

Ideas for Materials/Activities within Centers

Art

- Markers
- Crayons
- Scissors
- Glue Sticks
- Paper
- Colored Paper
- Easel with paint/paint smocks
- Magazines to cut
- Catalogs to cut
- Fabric pieces, ribbon pieces
- Easel
- Paint
- Playdough & tools
- Fingerpaint
- Stencils
- Materials to glue (buttons, sequins, seeds, leaves, etc.)
- Glitter
- Yarn
- Hole punchers
- Pattern scissors
- Colored tape
- Colored macaroni
- Scotch tape
- Stamps/Stamp pad
- Foam shapes
- Chalk

If children have difficulty participating:

- Provide physical boundaries to the project, put paper in a tray or cookie sheet.
- Help the child do the activity from a more comfortable position or when in positioning equipment, make a place for a peer to be beside the child who needs special positioning (e.g., child in standing frame or child in wheel chair with space for peer to work beside).
- Use sponges instead of brushes for children who can't grasp a brush.
- Have children work together and let the child who can't manipulate objects direct another child on where to place things.
- Modify the expectations of the activity so that a child in the dump and fill stage can create a product (e.g., put glue on paper and encourage child to place things on).
- Provide a visual of each step in the project so that the child understands what to do.
- Provide the child with a plan for what to do when he or she arrives at the center, provide peer or adult reminders of each step as the child completes the project.
- Provide a towel for wiping hands if the child is sensitive to messy activities or allow the child to wear gloves when painting.

Writing

- Pencils
- Pens
- Stamp Pad/Stamps
- Paper
- Envelopes
- Stickers
- Chalkboard & chalk
- Magnetic Alphabet board
- Sand trays to write in sand
- Alphabet stickers
- Dry-erase boards and markers
- Lined paper/Stationary
- Blank Books (a few ½ sheets of paper stapled together)
- List of children's names and pictures on wall for copying
- Word banks and card file (*word banks can be developed for individual children by asking them what words they want in their bank, have the child cut a picture out or draw a picture of the word and also put the word on the card*)

If children have difficulty participating:

- Include stencils so children can trace letters, shapes, faces, etc.
- Include writing prompts to get children started (e.g., write a grocery list, write a letter to your teacher, your pet).
- Provide bigger pencils, markers, chalk, knobbed crayons or markers, and other manipulatives for better grip.
- Have a space to display children's work for later view.
- Have a mailbox where they can put their letter after they put it in the envelope. Have the person they wrote to write them a letter back and keep it in the center for the next time they come.

Listening Area

- Tape player with head phones
- Books on tape/CD
- CD player with head phones
- CD's
- Comfy seating

If children have difficulty participating:

- Loop a small piece of pipe cleaner on the corners of the pages of the books to make it easier for children to turn pages independently.
- Put big stickers over the play and stop buttons on the tape recorders so children can manipulate the tape player independently.
- Post visual steps for using the tape player, always start with rewind to be sure they get to the beginning (i.e.: First press the yellow button to rewind until it "pops," then press the green to play).
- For multiple headphone sets, color code headset and volume knob so child can control own volume.
- Label each tape or CD (not the case) with a picture that matches the book cover to make it easier for children to find the matching media - use clear cases so it can be seen.
- Include books with items of interest (e.g., if the child likes trains include books about trains).
- Include space where two children can sit and listen and look at the same book.
- Rotate books and tapes to maintain interest.
- Make sure stories fit your children's developmental levels.

Dramatic Play Area

- Stove/refrigerator
- Sink
- Table/chairs
- Dishes
- Table cloth
- Dish cloths
- Place mats/napkins
- Utensils
- Pots
- Pretend food
- Empty food containers
- Cabinets
- Doll beds
- Dolls
- High chair
- Rocking chair
- Couch
- Pretend cameras
- Coffee table
- Mirrors
- Phones
- Dress-up clothes (hats, shoes, jackets, skirts, pocket books, brief cases, tote bags, neck-tie)

Dramatic Play Themes (create prop sets for these play themes):

- Doctor's office
- Birthday party
- Garage sale
- Wedding
- Camping
- Picnic
- Vacation
- Animal doctor
- Grocery store
- Restaurant
- Post-office
- Fix-it shop
- Office
- Dentist
- Dollar store
- Construction crew
- Farmers
- Pet shop
- Florist

If children have difficulty participating:

- Read the children a story or propose a play script and then guide their play by assigning roles or suggesting what may be next. Repeat the same scenario over several days so they have some practice, gradually adding new ideas.
- Always provide materials that reflect a "home" theme as it is what developmentally young children are most likely to imitate in their play.
- Make sure the dress up clothes are easy to put on and take off - use Velcro closures in place of small buttons, ties, or zippers.
- Make sure everything has a place and a label. It is very easy for this center to become cluttered and over-stimulating for some children.
- Consider sorting food by color rather than food groups - especially for young children.

Block Area

- Legos or Duplos
- People
- Animals
- Vehicles
- Train set
- Wood/Foam blocks
- Airport
- Zoo Set
- Airport
- Doll house
- Farm set
- Large paper to create roads

If children have difficulty participating:

- Give children a building mat (painted plywood shape) to build on and establish boundaries for their structures.
- Have a variety of materials to match children's abilities: Duplos for children who can't use Legos, magnetic trains, toddler doll houses for children with less refined motor abilities.
- Bring in props that are preferred objects and encourage the child to build related to the prop. For example, build a house for the stuffed animal or build a road for the dump truck.
- Teach a peer buddy how to encourage the child to join in building by handing the child the block or vehicle and instructing the child where to place.
- Help the child do activity from a more comfortable position or when in positioning equipment, make a place for a peer to be beside the child who needs special positioning.

Water/Sand Table

- Boats, sea animals, shells
- Dolls, sponges, doll towels, baby clothes, diapers
- Pouring containers of all sizes and shapes
- Sand, digging utensils
- Sand, dinosaurs,
- Sand, jungle animals, trees
- Watering can
- Water, frogs, turtles, ducks
- Colored bubbles popping on paper
- Junk stuff for sorting (buttons, beads, small trinkets)

If children have difficulty participating:

- Rotate items to maintain interest.
- Shorten table legs to accommodate all children.
- Have bigger objects that are easier to grasp and hold.
- Have smocks and gloves for children who tend to get messy.
- Include items of interest.
- Put visual reminders (feet on floor, numbered sticker on side of table) to indicate personal space.
- Have multiples of materials (scoops, shovels, containers).
- Bury small items of interest, encourage child to find a specific number of "buried treasure."

Book Corner

- Books
- Pillows
- Comforter
- Stuffed animals
- Puppets
- Puppet theatre
- Predictable books
- Books with props
- Books made in the classroom
- Small bean bag for sitting
- Rug
- Flannel board

If children have difficulty participating:

- Place books that are familiar to the child (predictable) in the area so that the child recognizes the book and can pretend to read.
- Place photo albums that have pictures of children in the classroom engaging in play. These may be attractive to the child.
- Include books about activities/objects that may be preferences to the child (e.g., train book or animal book).
- Include a range of books that match children's developmental level including toddler cardboard books that are easy to manipulate, but have a more mature theme or will be of interest to all children (e.g., books with photos of animals).
- Encourage children to listen to other children read while snuggling with a blanket or stuffed animal.
- Place books with props like a stuffed animal or puppet. Some children may briefly look at the book and then play with the toy.

Table-Top/Floor Activities

- Beads to string
- Mosaic patterns
- Peg boards
- Puzzles
- Lacing cards
- Sea shells to polish (water, cotton)
- Play dough with cookie cutters/letters to press/theme materials (e.g., shells, dinosaurs)
- Things to sort - teddy bear counters, bottle tops, small blocks, crystals
- Places to sort - divided trays, egg cartons, muffin tins, colored plates or bowls
- Simple turn taking board games

If children have difficulty participating:

- Rotate items so children do not engage in the same activities over and over.
- Connect to real life by enlarging pictures of children at home and make them into puzzles.

Science Center

- Magnifying glasses
- Measuring tapes
- Shells
- Measuring cups
- Scales
- Lab coats
- Crystals
- Seeds
- Stethoscope
- Rocks
- Tongs
- Prism
- Plastic animals (classify)
- Food coloring
- Magnets
- Flower box w/dirt
- Tuning fork
- Textures

If children have difficulty participating:

- Go on nature walks and allow children to find things to add to the science center.
- Have smocks for children to wear and place plastic tablecloths of the floor for easy clean-up.
- Provide easy to grasp tools such as large scoops or large plastic tongs. If necessary build up handles with foam or cardboard.
- Infuse science into other areas of the day (i.e., language, reading, outdoor play, meal times).

Outside Centers/Activities

Outdoor play can offer the same richness in play opportunities as indoor play, especially in climates that offer year-round access to outdoors. Here are some of the centers you could create for outdoor play.

- Garden
- Bike path
- Blocks
- Fluid play
- Sand box
- Painting
- Dramatic play

If children have difficulty participating:

Children can do a variety of things outside that are too difficult to manage indoors. Get creative, think about the following as possibilities:

- Wash doll clothes and hang on a line
- Use paint brushes and water to paint the building, fence or equipment
- Bubble wands and bubbles
- Wading pool with paper boats, play boats, magnetic fishing set
- Wash bikes
- Large blocks and cardboard to build a fort
- Porch swing for swinging with friends
- Hammock for snuggling with a friend
- Tent for dramatic play
- Sidewalk chalk
- Draw neighborhoods (with chalk) for pretend play and incorporate bikes
- Push solo cups or weave ribbons in chain link fences
- Create an obstacle course through playground equipment
- Ball play, parachute, paint with feet

Circle Times that Capture Everyone's Attention!

Circle times (aka "large group" or "meeting") are often times of the day with the most challenging behaviors but are an important part of an early childhood classroom. How can you make circle what it really should be - a fun, engaging time packed with learning, minimizing challenging behaviors? Here are some tips:

- It's okay to be noisy! Children should have opportunities to laugh, talk, and sing along with listening times.
- Watch that clock! Circle times should last about 15 minutes but ALWAYS reflect the age, interests, and abilities of the children (e.g., less for 3 year olds, more for 5 year olds).
- Mix up the activities! The table on the following page gives you a basic structure of a successful circle.

Think of these activities as ingredients that, when put all together, make a great "Circle Time Sandwich!" The bread are your transitions - one on top and one on bottom. Your lesson is the "meat," but too much makes it too thick and hard to swallow. Add in some tried and true standard fixin's - routine activities and reviewing the expectations, to be sure your sandwich is really interesting. Too much of any one part can make the sandwich unbalanced, so be sure it is the right size for the little hands "holding" it!