

# Setting Up Your Preschool Learning Centers

You have figured out your [preschool schedule](#). You have [set up your classroom](#). Now you are wondering about **setting up your preschool learning centers**.

Well, good, dear [teachers](#)! I'm glad you are here, because that's what I'm going to help you with today.



*This post contains affiliate links for your convenience.*

## Setting Up Your Preschool Learning Centers

**At what part of our day is centers time?  
How long is it?**

Our learning centers are offered during free choice centers time. It is one of the first events of our day, after our [morning meeting](#). It is 60 minutes long and the preschoolers can be at any center they wish, for as long or as short as they want. I feel strongly that with 3 year olds, they get time to explore areas they are interested in. Others have expressed concern that some children might only stay in certain centers if we don't rotate them from center to center.

## **What if the children stay in one area most of the hour?**

Rarely do our preschoolers stay in one area the entire hour. Because we introduce each center during our morning meeting, they are naturally curious and want to explore several areas. Many times they will leave a center and return later, realizing there is more exploring to do.

If we do see a child staying away from certain centers, we might encourage him to come try something else. (Encourage, not pressure.)

## **How do we set up an inviting center?**

We put great thought into how we set up each center, especially at the beginning of the year when we are still learning what our preschoolers are interested in. We strive for an uncluttered atmosphere where everything has a home. (Sometimes that can be a challenge, but we are always working on it!) While observing the children working and playing in these centers, we notice how they are using the materials. If the children seem frustrated or are dumping everything, we adjust what we have available. Even though we do show them how to use the materials, sometimes the children just are not ready for them. In that case, we replace them with something simpler and will try again later in the year.

## **How do we teach them to take care of each center?**

At the beginning of the school year, we keep it super simple, not putting out near the amount we will later in the year. This is so we can stay on top of showing the children how to take care of the materials, including putting them away. With our 3 year olds, we don't expect them to neatly clean up each area when they are finished, but we work on simple actions

such as placing all the puzzle pieces back on the tray, or sweeping up spills under the sensory table. Our main time for clean up is at the end of centers time, when our [class helper](#) rings the clean up bell and we work as a group to clean each area.

## Our Preschool Learning Centers

Here are the centers we have on most days during our free choice centers time.

### Science Center

This is our discovery and exploration area. It usually relates to that week's theme. We provide books, photos, and materials that can be touched and held.

Further reading: [How to Set Up a Preschool Science Center](#)



### Easel

The easel is part of our art area. It is an important part of fine motor development, but also fosters creativity as children learn how to use a vertical surface.

Further reading: [Preschool Art at the Easel](#)



### Art Center

Our art center is a perfect place to explore colors and textures. Like with the easel, the art center builds fine motor skills and also strengthens hand-eye coordination.

Further reading: [10 Favorite Painting Activities](#)



## Fine Motor Center

There are so many fun ways to strengthen the hands and fingers to get them ready for holding writing tools! We use this center for activities such as [transferring water](#), [threading macaroni](#), and [making collages on sticky paper](#).



## Dramatic Play Center

The dramatic play center is important for developing social and emotional skills, as well as motor skills and communication. We change this center out approximately every 2 weeks, depending on what the theme is.

Further reading: [Dramatic Play Activities](#)



## Block Center

This is our most active area during centers time. If anyone ever doubted children learn through play, they need to watch preschoolers in this area. While building with blocks they are sorting by shape, color, and size. They are counting as they stack the blocks, using their fine and large motor muscles handling the block center materials, and building social and language skills while working with other children.

Further reading: [Fun Block Activities for Toddlers and Preschoolers](#)



## Sensory Bin

Having a sensory bin (also known as a sand and water table) provides many opportunities for hands-on exploration. Preschoolers can dig, scoop, transfer, and pour. Our sensory bin is offered every day and we change out what's in it every 1-2 weeks.

Further reading: [Fun Water Table Activities](#)



## Cognitive Activity Table

We have 1 table during free-choice centers time where we offer various activities that build cognitive skills, such as counting and sorting, matching shapes, and alphabet puzzles.



## Light Table

Not all preschools have a light table, but after visiting a [Reggio Emilia inspired](#) preschool, we just knew we had to have one. Thankfully, through fundraising, we were able to purchase a light table that conveniently fits in the corner of our reading and writing center. Not only can we explore light, but also different colors with translucent pieces. Our light table is also nice for science displays, such as leaves and shells.

Further reading: [30 Light Table Activities](#)



## Literacy Center

Having a quiet area to look at books and use writing tools is very important in the preschool classroom. This is also where we keep our [memory books](#) and our [journals](#).

Further reading: [Creating a Writing Center in the Preschool Classroom](#)



## Play Dough Center

Play dough is offered just about every day because it is loved so much by our preschoolers. (Toddlers, too!) We [make our own](#) play dough and change it every week. We vary what materials and tools we set out, but rolling pins and cookie cutters are usually part of each week. The play dough table is another fun way to strengthen fine motor skills, and because we sometimes add scent and texture, it's a fun sensory experience.



## Cooking Center

Cooking is not a regular center, but when we do offer a cooking activity, it's usually at our fine motor table. There are so many advantages to cooking with children, from building fine motor skills, learning how to cooperate with others, strengthening [language development](#), and doing simple counting while measuring.



**What are in your learning centers?**



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