

Sunday School Learning Centers

The use of CENTERS is a teaching approach, which can be done effectively in Sunday School, Children's Church, Vacation Bible School, and other church settings.

The concept is that children truly want to learn new things, and Learning Centers allow them to do self-directed "play" or "work" in a prepared environment to learn things at their own pace.

The classroom is arranged so that there are several separate areas or "centers" where the children can spend time studying or exploring different ideas. Children are then invited to move about from one center to another, choosing their activities based on their own interests and abilities.

The children "learn" about the things they are studying as they participate in the activities at each center. The learning is self-directed because the children choose which center to visit, how long to stay there, and how often they will return to the same center. In this way children explore and learn about a concept at their own rate, until they are ready to move on to something else.

CENTERS can be done **informally** (For instance: Putting certain blocks in a basket on the floor and books on a shelf to read, in different parts of the room) or **formally** (For instance: Having tables and chairs with 1-2 activities to do at each table) or **somewhere in between**.

It is often challenging to use centers during Sunday School, because of the limited amount of time in those classes (typically less than an hour.) The children have less time to move around freely from one center to another. However, during VBS, Centers can work very well, especially in younger children's classrooms (5 years old or less.) This is because Centers offer some variety for these children, and because it is more like "directed play" than having the usual "playtime." But, with effort and planning, Centers can succeed with older children, even in Sunday School.

How to Set up Learning Centers in Your Classroom

Set up discreet areas around your classroom, with various activities in each area, inviting the children to visit them. You may need to give specific instructions about how to do some of the activities. Limit the number of children allowed at each center at one time. You may want to say, "*If there's a spot available at the table, you may move there.*" Set aside a certain amount of time for Centers, after which the children will come back together for group activities. One of the Centers could be a "Snack Area," but be sure to offer something simple, like crackers and water. Otherwise, all of the children will want to crowd around it *at the same time!* 😊

The types of Centers in your classroom need to vary with the age of the children, their abilities and interests, and possibly with what you have been studying in class. At each Center there needs to be something to see and explore, or something to do and learn from. Be imaginative, and use the resources and materials you have available, to create innovative and fun Centers.

Here are some ideas...

IDEAS FOR CENTERS for children 4-7 years of age

Reading Center – A quiet, comfortable area with small chairs (or even bean-bag chairs), where the children can relax and read books. If no chairs are available, you can use blankets on the floor, or even big boxes with the top and one side cut out of them, and pillows inside of them.

Writing Center – A table with chairs where children can practice the fundamentals of writing. Provide large letters for the children to trace with their fingers. Allow them to write their letters on a piece of paper. Let the children practice writing their names, either printing or using cursive. Provide a picture of something, with its name written under it. Let the child write the name of the thing pictured as well. Have a place to display all of the children's written names.

Scissor Center – Safety scissors are used to make cuts on pieces of paper with lines on them. The designs on the paper should range from easy to more difficult. First have them cut along a straight line towards a dot at the center of the page. Later move to curved lines and zigzag lines.

Magnify Me Center – Provide plastic magnifying glasses for the children to look through. Allow them to look at various objects. Ideas include: Seashells, rocks, pine cones, leaves, and insects. Let the children draw what they see through the magnifying glass.

Sandbox Center – Provide a low flat plastic box with a layer of clean sand in it. (Put a sheet or tarp under it, so the sand doesn't go everywhere.) Draw letters or numbers in either dry or wet sand. Erase the sand with your hand. "Find" things hidden in the dry sand, using your hands, or a sieve. (*Little plastic rings are fun to find!*) Alternatively provide cups, or a shovel and pail, so that children can practice scooping up the sand and pouring it from one container to another.

"Walk the Line" Center – Put a line on the floor (with tape or something) and ask the children to walk on the line without "falling off." Can you do it heel to toe? Can you do it going sideways?

Water Center – (This Center probably works best outside in the summer!) Bring lots of towels (and maybe even some extra clothes) on this day. Provide a sink, a small dishpan, or a bucket full of water. Also provide plastic pitchers, pans, cups, and even measuring cups. Pour water carefully from a pitcher to a cup and back again. Learn to measure 1 cup, ½ cup, teaspoons, etc.

"Sink or Float" Center – An extension of the Water Center. Provide a small pool or bucket of water. Also provide various objects like: tin foil, small blocks of wood, wooden spoons, and metal spoons. See if the items sink or float. (Test their buoyancy.) Allow the children to shape a boat from the tin foil. Will it float? What shape of boat floats the best?

OTHER IDEAS:

Bubbles	Markers	Stickers	Stamping	Tie a Bow	Learning Shapes
Coloring	Hand Washing	Counting	Writing	Button a Button	

IDEAS FOR CENTERS for children 8-11 years old

Reading Center – Have a quiet comfortable area where children can read. Be creative with this area. Consider hanging sheets to make it seemed “walled off”. Or let children read under tables, while sitting on pillows. Provide books appropriately challenging for their ages.

Sewing Center – Learn to thread a needle. Use an embroidery hoop (with fabric in it) to try out different stitches. Progress to sewing on a button.

Bible Work Center – Learn about the Bible. Read directions explaining that the Bible is made in two parts (Old and New Testaments). Learn about the different books of the Bible. Practice saying or memorizing their names. Look up different Bible verses. Write them down.

Make a Card Center – Use heavy paper, markers, stencils, cut outs, stickers and pictures to make a card for someone special, or for an upcoming holiday.

Game Center – Play different quiet games (checkers, chess, or other types of board games) with one or two other persons.

Bible Verse Center – Work memorizing the Bible verse of the day. It will be written down on some paper at the Center. Read it. Write it down. Say it to yourself or others. Take the words of the verse, which are written down on note cards, mix them up, and put them in the right order.

Map Center – Look at maps of the area where today’s lesson happened. Did the person in the story take a journey? If so, show with your finger where the person went to on his/her trip. Learn north, south, east, and west on the map. How far is it from one place to another?

Five Senses Center – Smell different smells in bottles. (Such as spices and flavorings) What are they? Did you guess correctly? Now look at salt and sugar. Do they look the same? Do they taste the same? Feel things with different textures. Which ones are rough, smooth, or prickly? Put your hand in a sack and feel objects of differing shapes. What are the objects? Can you tell (without looking) what the objects are? Listen to different sounds. What do you hear?

Magnifying Glass Center – Use a magnifying glass to look at different objects up close. Be very careful with the magnifying glass. It is very precious. Look at rocks, seashells, insects, flowers, leaves, pine cones, etc. Remember that God made everything in nature! How good God is!

Painting Center – Use paints to learn about different colors. Primary colors are red, yellow, and blue. *(They cannot be made by mixing other colors together, but you can make any other color by mixing different amounts of these three colors together.)* Learn how to make green, orange, and purple. How do you make brown? Paint different colored squares on a piece of paper. Write the names of the colors. Can you create a new color of your own and give it a name?

OTHER IDEAS: Listening to Music Drawing Poetry Science Math