



## 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 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 with little supervision.

Here are some prop box ideas:



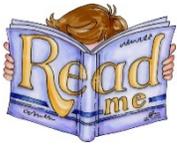
**Blocks/Math:** Include wooden blocks, colorful pattern blocks, and/or cardboard boxes in a variety of sizes. Children can practice stacking and building different structures, like houses or castles for their dolls, action figures, or stuffed animals. Add empty egg cartons or muffin tins and materials for sorting, like large buttons, leaves, rocks, or plastic animals (be mindful of size to avoid choking).



**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, Band-Aids for doctor pretend play. 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, fabric, and craft sticks. Include a variety of items for drawing like crayons, markers, and chalk. Add painting materials and playdough so children can create using different methods.



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



**Music/Movement.** Use cardboard and plastic containers of different sizes to make homemade instruments (like 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.



**Sensory play.** Fill a plastic container with interesting sensory materials like fabric, soil, tissue paper, etc. Add props such as plastic animals and different sized containers. 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, 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 a magnifying glass and binoculars, along with paper and crayons. Go outside to collect natural items, then encourage your child to investigate them using the tools. Ask questions such as “What did you observe?” and “What do you think will happen now?”



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 Time*, ask your child what they would like to do. If they want to create a picture or build a tower, ask them to bring out the appropriate prop box to independently explore, create, and discover!