Identify Characteristics of a Nurturing Environment

JUST AS PLANTS need water and sunlight to grow, people need food, water, and rest to survive. Humans also need extra care and nurturing to reach their full potential. A nurturing environment is one that meets individuals' physical, social, emotional, and cognitive needs. In this unit, you will learn about the importance and characteristics of a nurturing environment for young children and older adults.

Objective:

☑ Describe the importance and identify characteristics of a nurturing environment for young children and older adults.

Key Terms:

🔑
aestethics
affection
attachment
autonomy
nurture

Nurturing Environment

To **nurture** means to support development. Children and older adults require a nurturing environment, where their physical, social, emotional, and cognitive needs are met.

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IMPORTANCE

A nurturing environment provides many benefits that cannot be measured. It promotes learning by boosting critical-thinking and problem-solving skills. A safe, nurturing environment also encourages independence. Children explore the classroom to pursue their own interests and create learning opportunities. Older adults remain autonomous for as long as possible. **Autonomy** is the act of making one's own decisions. Adults feel useful when they do things for themselves, and making decisions helps keep their minds sharp.

A nurturing environment also promotes a feeling of security. Participants form an **attachment**, or a bond, to a caregiver. Children and older adults are more likely to join in activities when they feel secure. Participants feel valued and respected.

CHARACTERISTICS

A nurturing environment must be safe. Young children should be able to explore the classroom and play without danger. This will allow them to pursue their own interests, thus encouraging independence. Children will be able to create learning opportunities with minimal adult guidance.

Older adults should feel safe trying things for themselves. Safety measures, such as grab bars, handrails, and nonslip floors, may make older people feel more confident about moving around and taking care of their own needs with minimal help.

Age-appropriate equipment and activities are necessary parts of a nurturing environment. Rocking chairs provide comfort for people of all ages. Older adults can soothe themselves, while caregivers can hold children in rocking chairs to calm and comfort them.

Expressive materials, such as arts and crafts supplies, are also vital in a nurturing environment. Likewise, puppets provide an emotional outlet for children. Sensory activities, such as those involving sand and water tables, are calming for both children and older adults.

A nurturing environment provides many learning opportunities. Participants can learn about art, music, crafts, or even computers. Free time allows children or older adults to pursue their interests and make decisions. Both age groups should have unstructured free time each day.

Good caregivers are essential to a nurturing environment. Caregivers should show enthusiasm through their facial expressions and tone of voice when working

FIGURE 1. Some equipment, such as a rocking chair, can be used by people of all ages.

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with participants. A caregiver should also show **affection**, or fondness, by smiling or sitting close to a person. A caregiver could hold or hug a child or pat an older person on the arm or back to show affection.

Nurturing caregivers also take an interest in their students or clients. They can comment on a participant's work or ask questions. Caregivers should initiate conversation and make eye contact. They should listen empathetically as well, especially when working with older adults.

Aesthetics, or a beautiful appearance, is another important aspect of a nurturing environment. Beautiful spaces that include delicate items, natural elements, and artwork are nurturing. The surroundings should be comfortable and inviting, with places for participants to sit together.

Summary:

People need a nurturing environment that meets their physical, social, emotional, and cognitive needs. A positive, nurturing environment promotes independence and a feeling of security, as children learn about the world around them. The surroundings should be safe, with age-appropriate equipment and materials. Caregivers should be caring, enthusiastic, and affectionate.

Checking Your Knowledge:

1. What human needs are met through nurturing?
2. What are some benefits of a nurturing environment?
3. What are some characteristics of a nurturing environment?
4. What are some ways a caregiver can be nurturing?
5. How can the aesthetics of the environment be nurturing?

Expanding Your Knowledge:

Invite a child care or preschool teacher to visit your classroom. Ask the teacher to discuss the ways in which his or her classroom nurtures students. Be prepared to ask specific questions about the environment and caregivers and how they nurture students of different ages.

Web Links:

Infant Mental Health

http://infant-toddler-health.suite101.com/article.cfm/infant_mental_health

National Association for the Education of Young Children

http://www.naeyc.org/