

# Ideas for Setting up a Successful Classroom

## Sensory

At the beginning of the year keep sensory experiences simple. Less tidy up and resetting and achievable expectations allow for more time to connect and nurture relationships.

Consider individual trays and resources at a table - allowing children to engage without navigating sharing a space and fostering feelings of safety and security

Ideas - water, coloured rice, bird seed, wheat, ice with small figurines frozen inside

## Calm Area

A place to retreat away from the bustling classroom is an important space to provide. A reading nook with a couch and books are important, however a calm area is more of a quiet space that feels enclosed and safe.

A table with fabric draped over it, an old cardboard box opened at an end or an A-frame with fabric over it, are all easy ways to facilitate a calm zone.

Consider adding cushions, a sensory toy or a weighted blanket or cuddly toy.

See Page 4 for further support

## Art

Open ended art experiences that children can explore independently are a great starting point. A table top art area, as well as an easel, offer multiple creative experiences.

Important factors to consider include; the thickness of crayons/markers (thicker is better to begin with), limiting resources to a manageable amount and sure everything is in good working order.

Use this zone initially for observation of pen grasp, etc. If you note lacking hand strength/immature grasp, use this to guide your planning (eg. hand strengthening fine motor experiences)

## Construction

Catering for all the different learners and areas of interest in your class justifies the need to always have a form of construction available. This should be in addition to items that are always available, such as wooden blocks and a basket of cars and 'roads'.

At the beginning of the year, consider items that are easy to manipulate so that children can work autonomously, experience success and have the skills required to click items together and pull apart.

If you have limited resources at your service, consider loose parts such as old CD's, corks, small boxes, natural materials, etc.

## Imaginative Play

Possibly one of the most flocked to area in a kinder at the beginning of the year. Attempt to duplicate a home. Ensure you address cultural diversity and consider this in your planning.

Success - support children in their play by ensuring that there is enough space for children to move, sit at tables, open pretend fridge door etc. Also, select a small amount of items for the kitchen eg. 4 small cups/plates/cutlery, a few pieces of fruit in a bowl, items to make sandwiches from pretend food.

It's ok to direct children to "come back soon" - 4 children playing alongside one another in a small space is sometimes optimal.

## Small World

A table for two and open ended play can provide a place for children to connect that is not overwhelming. Small selections of resources allow play to be predictable.

A small dolls house/tree house on a table with selected figurines can be a thoughtful play provocation. Small boxes can make wonderful little homes or beds with small fabric off cuts.

Consider forest animals and gather trees, a rainbow, fake grass and create different levels for the play. Another idea may be a dinosaur land with a sand tray, a small log from outside or

Follow the interest areas of the children for small world play - this can be a wonderful resource to align with a child who is struggling to settle in.

## Puzzles

Puzzles can be a great starting activity for children transitioning at the start of the session. They have a predictable outcome and you can capture a child's interest by matching it with a puzzle.

TIP - make sure that puzzles are achievable. A small 'easy' puzzle at the beginning of the year can support a child to succeed and build confidence.

Children struggling with transition could start with a puzzle. Sit with them and don't be afraid to initiate the puzzle. Consider giving the child the final piece at the end to foster their confidence and support connection.

## Robust Play Indoors

Have an indoor activity that supports children's needs for robust movement

Wobble boards can be very effective. Throwing soft items at a wall or surface such as sticky lizards or velcro rollers to a felt wall work really well. Small indoor trampolines or an opportunity to jump over something low in a safe way work well.

Throwing bean bags into a bucket or hoop from a designated line also works well.

There are many great lists available online to cover all sensory needs - use this to cover all bases when mapping your space.

## Outdoors

Don't limit play provocations to indoor learning spaces - consider setting up for imaginative play outdoors.

Outdoor spaces are a true gift. Many ignite imaginations and allow for play to spontaneously erupt. Other spaces (and some children) need a little flame to spark play. While running is fantastic, it needs to be serving the children and sometimes, it's a sign that they need support.

Consider creating a boat, with paddles or a sail and life jackets and 'fishing rods'. Another great outdoor play idea is a fire station with a phone, desk, bell, truck (made with a steering wheel, tyres and a chair) and hats. Or perhaps your children are interested in creating a cafe. Follow their lead or note their interests.

## Setting expectations

Take a moment to gather your group at a new experience or on the mat area and discuss experiences that are available to them and the expectations.

Identify expected behaviours and make talking about looking after resources and your hopes for how they are used a regular part of your time together. Be open to following the children's lead in how they play, however if water is available, talk about where it can and cannot be transported, etc.

Keep it brief, however outline - lids go on markers. . . We reset activities before we leave . . . roll your playdough into a ball before you go . . . 2 people only in the quiet space . . .

## Empty Tables

It is acceptable to have an empty table if the children's needs are being met - especially at the beginning of the year.

Open learning spaces allows you to quickly follow the interest of the children, while you are getting to know them and you have a space for it straight away.

Not having as many activities available also means that you can engage with children and focus on building connect and relationship rather than needing to reset and tidy beyond reasonable measure.

## Space & Layout

Space is a luxury in a classroom, Consider your layout in relation to transitions through doorways, lining up, entering the room etc. Considering these elements will set your children up for success.

Consider where you place learning experiences in relation to a process. For example - play dough table on hard floor so that dropped pieces aren't walked into carpet. Easel close to the drying rack and bathroom for washing hands if required.

If you are short on surfaces, consider using vertical surfaces by covering with butchers paper and creating a communal art space. Also, use outdoor space for learning experiences.

Use shelving and dividers to make spaces to support learning and activities.



A GUIDE TO SETTING UP A



# CALM CORNER

A CALM CORNER IS AN AREA FOR CHILDREN TO USE WHEN THEY ARE OVERWHELMED AND NEED A BREAK  
HERE'S SOME IDEAS FOR YOUR CLASSROOM!

Put in sensory tools. For example: body socks, fluffy or weighted blankets, fidget toys, spinny chairs, wooden massagers, a crash mat

Make the corner a dark, private area, away from foot traffic.  
Headphones can be good so the area can be quiet.

Model with your class how to take a break and what type of break you need. When is a calm corner good, when do you need toilet, drink, food or movement

Include resources, books and posters about emotions and how to calm down

Make the space calm e.g. avoiding bright colours and sensory overload. A calm corner is a tool, not a play area

Sometimes a more appropriate space is a high energy area where children can expend energy e.g. a mini trampoline, hop scotch, a place to run

Everyone is different! When you create a calm area ask the children what would help calm them

