

Space for Active Learning: What's the Big Deal?

Why Do We Need a Space for Active Learning?

The child needs the opportunity to experience things and events in their own way and at their own pace. They need to know that everything that happens in the Space for Active Learning is caused by them, not another person. This distancing from others is crucial for the child to learn that they are separate from other people. Eventually they will understand that symbols, words, and signs can represent things, people, events and experiences. The Space for Active Learning (SAL) gives the child more direct and consistent access to his surroundings.

In a **Space for Active Learning** (SAL) a child may move her arm, head, leg or body and cause a bell to ring, or a hair brush to tap their hand. This is a way to begin to learn about objects: how they feel, how they move, whether they are cool or warm, and where they are in space. The **SAL** gives a child a chance to problem-solve at their own pace.

Things to Remember:

- A child can enter the **Space for Active Learning** on their own or with your help.
- Stay nearby for safety. Observe, take notes, read, wait.
- Let the child find things without you helping.
- You can talk about it later. Talking or loud activities may distract a child from exploring in the **SAL**.
- A child should be in SAL multiple times a day
- Sessions in an SAL should be at least 15 minutes and up to 40-45 minutes.
- Some children do almost nothing that you can observe for the first 15 minutes!
- Add or subtract objects based on the child's stimulation needs and feedback.
- Wait for them to initiate. Even if it takes 15-20 minutes!

Progression of Active Learning in a SAL

These steps lead to the formation of concepts.

1. The child's unplanned movement results in awareness of items.
2. The child intentionally touches items by batting or even grasping them.
3. The child begins grasping and letting go of the items or keeping hold of them.
4. When the child begins to repeat the action, it is a surprise and then once they anticipate what happens with the repetition, the child may respond with vocalizations and facial expressions of pleasure or excitement.

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5. The child begins to handle the items in a different way. They may notice other things that they didn't in the beginning such as the sound of the item. They may begin to integrate two sensory modalities such as kinesthetic and auditory. This may turn into a game for the child. Other sensory modalities may be integrated too, such as smell or vision.
6. The child begins to compare the qualities of items: what sounds do the items make? How they are visually the same and different, if the child has sufficient functional vision to compare. How does this one feel, compared to this one?

Considerations and Guidelines for What to Place in the SAL

Spaces for Active Learning (SAL) need to be an enjoyable place for the child/youth to be of benefit. Find out what items the child likes first by trying different items. There should be enough items that the child/youth has a choice of what to do in the SAL.

The items you place in the SAL should have varying qualities of:

- Sizes (large, small, but should fit easily in child's hand)
- texture (smooth, rough, bumpy, metal, wood)
- touch (with hands, feet, mouth)
- weight (heavy, light)
- temperature (cold, warm)
- shape changing (Hoberman ball, gel/water filled balloons)
- smell (invigorating, calming sachets - be sure the child/youth has no allergies)
- taste
- vibration (corrugated cardboard, cake cooling rack)