

Chapter 15

Introducing Centers

When it comes to center time, always remember that less is more. In the beginning of the year it is best to have very little out for the students, you can gradually put out more things as you introduce each center and the children learn the procedures and routines of center time. To establish center expectations properly in the beginning of the year, introduce only a few centers a day. Each center should have a set of rules that are reviewed each day at the beginning of center time for the first few months.

Spending time establishing rules for centers in the beginning of the year will significantly reduce behavior problems for the entire year. Never take for granted that your students know how to work with blocks, crayons, manipulatives, or any item appropriately. Many children have no prior experience with the materials in a typical classroom and it should never be assumed that they do. The rules of what

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is appropriate use of an object in their homes may vary greatly from what is deemed appropriate use in the classroom.

When introducing centers it is important to note that you should continue to review all the rules daily at each center for the first few weeks even after you have initially introduced them and then periodically throughout the year if necessary or when new students enter the classroom.

It's important not to overwhelm your students when introducing centers. Select just a few centers a day to introduce to your class in the beginning of the year. Introducing one or two centers per day in a half-day program, and two to four per day in a full-day program is typically enough. This way you can gradually ease the students into the process of centers.

The following are suggestions for introducing

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centers:

Block Center:

1. Gather all the students and seat them in the block area on the floor.
2. Show them the blocks and say, "This is the block center" and refer to the center sign as a visual cue.
3. Pick up a block and ask the students what it is used for.
4. Say, "In the block center we use blocks to build things" and take several blocks to demonstrate how to build something carefully.
5. Take several blocks and give to one student and ask him or her to build something, clap and cheer when they are finished to show they did it correctly.
6. Show students how tall their structures can be (tip: use the shortest student in the class as a guide, nothing higher than that student's shoulders)

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7. Ask students “Do we throw the blocks?” and model throwing for your ELL students. Use facial expressions or “thumbs down” to show that we should not throw blocks.
8. Ask students “Do we eat blocks/put blocks in our mouths?” and model eating a block for ELL students. Use facial expressions or “thumbs down” to show that we do not eat blocks.
9. Model how to clean up the blocks; show students where to put the blocks when they are finished.
10. Call two students to the front to clean up some blocks that you have placed on the floor. Cheer and clap when they clean up correctly. Use facial expressions or thumbs up to show that it was done correctly.
11. Pass out one block to each child and repeat the process above.

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Play Dough Center:

1. Gather the students and seat them in or near the play dough area on the floor. If your play dough area is too small you could do this in your large group/circle time area.
2. Show your students the play dough and say, "This is the play dough center" and refer to the center sign as a visual cue.
3. Pick up the play dough and ask the students what it is used for (tip: many may not know this one).
4. Say, "In the play dough center we use play dough to create things" and take a lump of play dough to demonstrate how to create something.
5. Ask, "Do we eat play dough?" (This step is VERY IMPORTANT!) Pretend to eat play dough and use facial expressions or thumbs down signal to show that we do not eat the play dough.
6. Discuss the consequences for eating play dough in your classroom.
7. Discuss how eating play dough may make you sick!

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8. Demonstrate how to keep all the play dough on the table and not on the floor.

9. Demonstrate how to use cookie cutters, rolling pins, or other play dough tools you may have and how to put them away correctly.

10. Pass out small amounts of play dough to the students and allow them to manipulate it for a few minutes; use facial expressions or thumbs up to reinforce good behaviors.

Dramatic Play/Home Living Center:

1. Gather all the students and seat them in or near the Dramatic Play area on the floor.

2. Show students the Dramatic Play center and say, "This is the dramatic play center" and refer to the center sign as a visual cue. (Different teachers use different terminology when referring to this center; use whatever is most comfortable for you and your students)

3. Say "In the Dramatic Play center we pretend."

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4. Demonstrate how to play in the Dramatic Play center by taking out a few items such as a baby doll, dishes, or pretend food and role play.
5. Give your students a tour of the Dramatic Play center and show them all the things that are housed in that center and where they belong.
6. Pass out a few items from the Dramatic Play center to several students and ask them to put them away. Use facial expressions or thumbs up to show that clean-up was done correctly; help those that are having difficulty.
7. Discuss the importance of not putting any dishes or pretend food in the mouth. Model inappropriate behavior and use facial expressions or thumbs down to show that we should not put dishes or play food in our mouths.
8. Introduce the baby doll(s) and demonstrate appropriate ways to play and talk with them. (This is very important as some students may act out physical violence or verbal abuse with the dolls) Say, "This is my baby, her name is

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____. She's crying. I think she's hungry, I'm going to give her a bottle." Act out feeding and carrying the baby appropriately and emphasize never hitting or yelling at the baby.

9. Pass a baby doll around to the students and have them take turns holding the baby doll and talking to it. Use facial expressions or thumbs up to reinforce good behaviors.

Book/Library Center:

1. Gather all the students and seat them in the book/library area on the floor.

2. Show them the books and say, "This is the book/library center" and refer to the center sign as a visual cue. Pick up a book and ask the students what it is used for.

4. Say, "In the library center we read books" and take a book and demonstrate reading by holding a book in your lap and turning the pages gently by the corners.

5. Show the students the front of a book and say, "This is the front of a book". Pass books out to students and see if they can find the front of their books. Use facial expressions or thumbs

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up to show that it was done correctly; help those that are having difficulty.

6. Show the students how to open their books, say, “This is how we open a book, carefully.” Ask students to open their books gently and use facial expressions or thumbs up to show that it was done correctly; help those that are having difficulty.

7. Demonstrate how to turn the pages in a book, say “This is how we turn the pages in a book, by the corner.” Ask students to turn the pages in their books gently by the corner. Use facial expressions or thumbs up to show that it was done correctly; help those that are having difficulty.

8. Demonstrate how to close the book correctly, say, “This is how we close our books, gently.” Ask students to close their books gently and use facial expressions or thumbs up to show that it was done correctly; help those that are having difficulty.

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9. Demonstrate how to return a book to its proper location, say, “This is how I put my book away, carefully.” Ask students to return their books one or two at a time and use facial expressions or thumbs up to show that it was done correctly; help those that are having difficulty.

10. Ask students “Do we throw books?” and model throwing for your ELL students. Use facial expressions or thumbs down to show that we should not throw books. Ask students “Do we eat books/put books in our mouths?” and model eating a book for ELL students. Use facial expressions or “thumbs down” to show that we do not eat books.

12. Show other inappropriate uses for books using the examples above as a guide.