

From Vision to Reality: Trauma-Informed Design in Action at Rise Early Learning



Introductions



Kylie Cooper

Executive Director



Heidi Neumueller

AIA, NCARB, LEED AP

Principal
Senior Project Manager

Cuningham



Hailey Wrasman

CID, IIDA, WELL AP

Associate
Senior Interior Designer

Cuningham

Learning Objectives + Agenda

1 Foundations of Trauma-Informed Design (TID)

Explore the history and principles to TID, with a focus on its critical role in fostering student well-being.

2 Trauma-Informed Design Strategies

Learn how TID principles influence both the design process and final solutions, addressing safety, security, and personal agency while fostering a sense of belonging.

3 Third Spaces for Connection and Self-Regulation

Identify how informal, shared environments within a childcare program can support self-regulation, co-regulation, and meaningful family engagement

4 Assessing Impact Through Post-Occupancy Evaluation

Understand how to measure the effectiveness of trauma-informed design strategies, gathering feedback to refine and improve learning environments over time.



RISE EARLY LEARNING CENTER



Play



Equity



**Trauma-Informed
Design**



RISE EARLY
LEARNING CENTER

High-quality, trauma-informed early childhood education for 62 young children & their families



Collocated within a 120 unit affordable housing complex with 50% 2 or 3 bedroom units



Wrap-around family supports internally and through partnership with Way to Grow

Rise Early Demographics, Year 2

- 51% single-parent households
- Average household size: 3.4
- 38% families over AMI (\$95,000+ annual income)
- 62% high-needs families
- 30% of families live in the immediate building



Quality Workforce = Quality Care

- Centering adult/educator wellness leads to higher quality of care for children and families
 - Physical supports against common injuries (hearing loss, overstimulation, repetitive stress injuries, urinary tract infections)
 - Quiet spaces for prep work, conferences, and break-time
- 91% educator retention rate
- Pay parity with the local school district (\$49,000 average salary vs. \$27,768 statewide average)
- Ongoing coaching, professional development, and prep time paired with low ratios



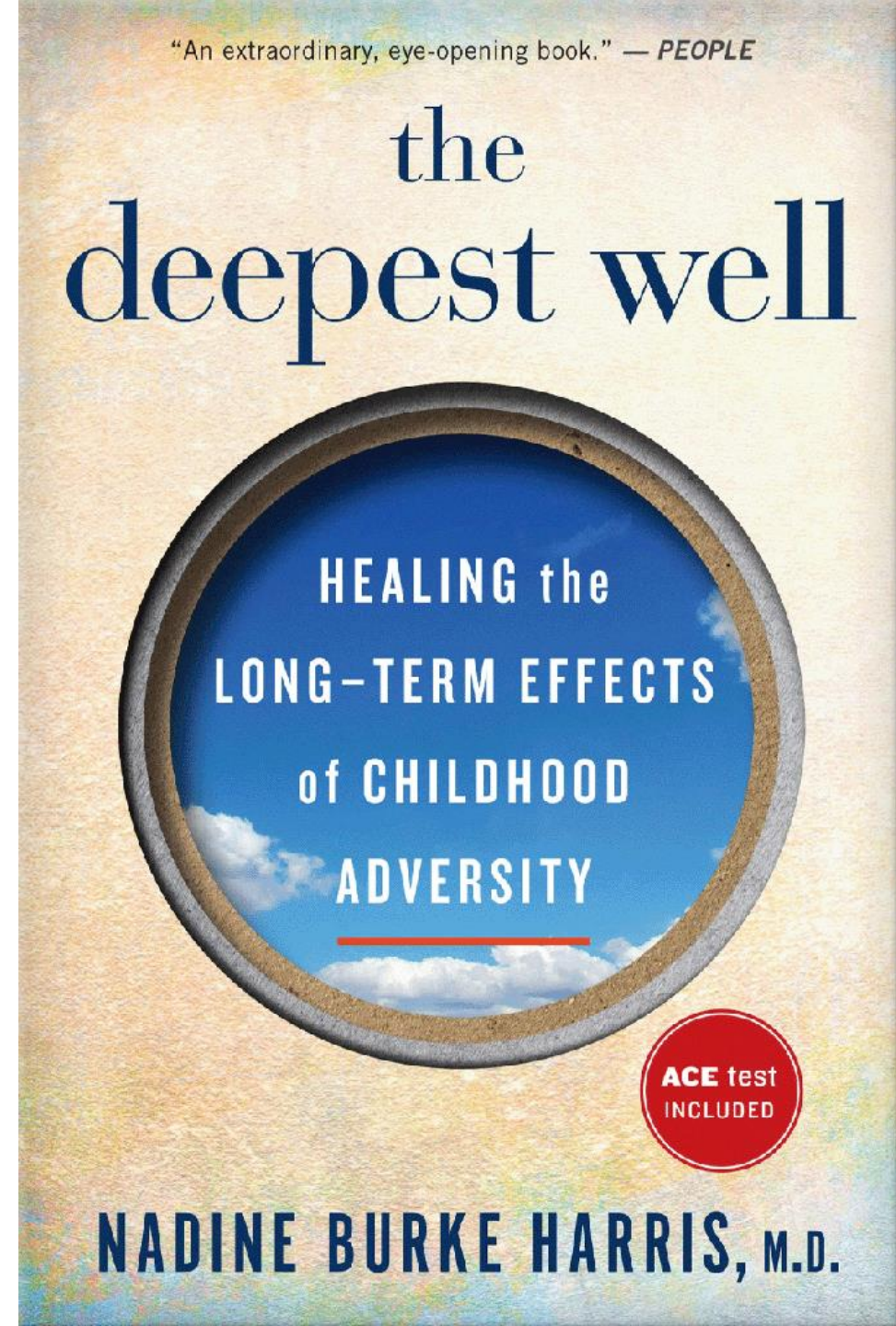
“Our hope is to create a community of inquiry, where children and educators alike are empowered to wonder together and pursue their curiosities. In the context of these meaningful experiences and investigations, teachers support and deepen children’s exploration of math, language and literacy, science, social studies and the arts.

This learning takes place in the context of our relationships with each other and our encounters with the world.”

-Rukia Rogers

Collective Reading

- “Early experiences literally shape the brain” (146)
- “The most effective way to rewire the brain is to implement **early interventions** that help to prevent the stress response from becoming dysregulated and that support practices that buffer the stress response. By doing this you give the brain the greatest opportunity to grow in new and healthy ways...such as: **sleep, exercise, nutrition, meditation.**” (146)
- “...the data suggests that if a child grows up in a stressful community environment **but has a well-supported and healthy caregiver**, he or she is much more likely to stay in the tolerable stress zone as opposed to the toxic stress zone.” (149)



Latané

Schools That Heal



WISE

DESIGN FOR BELONGING

HM
683
.W57
2022

Steve Maslin **Designing Mind-Friendly Environments**



PETER
BLOCK

COMMUNITY

THE STRUCTURE
OF BELONGING

HM
756
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2018

FOSTERING RESILIENT LEARNERS  Kristin Souers with Pete Hall



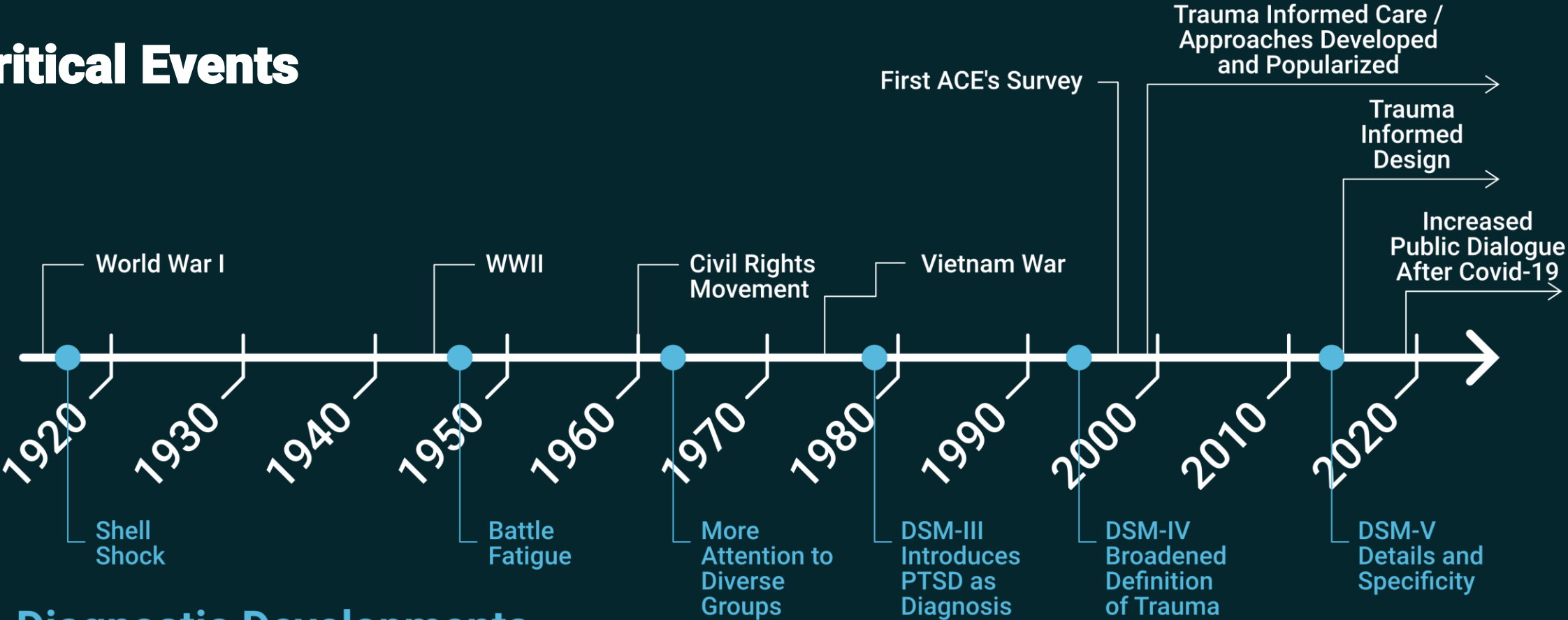
THE HAPPY DESIGN TOOLKIT

Ben Channon



Foundations of Trauma Informed Design

Critical Events



Diagnostic Developments

Rest

Talk Therapy

Group Therapy

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Trauma Informed Approaches to System Design

Treatment Developments

Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 2014. Appendix C Historical Account of Trauma. In: Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services: Treatment Improvement Protocol (TIP) Series, No. 57. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.



“Individual trauma results from an **event, series of events, or set of circumstances** that is **experienced** by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has **lasting adverse effects** on the individual’s functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual **well-being.**”

SAMHSA’s Concept of Trauma



Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Extreme stress experienced between ages 0-17 categorized into three groups: abuse, neglect, and household challenges



ACE Categories

1. Emotional / Psychological Abuse
2. Physical Abuse
3. Sexual Abuse
4. Parents in Abusive Relationship
5. Household Substance Abuse
6. Mental Illness in Household
7. Incarcerated Householder Member
8. Emotional Neglect
9. Physical Neglect
10. Parental Separation or Divorce
11. Bullying *

* added after original survey, assessed with CDC Bully Scale Survey

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A stable environment can
minimize the impact of stress

Educators + ACEs

Early childhood educators are more likely to have experienced significant ACEs

*22% for early childhood educators vs.
16% of the general population*



**About 16% of children under 6 years
have clinically significant mental
health problems that require clinical
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Most present with dysregulated emotional or behavioral patterns including anger, aggression, or anxiety that interfere with a child's ability to participate in family and community activities

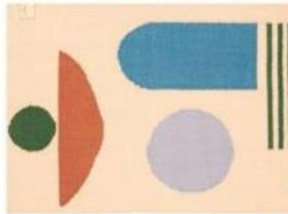
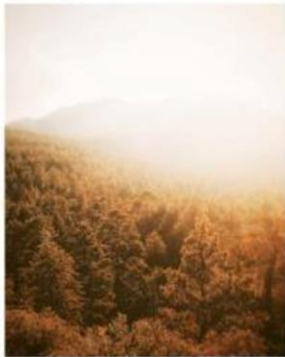


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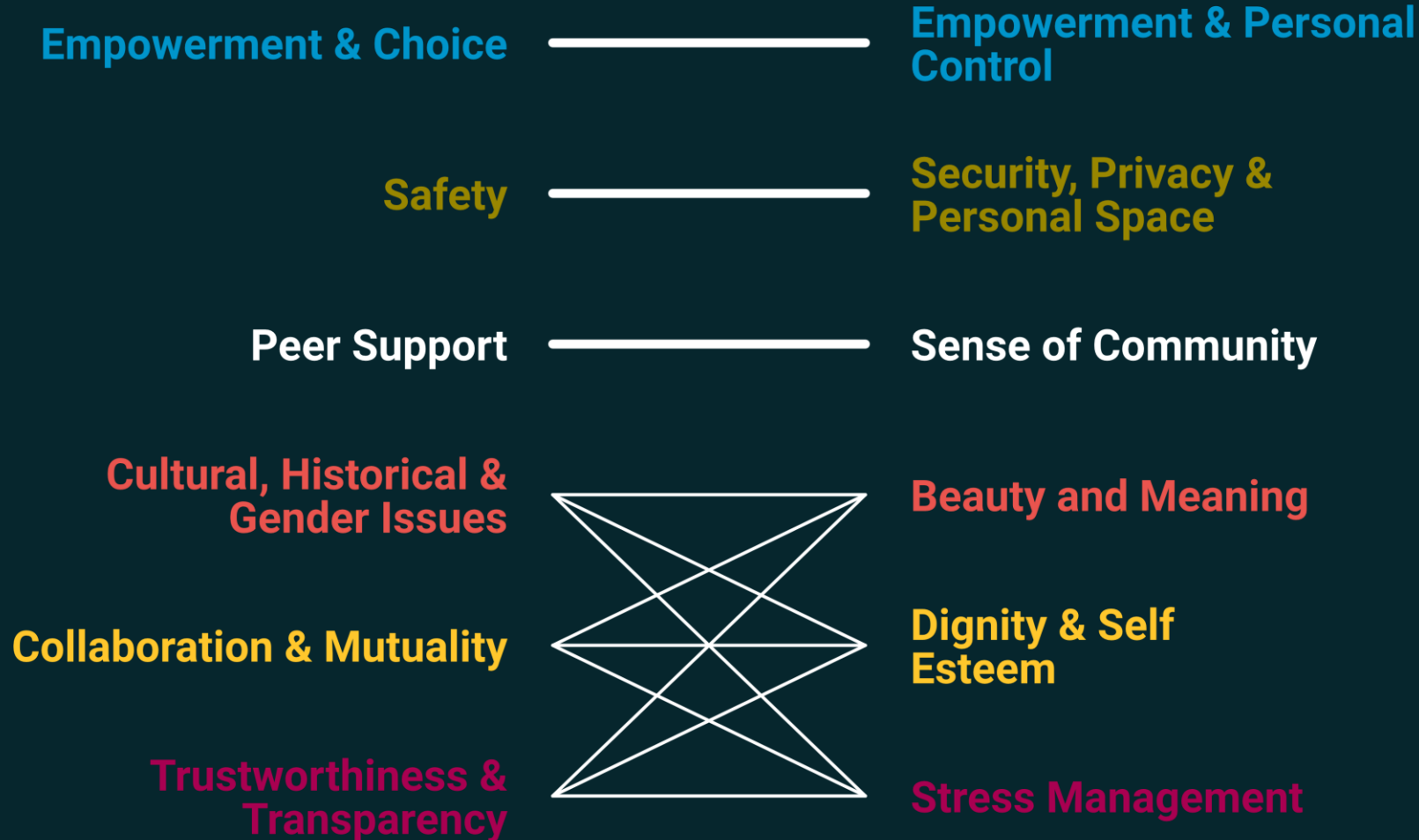
At Rise Early – 85% of the 2025 graduating class had an individualized education plan (IEP), 3 had previously been expelled from another early learning program.



Trauma-Informed Design Strategies

SAMHSA's 6 Principles to a Trauma-Informed Approach

DRH 6 Principles for Trauma-Informed Design



Empowerment + Personal Control

Encourage individual agency, welcome self-expression and offer choice for occupants

Safety, Privacy + Personal Space

Establish a perceived sense of safety beyond basic safety making occupants feel secure and comfortable

Sense of Community

Create spaces that encourage collaboration and togetherness to achieve a sense of belonging

Beauty + Meaning

Honor culture and identity while creating spaces that spark and nurture imagination, hope and aspiration

Dignity + Self Esteem

Celebrate individual's inherent worth, communicating positivity, emphasizing strengths, and maximizing potential

Stress Management

Cultivate a calm ambiance that supports relaxation, self-soothing, and coping

Passive

Spaces designed to be **less likely to trigger** trauma-based reactions by the nature of what is included in them and what is not

Intervening

Spaces designed to help those who are currently experiencing a trauma-based reaction to **recover in a healthy and supported manner**

Passive

Daylighting
Biophilia
Good acoustics
Favorable sightlines
Variety and choice
Adjustable lighting
Equitable access

Intervening

Nooks
Window seats and views
Retreat spaces
Sensory experiences
Space for movement
Soft furnishings
Outdoor access

Questions



What does it mean to feel protected in a space?

Where do learners like to go to feel safe and calm?

How can learners feel a sense of control and identity in a space?

What types of spaces or experiences maximize discovery and learning?

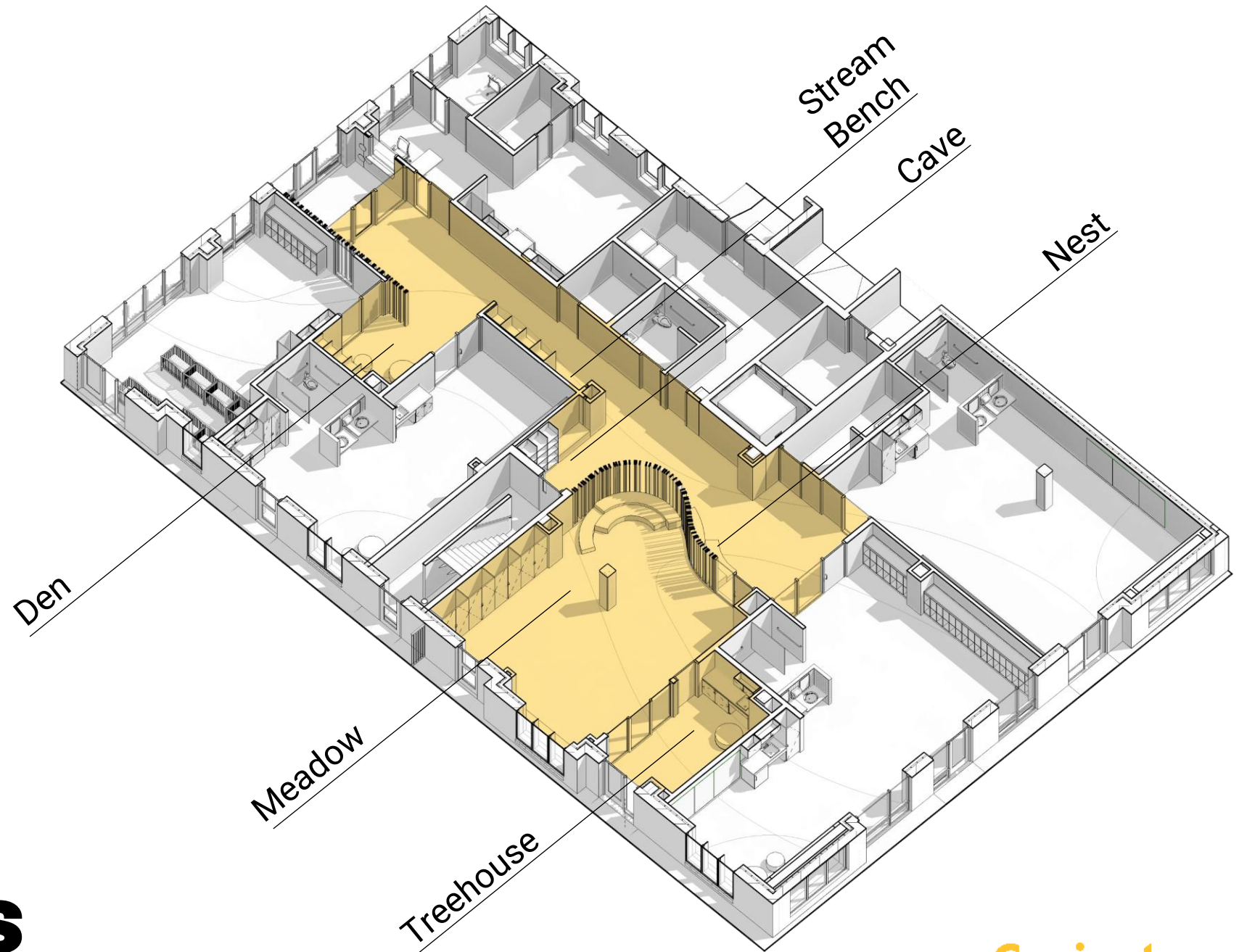
What types of spaces encourage interaction for all?

How can spaces make staff feel supported?

Responses



Leveraging Third Spaces



Third Spaces and Regulation



**Child has experiences in
Third Spaces
(*when regulated*)**

**Bring small group to
Third Space at early
signs of stress
(*before dysregulation*)**

**Child chooses to go
to a Third Space
(*when dysregulated*)**

Activities in small groups or one-on-one



**A quieter
space at early
signs of stress**



Space for movement and regulation



Assessing Impact through Post Occupancy Evaluations

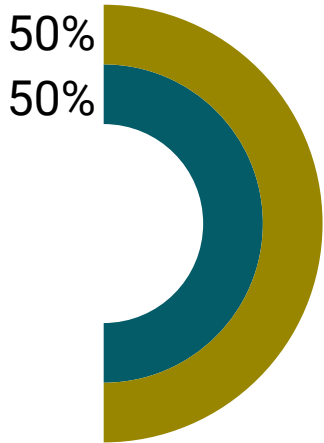
Staff Surveys

- The space allows me to make choices about how I work and interact with children. ————— **Empowerment & Personal Control**
- The design includes spaces that celebrate individual achievements, strengths, and contributions.
- The lighting supports a comfortable and relaxing environment. ————— **Stress Management**
- Sound levels are well-managed.
- The design of the space fosters positive interactions and a sense of camaraderie among staff, children, and caregivers / families. ————— **Sense of Community**
- There are spaces for relationship-building between staff and children. ————— **Dignity & Self-Esteem**
- The design of the space makes me feel valued and respected.
- The environment supports children's confidence and self-expression.
- The design of the space reflects and celebrates culture and identity of our community. ————— **Beauty & Meaning**
- The environment inspires creativity, imagination, and open-ended play.
- There are areas that provide privacy when needed. ————— **Safety, Privacy & Personal Space**
- The space provides a balance of open, visible areas and more enclosed, retreat-like spaces.

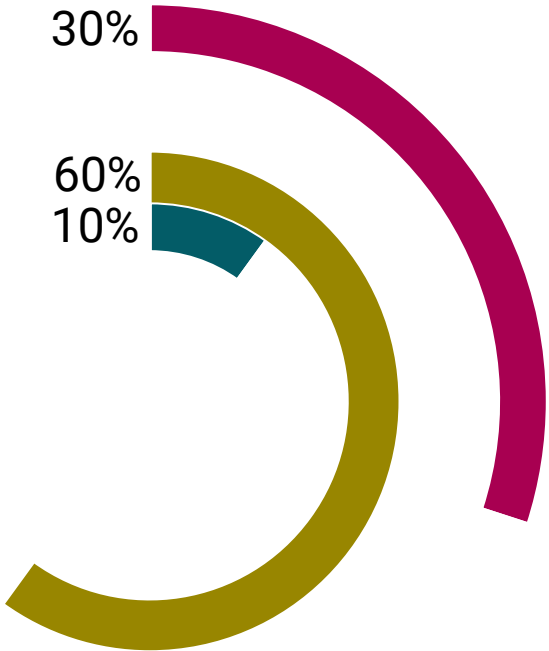
Empowerment & Personal Control

The space allows me to make choices about how I work and interact with children.

The physical environment supports children in expressing themselves and making choices about their activities.



100% agree



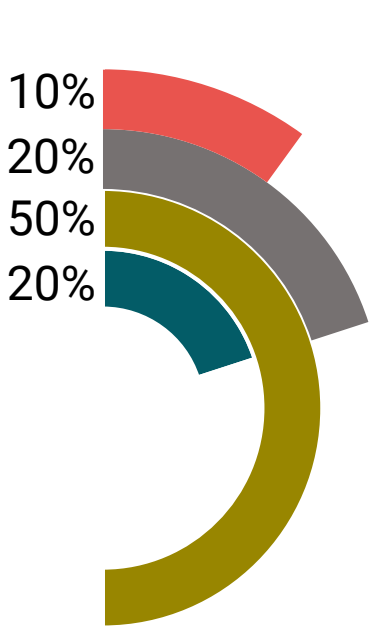
70% agree





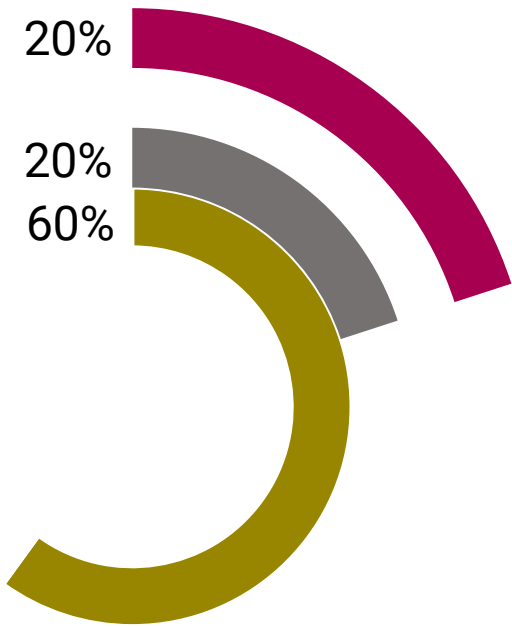
Stress Management

The space provides calm and soothing options to help reduce my stress.



70% agree

Heated floor areas support child self-regulation and comfort.



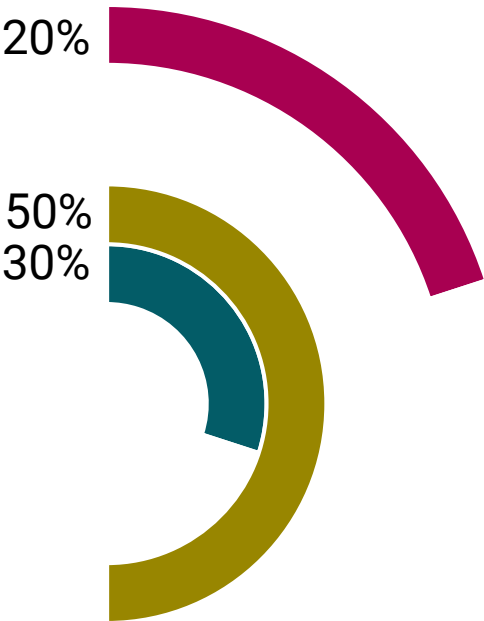
60% agree





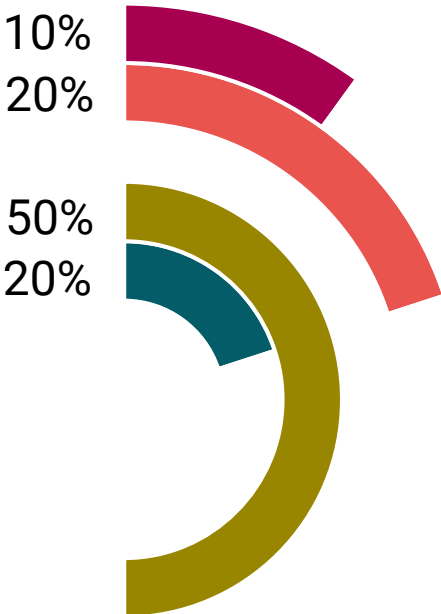
Sense of Community

There are spaces for relationship-building between staff and children.



80% agree

The layout and design encourage social connection while allowing for individual retreat when needed.



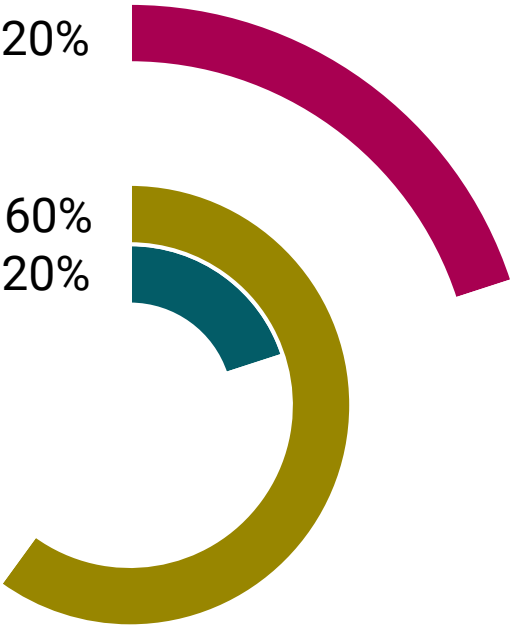
70% agree





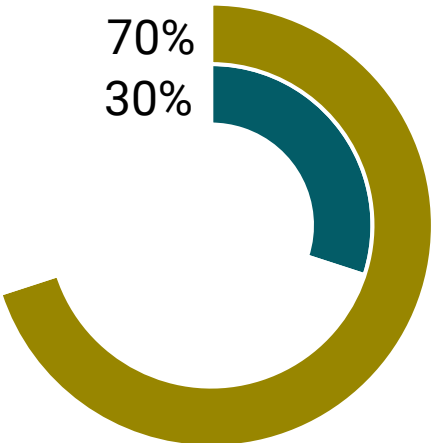
Beauty + Meaning

The environment inspires creativity, imagination, and open-ended play.



80% agree

Artwork, colors, and materials used in the space contribute to a meaningful and uplifting atmosphere.



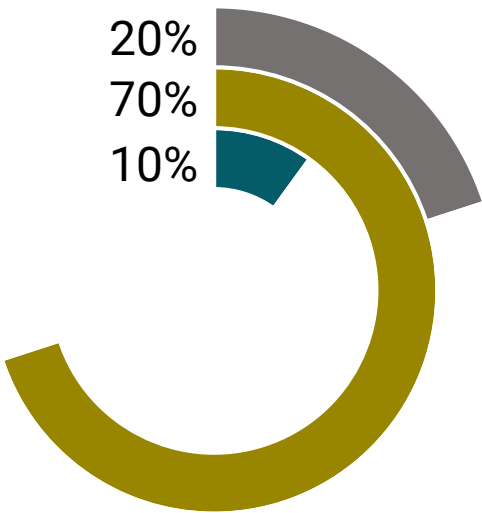
100% agree





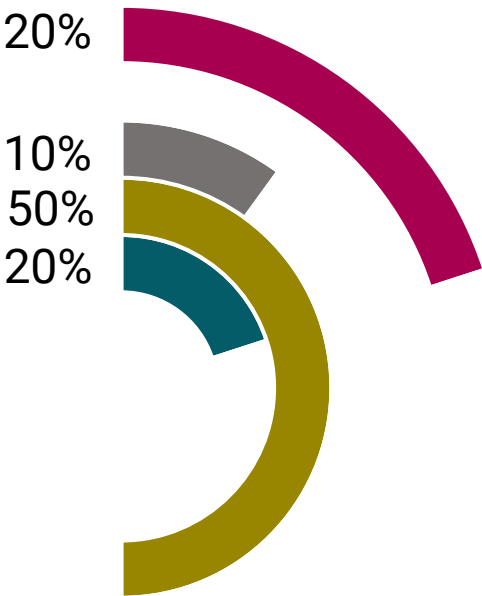
Dignity + Self-Esteem

The design of the space makes me feel valued and respected.



80% agree

The environment supports children’s confidence and self-expression.



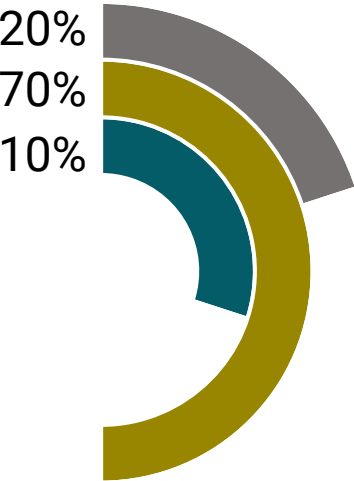
70% agree





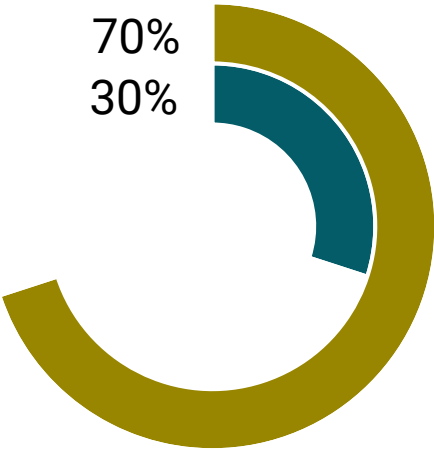
Safety, Privacy + Personal Space

The design of the space makes me feel physically safe and emotionally secure.



80% agree

The design of the space supports staff in creating a sense of security and emotional safety for children.

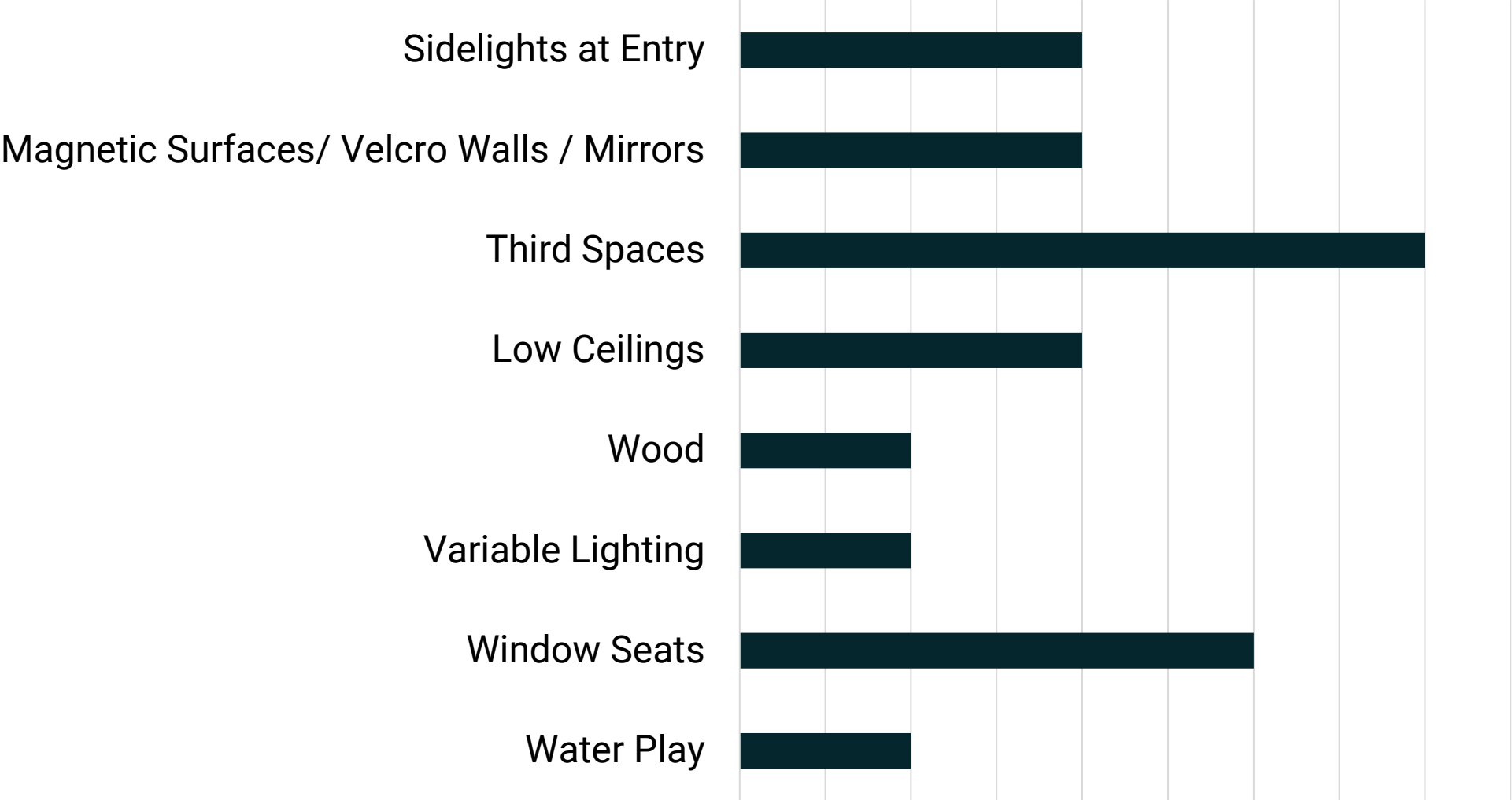


100% agree

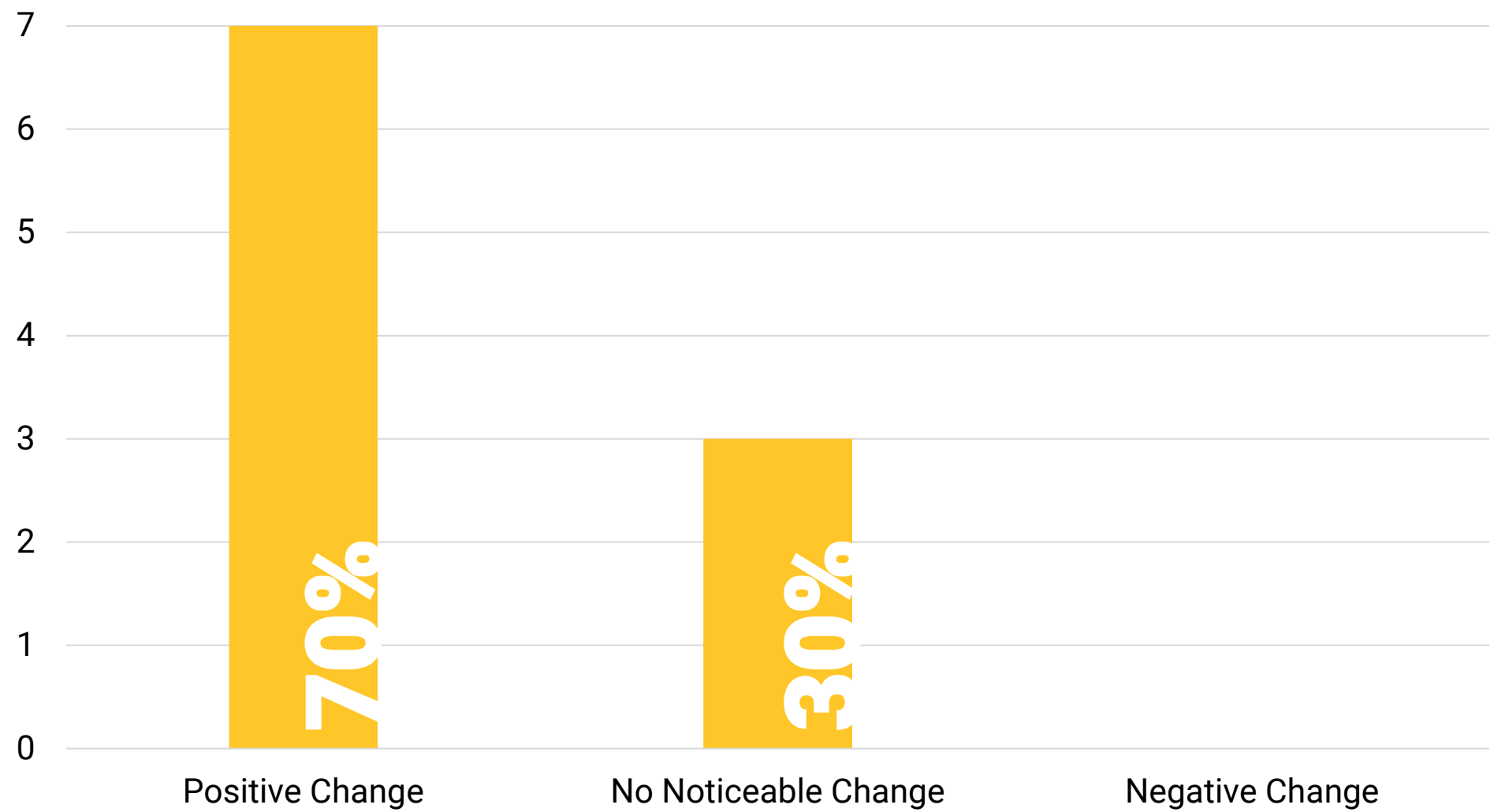




What specific design elements have had the most positive impact on your experience?



Since moving into the space, have you noticed any changes in child behavior, engagement, or self-regulation?



Positive Childhood Experiences + Outcomes

33% of parents noted improvements to mental health

16 parents experienced a raise, promotion, or new job with higher earning potential

7 parents entered and/or completed a job training or degree-seeking program

100% of children graduated kindergarten ready in 2024





What are you curious about?



Cunningham

Thank you!



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