

PROMOTING SOCIAL SKILLS IN THE TIME OF SOCIAL DISTANCING: LEARNING CENTERS

WHY LEARNING CENTERS ARE AN IMPORTANT PART OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Learning centers are well-defined, open-ended interest areas that contain materials across curriculum experiences. In centers, children have the opportunity to make choices, develop problem solving skills, build on previous experiences, sustained self-directed activity, and develop social skills with peers and adults. Learning centers are full of opportunities to learn across developmental domains both independently and with teacher support.



**BEST
PRACTICES**

**SETTING UP
CENTERS**

MATERIALS



**SAFETY
EXPECTATIONS**

**VISUAL
SUPPORTS**

**SUPPORTING
CHILDREN**

See the pages that follow for tips on structuring centers in your classroom!

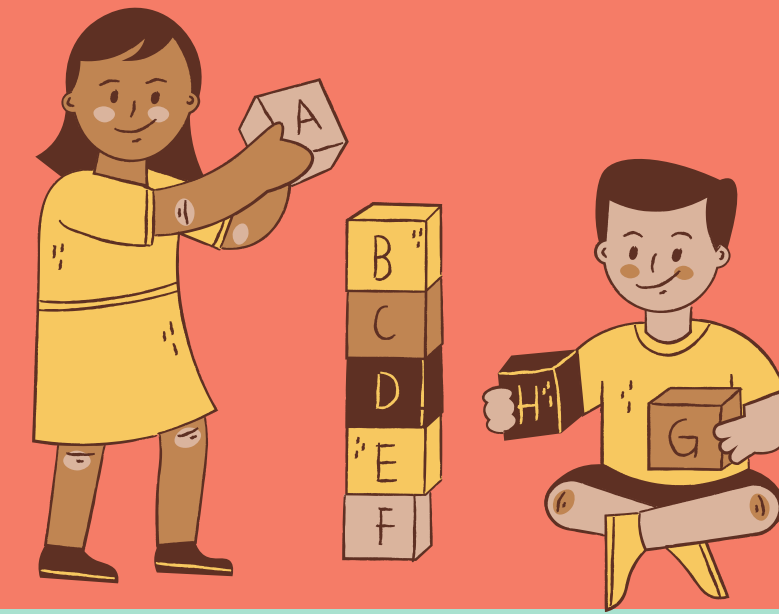
BARTON LAB
BARTONLABVU@GMAIL.COM



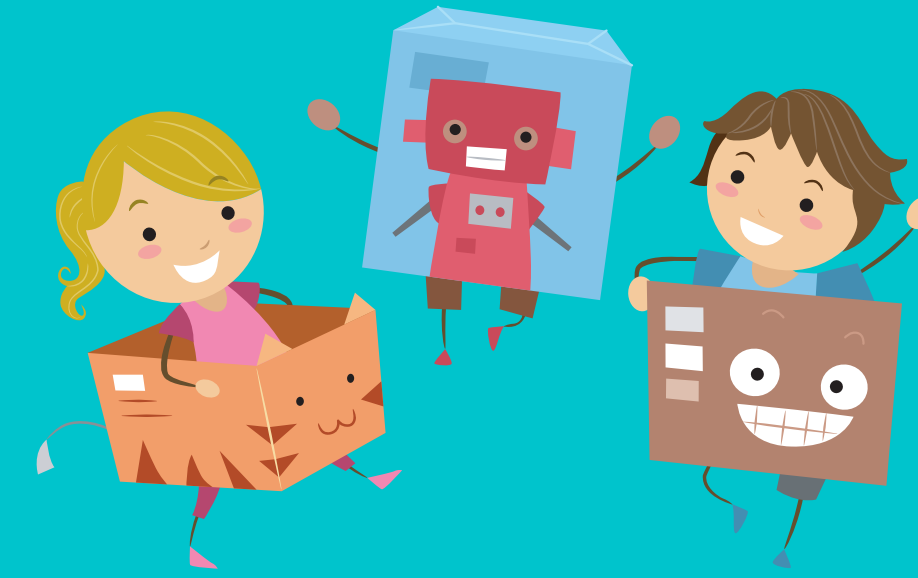
BEST PRACTICES

What are best practices?

Organize centers based on children's abilities. Consider how children can use the center to build on previous knowledge and achieve goals across domains over time.



Activities should be flexible and adaptable. Remember to allow children to think outside the box and try their own ideas. Incorporate open-ended materials (ex: dramatic play materials).

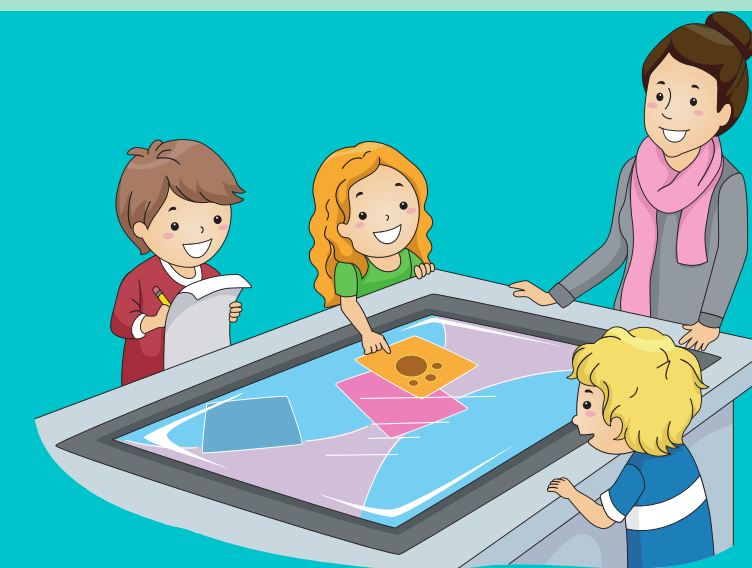


Consider these recommended practices as you adapt centers .

Introduce children to the materials and activities before they independently explore. Familiarizing children may increase engagement across centers and materials.



Interact with children in centers. Use this time to enhance, expand, and evaluate learning and outcomes. Facilitate opportunities for student-led learning.



(Kostelnik, 2019)

See next page for tips on setting up materials in centers!

BARTON LAB
BARTONLABVU@GMAIL.COM



SETTING UP CENTERS

Children should be able to go to multiple centers and use a variety of materials to increase learning across domains.

Here are some ways you may do this while following safety guidelines.

If kids have to stay in an assigned group, rotate centers so that children can access a variety of toys and learning opportunities.



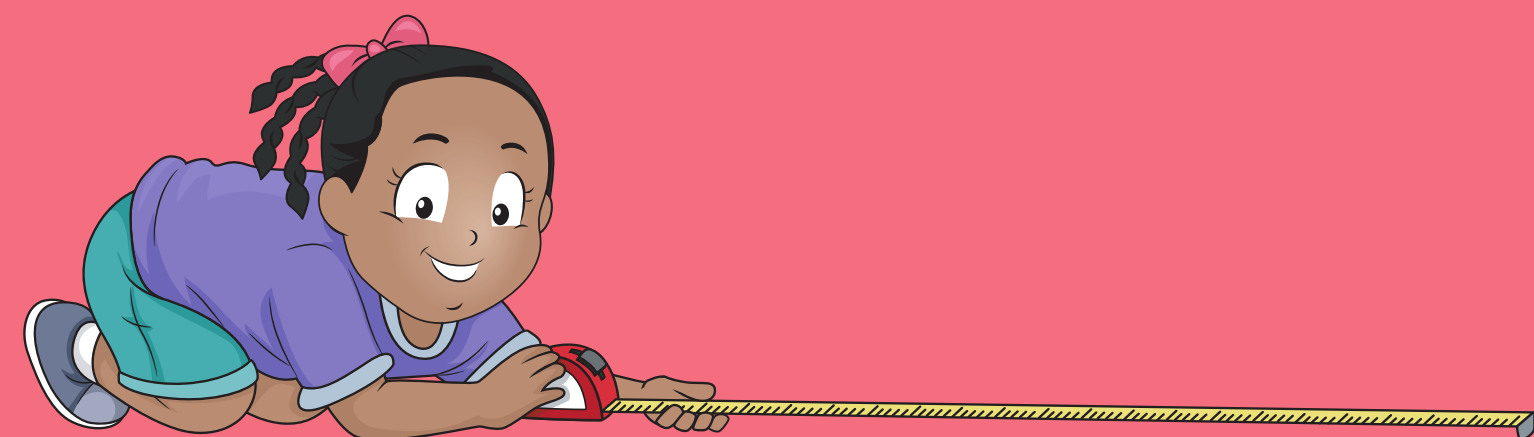
If rotating is not possible, consider putting materials from each center in "zones" (the socially distanced areas).



If you have to assign children to centers, be intentional about peers: consider peer preference and choose peers who will support one other's learning.



Clearly mark spaces (ex: tape lines) in centers for children to show them where to sit or stand to encourage interaction while distancing.



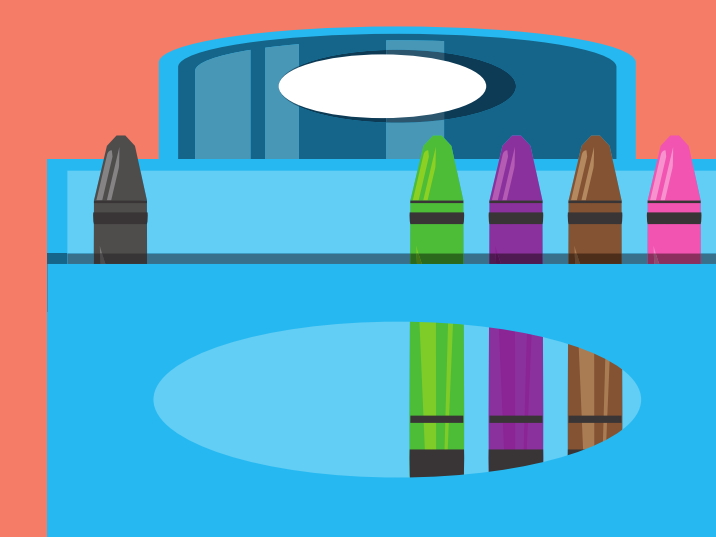
See next page for tips on materials in centers.

MATERIALS

Have multiples of as many materials as possible so children can play together without sharing.



Have assigned materials to the extent possible (e.g., crayon box, play dough for each student). Put children's pictures on materials to help them know which set is theirs.



Consider rotating materials with other same-age classrooms to expand the variety of materials in each classroom.



Rotate in new materials so that children stay engaged and create new play schemes. Consider how you might include real and found materials to expand your options and maximize resources.



Toys and materials facilitate learning and social opportunities. Using toys while playing with peers is foundational for developing social skills.

See next page for tips on safety expectations in centers.

SAFETY EXPECTATIONS

Review expectations before going to centers. Include examples, non-examples, and modeling to help kids understand the new rules.



Build safety expectations into daily behavior expectations (ex: "be safe" now includes staying far from your friend) and remind children of these expectations and how to engage in expected behaviors often.

Give positive descriptive feedback and reinforcement often for following safety expectations in centers.



If you have "helpers" or "jobs," add a new "safety patrol" job. This person can remind the class of the expectations.



Have a germ bucket for materials as they are used or contaminated (mouthed, sneezed on). Encourage children to help put materials where they belong. Consider having a child help with cleaning toys or putting them back in rotation when they're dry.



VISUAL SUPPORTS

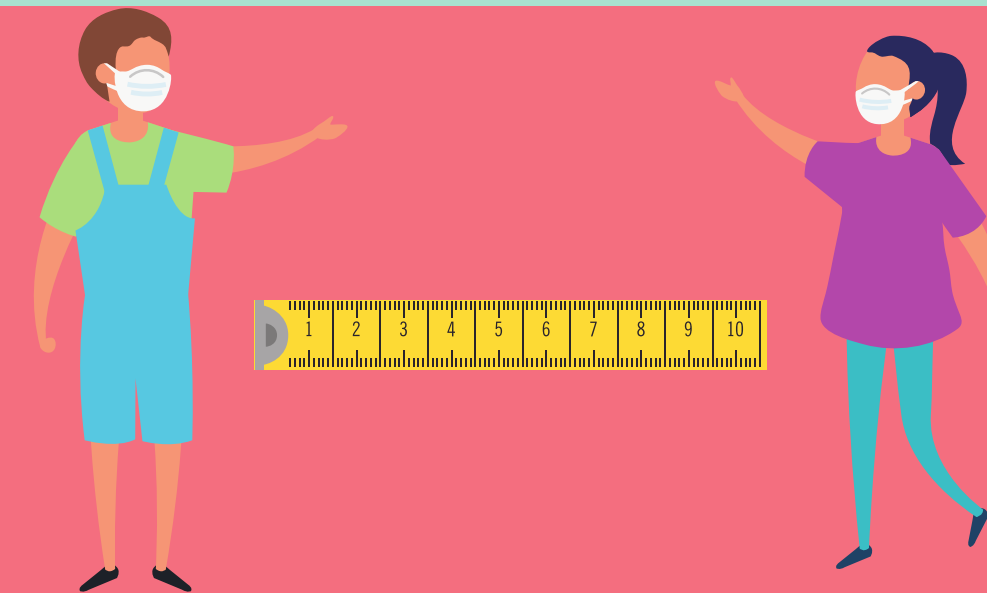
Incorporate visuals into each center. Examples of important visuals include safety expectations and what to do with used or contaminated materials.



Use tape or other markers on the ground to mark safe distances, to sit and where children can and cannot go in the classroom.



Show children what a safe distance looks like (use a yard stick or other measurable, accessible object to teach and remind children of safe distances).



Cover materials that are not available and give children choices between materials that are available.

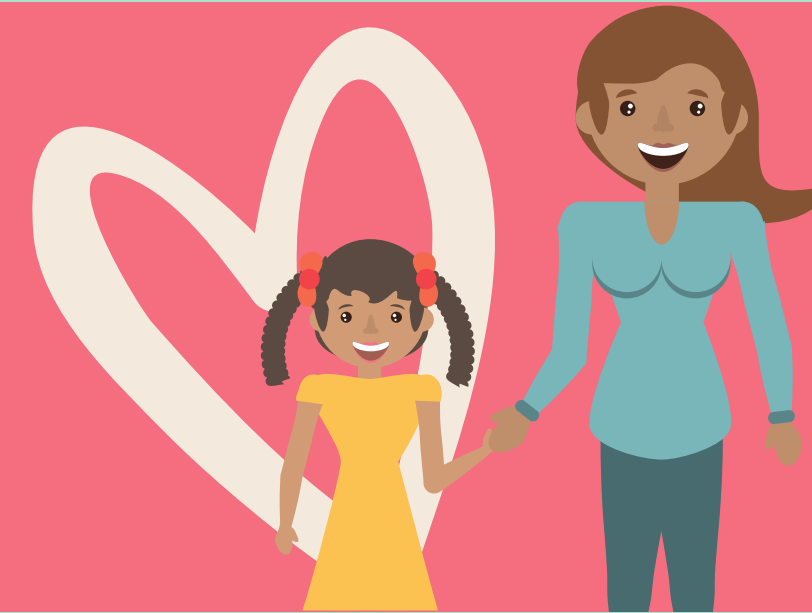


See next page for tips on supporting students in centers.

Visuals can be helpful tools to remind children of expectations. In order to be effective, you must teach, review, and refer to the visuals often.

SUPPORTING CHILDREN

Give children frequent positive attention, regardless of behavior. This helps build positive, nurturing relationships.



Avoid using "No, Stop, Don't" language. Instead, tell children what they should do.



Visit each group of students in centers, suggest play ideas, expand language, and facilitate interactions among children.



Clearly communicate to other adults in the room what they should be doing to support children's learning during centers.



Teachers should support children's learning in centers by facilitating learning opportunities.

Give frequent positive attention and positive descriptive feedback often. Use this time to nurture positive relationships with children.

See next page for additional resources.

RESOURCES

BUILDING POSITIVE CHILD-TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS



EXPRESSING WARMTH AND AFFECTION TO CHILDREN

ACKNOWLEDGING CHILDREN'S POSITIVE BEHAVIORS



SUPPORTING FAMILIES, EDUCATORS, AND CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

