabilities in the same room that is adapted especially for them.
- b. Use large-sized books and magnifying glasses for children with visual impairments.
- c. Provide eating utensils with special grips and edges.
- d. Use puzzles with knots for children with fine motor impairments.

1.c, 2.c, 3.a, 4.a