

# Peaceful Environments

A room is an open space that can become anything depending on what is put inside. Add bright, busy carpets, slot machines, free drinks, and you have created a space where people come to stay out all night and give their money away. On the other hand, add muted earth tones, calming music, and massage therapy, and you have created a space where people feel relaxed and nurtured. When setting up an environment for young children we need to keep this idea in mind in considering what type of environment we want to create. Do we want to create a space where they will be up all night, or a space where they will feel relaxed? Careful consideration should be taken for every element that goes into the room: furniture, plants, animals, lighting, colors, smells, food, play/ learning tools, people, and how they are all organized. Entering an environment is an emotional experience and can leave a lasting impression based on our sensory input.

I had the honor of accompanying my grandma to her church when I was 6. I remember the smell of the wooden walls and the way the light shone through the stained glass windows bringing streams of light into the dark room. I remember the taps of water on our forehead as we entered. But what I remember most is the part when we shook hands with the people around us and looked into their eyes with a smile to say, "Peace be with you, and also with you." I found comfort in this phrase and enjoyed stepping out of my shyness for this event. It's such a simple phrase and yet as a child from a chaotic home, it was the human interaction and message I craved. The idea of peace has stuck with me throughout life and has become my religion.

I am now the owner of a childcare center tucked into an old schoolhouse from the 1800s. The moment I walked into the school I could feel a spirit of community that sung to me, and I could instantly visualize what the room could become with calming color on the walls, natural materials, furniture, and toys. Remove the shades from the windows to let in the natural light for the plants to drink in. Bring in all of the comforts of home with a sofa for parents to read to the children before they rush off for their busy day. Add child-sized dining tables where we could enjoy meals together, and a large garden to grow and harvest our own food together. I began building furniture and repurposing things I had hung on to. All of the work went smoothly with a strong will to create community. Teachers joined who felt a strong connection with the idea of peace in the lives of children. Now we take walks to visit our neighbors on occasion and have built a neighborhood book box to extend our idea of peace to our greater community. It is a place where children, teachers and their family feel welcome and enjoy spending time.

People often mistake the schoolhouse for a church

because of the tall bell tower. Inside there are no stained glass windows or fragrant wooden walls, but within, our walls contain a deep seeded hope for a peaceful future for all of the children of the world. This hope is the heart of our peaceful environment.



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