

A Staff Training Aid

Classroom Labeling

A Publication of the Environments Professional Group

Appropriate labeling in the early childhood environment enhances literacy, organizes materials and activities, and facilitates classroom management.

How Classroom Labeling Can Help Young Children

Displaying labels and signs in early childhood classrooms is an important part of creating a print-rich learning environment that also includes books, drawing and writing supplies, play props that have printed words, etc. Labels and signs in the classroom offer opportunities to use printed language in ways that are real and meaningful in the children's experience. Young children will "read" the pictures and learn that print can provide useful information. *"The puzzles go here."* *"This area is for sand and water play."* *"This cubbie belongs to James."*

Children will naturally begin to associate printed letters and words with pictures and will realize that both real objects and spoken words can be represented by symbols such as pictures and letters. Even young pre-readers can experience the pride of reading when they interpret symbols.

Classroom labeling can also encourage the development of responsibility and independence. These visual "clues" help children become more secure as they make choices and learn to manage their classroom world. Confidence grows when classroom labeling builds success into children's activities.



Making Classroom Labeling Work

When using labels and signs in early childhood classrooms, be selective. The more authentic or real the information, the better. Choose signage that has meaning for the children in your class. Connections between print and images need to be clear and obvious.

Authentic labeling is NOT merely classroom decoration! Just having words everywhere won't do the job. Label things that children know and use, designate areas that should be familiar to the children, and use labels to bring order to children's work and play.

Remember to use the rules of conventional print on labels and signs. When printing labels and signs in English, you will primarily be concerned with case usage.

For example, most labels for classroom materials will use all lowercase letters: "puzzles," "blocks," "dolls." Labels or signs using proper nouns, such as children's names or center names, should use upper and lower cases appropriately: "Susan McDonald," "Dramatic Play," "Block Center." Also remember to always use correct spelling.

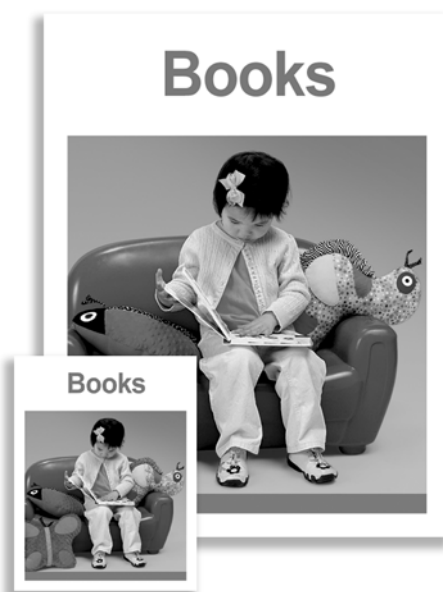
Appropriate Labels and Signs for Young Children's Classrooms

- Signs to designate interest centers / areas
- Labels on learning materials and toys that correspond to labels on shelving to indicate correct placement in the room
- Name labels to help young children learn to recognize their names and to manage their belongings
- Labels and signs for charts such as those that record attendance or show daily schedules
- Labels and signs for choice boards to facilitate classroom management
- Labels for key room elements such as a door, a window, or a sink
- Labels for teacher-made curriculum materials such as matching games

Creating Custom Labels and Signs with the Environments “Just for Me” Label Maker

When you are planning to add labeling to your classroom, remember that the Environments “Just for Me” Label Maker lets you create a print-rich learning environment using your own computer and printer. It’s **QUICK** and **EASY** to make custom signs and labels online – and it’s **FREE!**

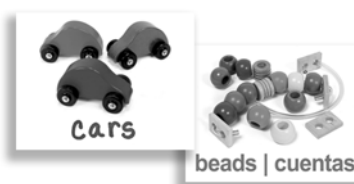
You can create all the labels and signs shown below! To use this online label maker, go to [www. EnvironmentsResources.info](http://www.EnvironmentsResources.info) and click on the link for “Just for Me” Label Maker.



CENTER & ACTIVITY SIGNS

Identify the centers in your room, and make classroom management easier.

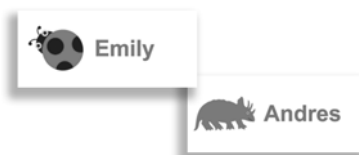
- Simplify organization of daily schedules.
- Create choice boards for center time.
- Customize signage to your curriculum with words and pictures that are familiar to children.



MATERIALS LABELS

Organize your classroom with easy-to-create custom labels – no more cutting pictures out of catalogs!

- Coordinate labels on containers with labels on shelving.
- Encourage children’s responsibility and independence.



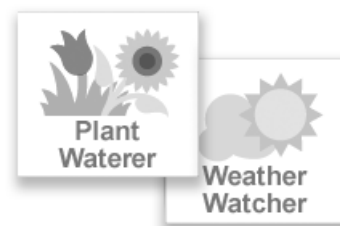
NAME LABELS

Help children learn to recognize their names with picture labels.

- Identify belongings.
- Designate personal spaces.
- Use for attendance and “choice” charts.

JOB CHART SIGNS

Help children know which tasks they are responsible for in the classroom



What can I do with the “Just for Me” Label Maker?

The Label Maker gives you the ability to create a variety of customized labels and signs. It also helps you organize your classroom with a coordinated, “put-together” look. You have lots of images and sizes to choose from, and how you word your custom signage is up to you.

With the Label Maker you can choose pictures that your children are familiar with and select words that are both consistent with your curriculum and understood by the children in your class. Instead of a “Manipulatives Center” for instance, you may prefer to designate an area for “Table Toys” or “Toys and Games.” Do you want to call your reading area a “Book Area,” a “Reading Center,” or a “Library”?



You can also use the Label Maker to print signs and labels without words. This provides you with even more opportunities to tailor signage to fit the needs of the children. For instance, you may prefer to handwrite your labels to reflect a particular alphabet model. Or if you have children with a home language other than English,

you can print or handwrite words in their language. This helps young children learn English as a second language and also supports the development of a stronger knowledge base of early concepts.

Different Types of Labels and Signs with Suggested Uses

Materials Labels

Materials Labels show pictures (with or without names) of the materials available to the children in your classroom. Materials Labels facilitate room organization while encouraging responsibility and independence in young children.



Idea #1 Coordinating labels on storage containers with labels on shelves helps children make choices, find the items they want, and return them to their correct places independently. For games and manipulatives with small pieces, make duplicate labels – one to place on the storage container and one for the shelf where the item belongs.

Idea #2 To help children make choices and to enhance classroom management, you can use Materials Labels to make choice cards. Print selected Materials Labels on sturdy paper. At small group time, show children the cards that picture the manipulatives, toys, or games that are appropriate for use at that time. Ask each child to select a card from the available choices. Children can then take the cards they selected and find the objects pictured.

Idea #3 To help organize unit block storage, trace around each block shape on contact paper. Then cut out the tracings, and affix these full-size paper shapes onto shelving. This will provide clear visual clues so that children can return blocks to the correct storage places.

Large Center Signs

Large Center Signs indicate what kinds of activities take place in various spaces around the room. They are the early childhood classroom's equivalent of a business sign. Center Signs can also help with classroom management when they are used to control the number of children in each center at one time.

Idea #1 Place a Center Sign at each interest center in a location where children can see it easily. You may choose to leave the signs up all of the time or to take them down when the center is "Closed." Or hang "Open" and "Closed" signs over or under the Center Signs to indicate whether those areas are available for use at a particular time.

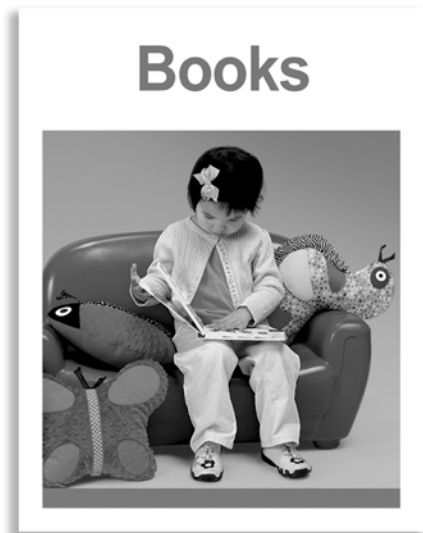
Idea #2 Mount Large Center Signs onto colored paper using a different color for each center. Select counters or other place markers of the same colors, one for each child allowed in a center at one time. For example, if the Art Center has a blue border, and you allow two children into this center at one time, set aside two blue counters. Place two bowls or other containers at each center, one for "space available" and one for "space taken." You might use a "green light / red light" system where green bowls hold "space available" counters and red bowls hold the "space taken" counters.

Put the correct number of colored counters into the "spaces available" bowl at every center. Remember that the color of the counters should match the color of the border around the Large Center Sign.

As a child enters a center, he removes a counter from the "space available" bowl and places it into the "space taken" bowl. When a child leaves the center, he removes a counter from the "space taken" bowl and returns it to the "space available" bowl. If a child goes to a center and finds no counters in the "space available" bowl, he will know the center is full at that time.

Idea #3 Another way to use Center Signs to manage center time traffic is to place a small magnetic marker board with the Center Sign on it in each interest area. Draw or outline rectangles on the board to represent the quantity of children allowed in the center at one time. The rectangles should be approximately the size of children's Name Labels.

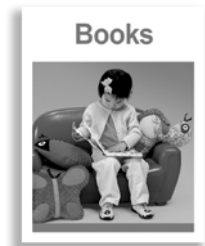
Make Name Labels for the children and attach magnetic strips to the backs of the labels. Children can then place their Name Labels on the boards at the interest centers of their choice. If no empty spaces remain on the board for a particular center, the child knows the center is full and can choose another center.



Idea #4 When a center’s function changes, replace the Large Center Sign. At Valentine’s Day your “Writing Center” may become a “Valentine Station,” and you may want to change from a Center Sign that depicts writing to one that focuses on message delivery. Or the “House Area” may turn into a “Career and Community Center” or a “Grocery Store.”

Small Center Signs

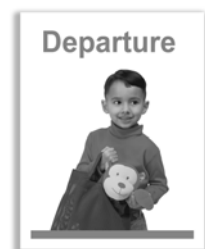
Although smaller in scale, Small Center Signs should have the same pictures as Large Center Signs. They can be used to create center choice boards that make interest center management easier and help children with activity selections.



Idea #1 Make duplicates of the Large Center Signs using the same pictures and words in this Small Center Signs format. Select signs that represent the centers that will be in use on a particular day, and create a chart featuring “Today’s Interest Centers.” To make the chart, attach the Small Center Signs to a flannel or magnetic board. Children will readily see what centers are currently open for use. They can place their name labels next to the picture of the center they want to go to. Using a write-on wipe-off magnetic board allows you to mark the number of spaces beside each center to show how many children can go to the center at one time. When the spaces are taken, that center is full, and children know to make another choice.

Daily Activity Signs

Daily Activity Signs are similar to the Small Center Signs. They have images and words that you select to represent the routine activities that occur throughout the day.



Idea #1 Use Daily Activity Signs to create a customized pictorial chart of the daily schedule for the children in your class to “read” and to see the flow of activities throughout the day. Choose pictures and words that are appropriate for the activities of your class from arrival time to departure time. You may want to use a pocket chart to hold the pictures in the order of the day’s activities. Or you can arrange your schedule on a magnetic or flannel board. If your daily schedule does not vary often, you may prefer to glue or paste the pictures to poster or foam board.

Idea #2 Present the daily schedule at morning circle or group time to make children aware of the order of the day’s happenings, and then post it for them to refer to throughout the day. Young children find reassurance in following routines and in knowing what is happening next. At the end of the day, let the children share their daily activities with their parents to reinforce the home-school connection.

Idea #3 Daily Activity Signs can also be used as cue cards at transition times. Quietly walk around the room showing the sign of the next activity to everyone to give a five-minute warning that the current activity is about over and that “This is what we will be doing next.”

Name Labels

Name Labels with appealing small pictures have many applications for early childhood classrooms. Consistently using labels which show a different picture for each child helps toddlers and pre-readers learn to recognize their names in print. They learn that the “butterfly” picture or the “fire engine” picture refers to them before they can actually read their names. For youngest children, use first names only. As children learn to identify their first names, you should make labels that include both their first and last names.



Idea #1 Place children’s name labels on their cubbies, cots, and rest mats to identify their personal possessions and spaces.

Idea #2 Print Name Labels on card stock or laminate them for use with pocket charts, magnetic boards, or flannel boards. Pre-writing children can record attendance or choose learning and play activities independently. They may also use their Name Labels to designate meal choices or to graph preferences.

Idea #3 Children will quickly learn to recognize not only their own Name Labels but also those of their classmates. Make Name Labels available in the Writing Center where children will enjoy using them to create messages for their friends. Children can then send their “mail” through the classroom message center while also learning to address envelopes.

Idea #4 Adhere each child’s Name Label on a separate large 12” × 18” piece of construction paper to help young children learn to identify their spaces and to respect other children’s spaces at mealtimes and table toy play times.

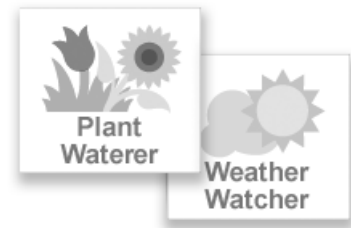
Idea #5 Use the Name Labels at transition times when children are moving from one area to another. Instead of calling out names, hold up Name Labels.

Idea #6 Name Labels can be printed with or without names or with words for other uses. For example, when going on a field trip, you may want to identify each child with your organization name and a contact number.

Idea #7 If children need to be divided into small groups for games or activities, print as many labels as you choose with the same image. One group or team may be the “Ladybugs” and another the “Turtles.”

Job Chart Signs

Assigning specific classroom jobs to young children fosters responsibility and helps children learn to follow through and finish tasks. Young children take their jobs seriously and are proud to be trusted with a role in their classroom's operation. Classroom management is enhanced by creating a job chart with pictures everyone can "read". There is no confusion over job assignments when everyone can see at a glance what his or her responsibility is.



Idea #1 Assigning each child a job to do weekly lets everyone participate and allows children time to become familiar with and successful at a task.

Idea #2 Select pictures of jobs that are relevant to your class and job titles that have meaning for the children. Most jobs will remain consistent over the year, but some may be seasonal. For example, in spring there may be a need for more Plant Waterers or Gardeners if you have a garden to tend.

Idea #3 Making a job chart that is easily changed allows for flexibility in job assignments. A chart on a magnetic board with job pictures and children's name labels that have magnetic backing are easy to adapt to changing jobs and weekly reassignments.

Around-the-Room Labels

Labeling some architectural fixtures and furnishings in the classroom is helpful to young children as they continue to learn that real objects can be represented with words and symbols in print.

Idea #1 When you choose to label room elements, remember to be carefully selective. Too many labels around the room are ineffective. They just become visual clutter and difficult to see. Label only one of an item – for example, only one chair and only one table.

Idea #2 Label things that young children know, can see easily, and use regularly – for example, a door and a window. Skip the vent and the ceiling. Change the objects labeled periodically to renew interest.

Idea #3 Label objects with their real names. Use names that the children in the class know. For example, people in some places say "cupboard" while others call it a "cabinet." Neither choice is right or wrong, but it is more appropriate to use the names with which your children are most familiar.

A Publication of the Environments Professional Group

The Environments Professional Group is a team of educators and designers who come together to make the connection between the needs of early childhood programs and the developmentally appropriate products that meet these needs.

© 2005 *Environments, Inc.*®

The contents of this publication are copyrighted by Environments, Inc.® All rights reserved.

Note: *Up to 100 copies of this publication may be reproduced for educational use. Reproduction of this or any other Environments publication for commercial use or sale is strictly prohibited.*

These suggestions and guidelines are general in nature and are not intended to take the place of any specific instructions provided to you by your supervisors or regulatory agencies. In addition, appropriate caution, reasonable safety precautions, and adult supervision of children are recommended at all times. Do not leave children unattended at any time.

Environments, Inc.
159 Bay Pines Road
Post Office Box 1348
Beaufort, SC 29901-1348

Phone: 843-846-8155
Fax: 843-846-2999
Email: environments@eichild.com



Environments

Call toll free 1-800-342-4453
1-800-EI-CHILD
Fax toll free 1-800-343-2987
1-800-EI-FAX-US
Visit online:
environments.com