

Tools for Autonomy in Preschool Classrooms

Creative Curriculum Resource

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Learning Environments



Creating the right learning environment encourages children and adults to work together in a productive surrounding and promotes children's growth in a developmentally appropriate way.

QUICK TIPS

Should be posted at child eye level

Charts help children to recognize their printed names and those of their peers, but also supports the concept of teaching children that they are an important part of the classroom community

Signs and charts help to create a positive classroom culture by providing children with visuals and consistency

Essential Charts

Attendance Chart/Who's Here Today?

Job Chart

Birthday Chart

Center Time Tool/Choice Morning Arrival Chart

Daily Schedule

3 B's/ Class Rules

Weekly Calendar

Emotions/Feelings Chart

Visual Schedule



Visual Schedule

Organize from left to right (horizontal) when possible to promote pre-reading skills.

Include interactive aspects, for example an arrow that children can move on the schedule as the day progresses (you may choose to include this as a job on the job chart)

Post at eye level so that children can independently refer to it

Teaching staff establish routines yet remain flexible and responsive to student perspectives and challenges, keeping children engaged in their learning and creating smooth transitions between portions of the day.



QUICK TIP

Children who are able to recognize their names in print, do not require their photo to be displayed for this.



Who's Here Today?

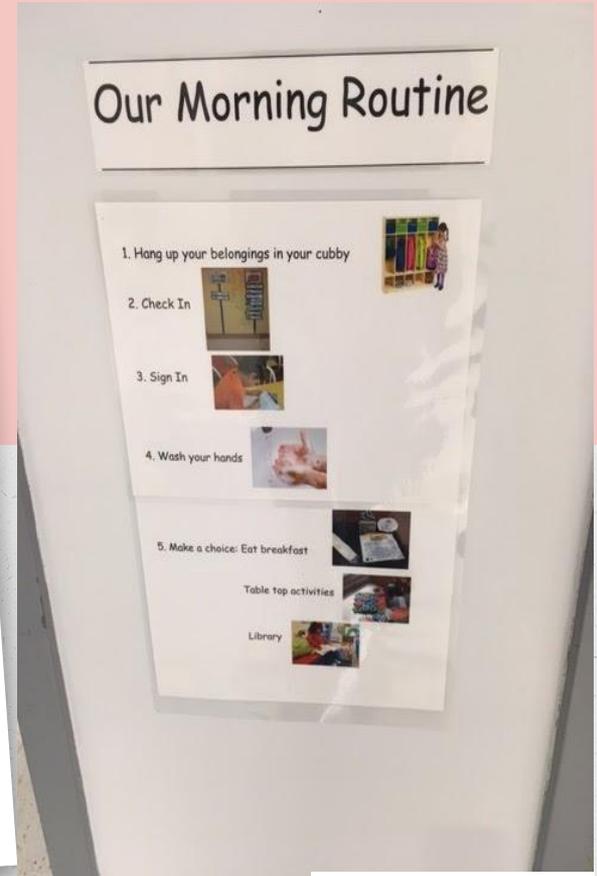
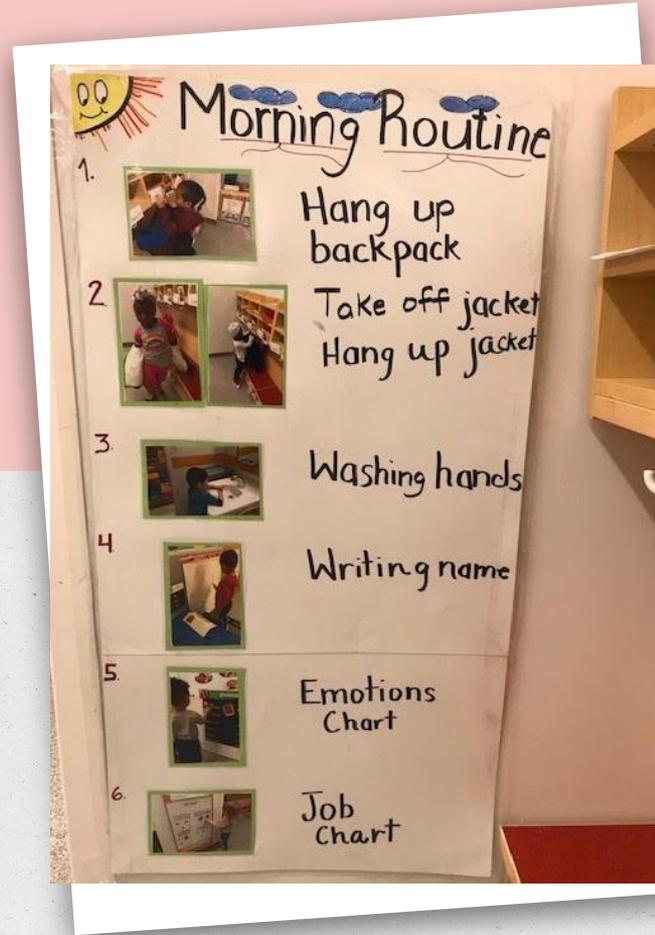
Each day as children arrive, they place their name in the “present” or “at school” area of the chart.

At end of the day children place their name in the “absent” or “at home”

Children use these charts to discuss how many children are at school and how many are at home

Morning Arrival Chart

It's important to establish routines for all children. This should begin as soon as they arrive to the classroom



Center Time /Choice Chart

Choice time chart



Centers should be in place to help children choose and navigate a variety of learning centers in the classroom.

The chart shows how many children are able to work at each Center and pictures of children working in each Center

You can choose to use one centralized chart, or smaller charts for each Center or other tools that address the needs of the children in your classroom

Weather charts are a great way to teach children math and science skills, as well as critical thinking.

Weather that should be included:

- Sunny
- Cloudy
- Rainy
- Snowy
- Foggy
- Partly cloudy
- Stormy
- Windy



The Weather Chart



Birthday Chart

Birthday charts are a great way to create a sense of belonging in your classroom. Adding a birthday chart makes everyone feel included and acknowledged. There's no more exciting day in a child's calendar than their birthday, not even Christmas matches the excitement of counting down to that special day which is all about them.

Best Practices

Children use this tool to help identify feelings they are experiencing as part of their arrival routine and throughout the day

Teachers use the feelings tool to discuss how children react to the different emotions they are experiencing

Pictures of what children can do if they are experiencing a challenging feeling can also be placed in the cozy area



Emotions/Feelings Chart

Feelings tools support children in understanding and managing feelings in themselves and others.

Feelings tools provide pictures and labels of a wide variety of feelings that children experience each day. They allow children to practice identifying and expressing their feelings



3 B's
Pyramid Model

Clearly communicated developmentally appropriate expectations for children help them develop independence and self-regulation skills and engage in respectful interactions with peers and adults

What About the Calendar?

Preschoolers are focused on the here and now. They learn concepts of before, and after, later, and next. That is why it is important to have a visual schedule, it helps with consistency, and fosters their learning about time concepts



Sample Weekly Calendar

Research indicates that children don't truly understand time concepts until the 1st or 2nd grade, even though they use words associated with time.

If you want to introduce a calendar, use it as a tool to show children how to keep track of important events. This approach helps them to learn the purpose of calendars and how they can be useful to them personally

Having children participate in classroom jobs teaches them responsibility, gives them pride in a job well done, and helps children contribute to caring for the classroom community.

Jobs also teach children vocabulary and help them to understand and carry out multi-step directions.

Rotate jobs in a predictable/fair manner so children can see what job they have and what job they will have next. A weekly rotation gives children a chance to master or practice their job and try various roles throughout the year.



Suggestions for jobs:

- Breakfast/lunch helper
- Weather forecaster
- Plant waterer
- Visual schedule mover
- Time Keeper
- Line leader



Student work is authentic and relate to current activities and themes.

The work is labeled with title, standards, task and student/teacher comments



Bulletin Boards/ Student Work

Learning Centers

Learning Centers

Blocks

Math/Manipulatives

Writing

Sand/Water

Music & Movement

Dramatic Play/House

Library/Quiet Corner

Art

Science/Discovery

Listening

Best Practices for Centers

Before Center time

Let children know what new material or small group activities are happening in each center

Help them plan where they would like to begin working

During Center time

Each child chooses a center and places his/her name card near the picture of the center.

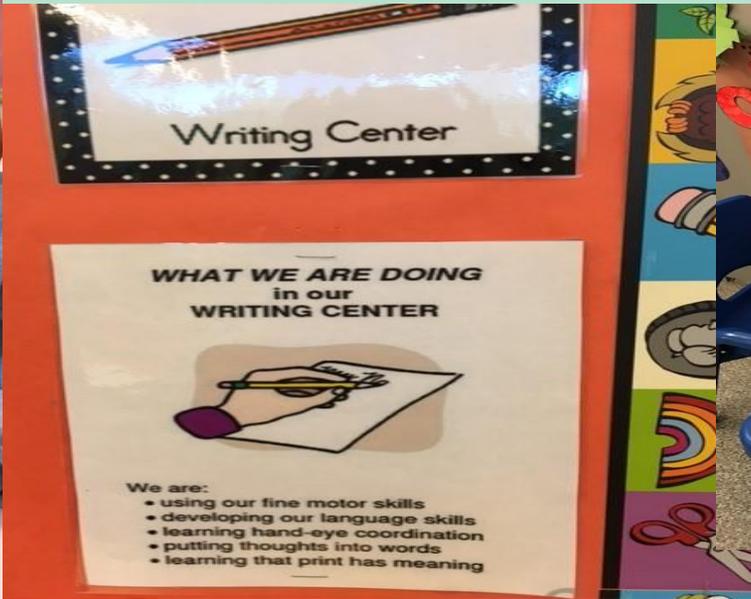
To switch to another center, children move their name to a center with availability

After Center time

Save time for children to clean up centers. Ensure that clean-up expectations are clear.

Invite children to reflect after centers to discuss what materials they worked with, with whom they played and how the play went.

Teachers can reflect with children in small groups, as turn and talk or during meal time



Writing Center

Are a great way to encourage writing, doodling and drawing.

Supports self expression, exploring, imagination, and working on the use of fine motor skills.

Materials-dry erase boards, chalk, various writing paper and writing utensils, magnetic letters, rubber stamps





Block Center

While children play in the Block Center they learn:

To problem solve as they construct with blocks

To expand their expressive language as they talk about building and constructing

To cooperate and to accept the work of others

To organize their world using symbolic representations in block play

Sand & Water Table

WHAT WE ARE DOING in our SAND AND WATER CENTER



We are:

- enjoying sensory experience
- experimenting
- discovering
- refining our observational skills
- measuring
- weighing
- enhancing our fine motor skills

Materials

Sand/water
Plastic buckets
Utensils
cups
Shovels
collenders/sifters
Plastic animals

Sand/Water Table

Both of these centers help children to learn with hands-on materials and take in new information through their senses.

These sensory experiences can assist some children with calming down their bodies





Provides opportunity to improve their coordination, learn about counting and sorting, and expand problem-solving skills.

Manipulatives help children learn by allowing them to move from concrete experiences to abstract reasoning



Ensure that area is clear of clutter and well organized. Each bin is clearly labeled with a photo of materials and where they are kept.

Math/Manipulatives



While playing in the Dramatic Center children learn:

To expand their language skills as they talk about the activities taking place

To become confident of their capabilities as they dramatize familiar happenings

To begin to understand other people and learn needs and responsibilities



Dramatic Center/House

While playing in the Art Center children learn:

1. To become more creative
2. To understand their world as they experiment with many different materials and tools
3. To learn about artists and illustrations
4. To build their self-confidence as they make decisions and implement ideas



Art Center

Suggested Props:

- Easel
- Water source
- Paintbrushes
- Chalk
- Crayons
- Sponges
- Feathers
- Different kinds of paper
- Painting smock



Library Center

Encourage children to read stories to each other

Have stuffed animals or puppets available for dramatization of stories

Have books according to unit of study

Be sure to rotate books to keep them interesting

Include books about science, math concepts, animals, and that reflect diversity

Get rid of old or torn books by recycling them