



Creating Learning Centers in Your Home

Learning Centers are a staple in early childhood classrooms. Each Center contains age-appropriate materials that children can use to explore, play, and learn about specific topics. Each of our Preschool and Pre-K classrooms include Learning Centers to make sure children are engaged and learning throughout the day.

You can create mini-learning centers in your home through the use of *prop boxes*.

What is a prop box?

A prop box is a plastic bin or cardboard box you fill with materials and props related to a topic, such as math, science, or dramatic play. The materials should allow your child to explore the topic independently.

Here are 10 prop box ideas:



Blocks: Include wooden blocks, colorful pattern blocks, and/or cardboard boxes in a variety of sizes along with clipboards, paper, and crayons. Children can create their own town with a variety of buildings and roads, then make signs to go with them. Or they can create houses or castles for their dolls, action figures, or stuffed animals.



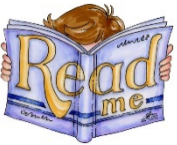
Pretend play. Fill a box with clothes and accessories to make children's pretend play more realistic. You could create separate prop boxes for different play themes—for example, a notebook, an adult white shirt, play stethoscope, cotton balls, Band-Aids for doctor pretend play. This type of play may be especially necessary during this time. Let the children's interests and imaginations guide the themes and selection of clothes and props.



Art. Create an art prop box with different types of paper, safety scissors, glue, craft sticks, and tape. Include a variety of items for drawing, like crayons, markers, colored pencils, and chalk. Add painting materials and playdough so children can create using different methods.



Math. Include board games and puzzles. Add empty egg cartons or muffin tins and materials for sorting, like buttons, leaves, rocks, or plastic animals. Add materials that children can use to invent their own board games, like paper, crayons, and dice, along with buttons or small plastic animals to use as player pieces. Add plastic numerals, a ruler, a tape measure, scale, and other items for measuring size, weight, and distance.



Reading. Create a book basket that can be carried around the house or even outside! Put fiction and nonfiction books and magazines that will interest your child in the basket. Consider adding puppets so children can act out the stories.

Your child can make puppets by drawing pictures of characters from their favorite books and gluing them to craft sticks.



Music. Use cardboard and plastic containers of different sizes to make homemade instruments (like a rainstick or a drum) with your child. Store these instruments in a box and add other items, like castanets or tambourines. Children love to create music while singing or making up silly songs.



Writing center. Fill a container with paper, markers, notebooks, pens, pencils, envelopes, a ruler, stationery, and note cards. Place a notebook in the container that your child can use as a journal. You can also add an ABC chart and letter stencils.

Consider making an ABC chart with your child by writing each letter of the alphabet on a large piece of poster board. Invite your child to draw a picture of something that begins with each letter.



Sensory play. Fill a plastic container with interesting sensory materials like cotton balls, fabric, soil, tissue paper, etc. Add props such as different sized cups, funnels, and tongs. Water is the best sensory play of all – children can learn so much from exploring water, and it is a calming activity as well. Add sponges, basters, colanders, and strainers to the water. You can add bubbles and/or food coloring to make the play even more interesting.



Science. Fill a box with a few investigation tools, such as magnets, a magnifying glass, and binoculars, along with a notebook and crayons or pencils. Go outside to collect natural items, then encourage your child to investigate them using the tools. Ask questions such as “What did you observe?” “What do you think might happen next?” “Why do you think that happened?” These questions help children to observe and make predictions, which is the foundation of the Scientific Method.



Did you know that your kitchen is a prop box? **Cooking** is a sensory activity that promotes science, math, and literacy learning. Store some favorite simple recipes and unbreakable bowls and utensils in a kitchen drawer or bottom cupboard. Invite your children to help you while you prepare meals and snacks. Get them in the habit of washing their hands before and after handling food.

Store the prop boxes where your child can easily access them. During the time in the daily routine for *Learning Centers*, ask your child what they would like to do. If they want to create a math game or draw a picture, ask them to bring out the appropriate prop box to independently explore, create, and discover!