



Centers are a great way to bring child-directed, intentional instruction to any early childhood classroom. Young children have shorter attention spans and a lot of energy to get out, and centers allow teachers to expose them to many different topics and domains in a way that is meaningful and engaging. A common misconception about centers is that in order for them to be child-directed, they must be unstructured. However, there are ways to set up centers that allow children to explore and play but also enforce structure that makes them more accessible to children with a wide range of learning needs and disabilities. This guide is meant to delineate how to set up centers in a way that sets up all children for success.

## 1. Center signage and how students should navigate them:

- a. Centers should all have a visual that students can easily see and identify, such as a picture of the activity or a designated color. Often, space is limited and different types of centers need to take place in the same area from day to day. You also may be sharing the space with others throughout the week. Therefore, we recommend assigning the spaces a color so that whether students are doing art or playing with blocks in that space, they will be able to recognize which space they are supposed to go to.
- b. Consider predetermining groups of students for each center prior to the lesson. While many see centers as a time for students to choose where they would like to go, this can often create a barrier for students that struggle with making choices or need more structure. It also ensures that students are consistently being challenged to try new things. We recommend creating groups of students based on differing strengths and needs. Allowing for a balance in these groups means that students with disabilities will have appropriate peer models as they play and learn. It also means that all students will feel a sense of belonging amongst all of their peers.
- c. Use a visual for each group of students (or each individual) so they know the order in which they should go through the centers. The visual should correspond with the symbol or color used to represent the center so that students can see which area they should navigate to first and where they are going next. Not only does this increase independence (students will not have to ask you where to go whenever it is time to switch centers), it will also provide students with advanced warning about what is next on their schedule.



## 2. Center Types and What to Include:

- a. Art: Variety of art materials (paint, markers, paper, crayons)
  - Be sure to include different types of paint applicators and writing utensils. For example, sponges might be easier than a paint brush for some students to maneuver since they require less fine motor precision. Short wide crayons are great for students still working on developing pencil grasp, as it forces the hand to hold the crayons correctly and encourages muscle strengthening.
- b. Building: Wide variety of building materials (blocks, legos, recycled materials, magnetiles, etc.)
  - Consider that certain building materials will be more challenging for some students than others, and ensure that all students have materials that meet their needs.
- c. Sensory Exploration: Variety of sensory items (water, shaving cream, dry rice and beans, kinetic sand, etc.)
  - Stay away from choking hazards and items that are not “taste safe”.
- d. Hebrew Letters: Magnetic Hebrew letters with cookie trays, mini chalk or white boards, markers, crayons, sheet protectors with print-outs of traceable letters in them so they can be reused

## 3. Center Procedures:

- a. Have a visual timer somewhere at the front of the room, easily visible to all students.
- b. Take time at the beginning of the year to simply practice navigating the centers. Give students free play in each of the areas and practice transitioning from one activity to the next.
- c. Include visuals at each center that can support sharing and turn-taking.
- d. Put visual labels on bins that correspond with what goes inside them, and set the expectation that students put items away at the end of their turn in the center.

*Note: Some children may have allergies or sensitivities to materials such as Play Doh, paint, or glue. These products can contain gluten, dairy, latex, or other allergens that may cause reactions. Always consider potential allergies when choosing materials to create a safe learning environment for all students, and consider using allergen-free alternatives. Check labels carefully and communicate with families in advance to identify and accommodate individual needs.*

# Centers Visuals

Directions: Cut out and laminate the items below to attach to center spaces or to give students to use as personal visuals for navigating the classroom

For the center space visual: After laminating and hanging in each space, write in dry erase markers what activity or type of center students will engage with that day. You can then erase and change it as needed.

Today, the Kachol Center is:

Today, the Yarok Center is:

Today, the Katom Center is:

# Centers Visuals

Directions: Cut out and laminate the items below to attach to Center spaces or to give students to use as personal visuals for navigating the classroom.

For the Center Schedule Visuals: Cut out, laminate and add a clothes pin, paper clip, or velcro button to it. The teacher should put the clothes pin on the color of the Center the group of students is starting with. Students will then move their clothes pin as they navigate from Center to Center. The color that comes next indicates the Center they are going to next.

**We are Going to:**

**Kachol**

**Yarok**

**Katom**

# We are Going to:

**Katom**

**Kachol**

**Yarok**

## **We are Going to:**

**Yarok**

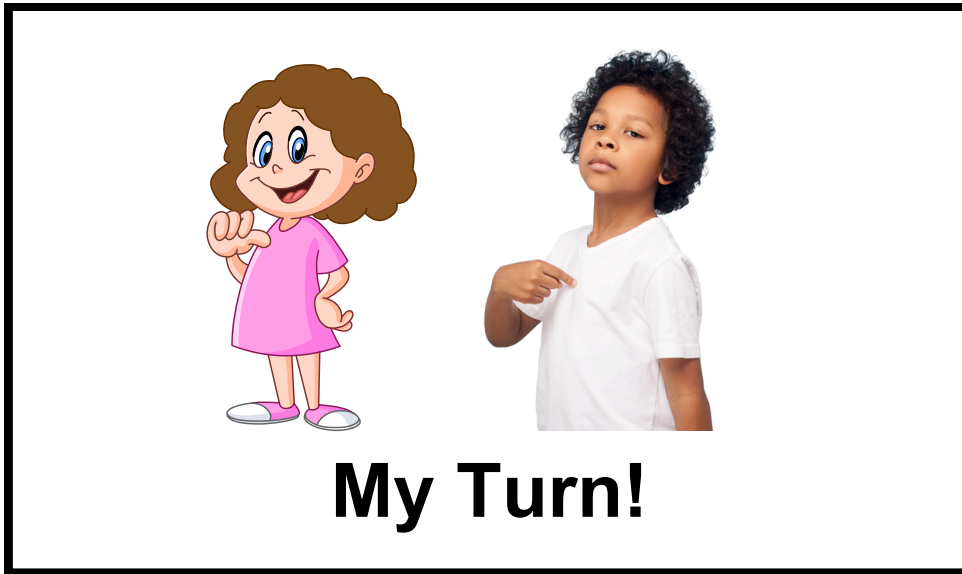
**Katom**

**Kachol**

# Centers Visuals

Directions: Print double sided with one image on one side and one image on the other side. Cut out and laminate. Keep at least one in every center space for students and teachers to utilize to help students share and take turns.

To Use: When you want students to know it is their turn or if they want to tell a peer that may not be responding to their verbal cues, have them turn the picture to the correct side and switch it when it is someone else's turn.



# Centers Visuals: Bin Labels



Markers/סמנים



Crayons



Paint/צבעים



Paper/ניירות

# Centers Visuals: Bin Labels



**Blocks/בלוקים**



**Legos/לגו**



**Magnatiles/אריחים מגנטיים**



**Recycled Materials /  
חומרים ממוחזרים**

# Centers Visuals: Bin Labels



# Centers Visuals: Bin Labels



**Sensory Bin/סל חושי**



**Cups/כוסות**