

Visual Clutter

Relevant Satellite Accreditation Standards

II. Physical Environment, Equipment, and Materials

B. Materials and equipment are developmentally suited and appealing to all children in the group.

6. Materials are located close to the place children are likely to use them, and children are able to find and replace materials on their own. For example:

- Shelves are uncluttered so that when a child removes an item, s/he can see where to replace it.



*Photos of Sarah's Littles Adventures in Playschool in Waukesha (Program Owner Sarah Cohan).

The Basics

What is clutter? Clutter describes a space filled with physical items in a disorganized manner and/or of an overwhelming amount. In other words, cluttered spaces have too much— on the walls, the ground, and the shelves:

- Decorations that **overwhelm**.
- Furniture **impeding** navigation.
- Too many toys and materials **inhibiting** play.
- **Bright, distracting colors**.

How does it affect development? Children's brains are still developing top-down control over their visual attention. Most adults can easily focus on a visual target, such as the bananas in the grocery store, while ignoring the apples, pears, and grapes. Children see and process all incoming visual information. In cluttered early learning environments, children's brains are strained, and research has shown this to affect attention, behavior, and well-being. Well organized, uncluttered spaces can be a tool for promoting learning, responsibility, and independence.

How do I declutter my space? The first step in assessing your space is to observe how children are interacting with it. Are the decorations meaningful to children's learning and placed at eye level? Do children feel confident in choosing activities, engaging in play, and cleaning up materials? Are infants and toddlers able to stay focused in play? Next, get creative with storage. Are there ways you could organize your materials to reduce visual input, such as opaque storage bins, curtains, or fewer superficial decorations? Decluttering your indoor and outdoor spaces will help create a calmer, more engaging learning environment.

I want to learn more!

- [Tips for Teachers: Designing Environments](#)
- [Family Child Care Environment Checklist](#)
- [Designs for Living and Learning](#)
- [Less is More: Taking Distractions Out of the Physical Environment](#) (available to [NAEYC Members Only](#))