



## *Why is the Natural Environment So Important?*

Have you ever noticed that “home field advantage” plays a major role in who wins a sporting event? Or that a football team in Colorado has the endurance to play strong for the whole game while a visiting team from Florida is fatigued after the first quarter and has to receive oxygen on the sideline?

Have you ever tried cooking a meal in someone else’s kitchen? The oven doesn’t heat as quickly, there is not enough counter space, and you can’t figure out where they keep the sugar. You probably wish you were in your own home where you know where everything is kept and the intricacies of the appliances are just the way you like them.

These situations illustrate the importance of the natural environment in everyday events.

The natural environment is also important in therapeutic intervention for young children. When the therapist comes to the home or childcare center and integrates the intervention activities into the normal, everyday life of the child, the child’s natural environment is not significantly altered. The child and the caregiver do what they do, the way they want to do it. The family does not have to purchase hundreds of dollars worth of equipment either. The therapist simply guides the caregiver to select pieces of furniture or toys that the child is already used to, and incorporates them into the intervention activities. These activities are selected from the things the family does... watching football, cooking, or whatever.

The natural environment is more than the place that activities occur... it’s also how the caregivers and the child do them. It’s much easier for the caregiver and the child to regularly perform the intervention activities when the activities do not significantly alter their natural environment or their normal daily routine. Incorporating activities into daily events such as bath-time or mealtime is a way that therapists introduce intervention activities without altering the natural environment or the normal daily routine of both the child and the caregiver. Therapists join the child and families natural environment supporting their “home field advantage.”

Natural environments are so important in the therapeutic intervention of young children that Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Act states that to the maximum extent, early intervention services, which includes therapies, must be provided in the natural environments of the child.