



# Creating an area for activities

**SOURCE:** Expertise Centre Childcare, 2025

**Creating a new area for activities or improving an existing one step by step. You make a plan and carry it out. And then you observe how children use the new area and make changes if necessary.**

## FOR WHOM

Pedagogical coach or coordinator together with pedagogical staff.

## OBJECTIVE

Creating an area for activities and observing how children use it

## WHAT

As a team, you follow a number of steps to create or improve an area for activities. By observing the area after the change, you gain insight into how children use the area and whether the adjustments you made are producing the desired results.

## WORKING METHOD

A step-by-step plan that you discuss in a team meeting. And an observation method that can be used by a pedagogical employee or by the pedagogical coach.

## GOOD TO KNOW / INTRODUCTION

Sometimes, in practice, it turns out that an area for activities is rarely used, or is used differently than intended. An area with soft cushions that was intended as a quiet reading corner can easily become a busy place for jumping and playing. That frolicking about apparently satisfies a need for the children, but you also want to provide a good area for children who want to read quietly.

Why is it that the reading area does not function as such? Is it too big, too small, is it in the wrong place in the room, are there no interesting books, is it uncomfortable to sit in? By sharing experiences within the team about how children use the area, you can gain a better understanding of how the area is being used. This provides starting points for drawing up a plan for improvement. It is important that you include all aspects of that area: not only the play equipment, but also the layout and location within the area.

## → Layout plan for an area for activities

You can use this method to create a new area for activities or if you are unsure about the functioning of an existing area for activities. As an pedagogical coach or coordinator, you do this together with one or more pedagogical employees who work in the relevant group.

### 1. What activities

First describe the activities for which the area for activities should be suitable, and for which age groups. In doing so, you should describe the activities in as much detail as possible. So not: building, but for example: working with large wooden blocks, making objects that can stand upright, working with cardboard boxes, transporting things with toy cars, etc. The more you thought about what should be possible in an area, the easier it becomes to make a suitable plan.

## 2. Pedagogical policy

Check what your pedagogical policy says about the layout of areas for activities: is there anything on paper? Is there perhaps a list of materials for the area you are going to work on?

## 3. The size of the area

This depends on the number of children who will be using the area at the same time and the type of activities. Building a train track requires more area than reading a book.

Also consider whether it should be an area where a pedagogical professional must be able to sit with one or two children.

**If it concerns an existing area for activities that you are going to improve: critically assess whether the current area is large enough (or too large).**

## 4. An open or closed area

That depends on the type of area for activities. It is nice if a house corner and a building corner are separated by, for example, a cupboard or wall, so that things do not end up scattered throughout the room and children can play undisturbed. It also depends on the age of the children: with young children, it is important that they can keep an eye on the rest of the room, so the boundaries are low, while at out-of-school care, the boundaries can be quite high (see also: Pedagogical Surroundings Knowledge Base)

## 5. What furniture is needed to play on or with?

Bear in mind that it can quickly become too much: children like playing on the floor or standing on a platform or worktop. Furniture like chairs and tables often take up a lot of area and make it difficult to arrange an area flexibly.

## 6. Play materials

Determine what play materials are needed, and how and where the materials should be placed. Ensure that play materials are inviting to use. This means that materials are visible and within reach of the children. In this respect, it is important to find a good balance in how many stimuli you want to offer your children.

In this respect, out-of-school care children can cope better than young children. This may mean that, with the youngest children, you choose to place some of the materials out of sight and, for example, to regularly rotate the materials.

## 7. Atmosphere

Consider what atmosphere you would like to create for the area for activities. This can help children to understand the purpose of the area. Quiet activities such as reading books, relaxing, and listening to music call for a layout with calm colours and soft materials, such as a rug or cushions. Whilst harder materials, such as marmoleum flooring, are more suitable for busier activities such as building, dancing and creative activities.

You can create atmosphere with:

- Decorations on the wall at child height that are related to the activity
- Shape, material and colour of the furniture
- Accessories such as cushions, plants
- The floor: consider a rug or piece of carpet
- Lighting that matches the atmosphere you want to create at the area for activities

## 8. Safeguarding

Once you have completed all these steps, you create a drawing or description of what the area for activities should look like. You also make a list of necessities. If it concerns an existing area that you are going to change, part of it will already be present.

Next, you furnish the new area based on the results of the step-by-step plan.

### → Observe area for activities

Once an area has been rearranged, both the children and the pedagogical employee will need time to adjust. After getting used to it, you observe whether the area is being used as you would like it to be.

#### **Habituation**

Sit on your hands for a few weeks (three or four): do not change anything (yet) in the newly decorated area. After all, children need to get to know and discover the new area. It may well be that, initially, they do not use the area in the way you would like them to. For example, they all sit down in the new building corner and do not put things back where they should be. In short, they need to get used to the new area. This usually takes a few weeks. So take the time for that habituation, and help the children to get to know the area and how to interact with it.

#### **Observations**

After the habituation, you start observing how the area is being used and discuss with each other whether you are satisfied or whether adjustments may be needed.



You can also observe an area for activities if, for example, you are dissatisfied with an existing area for activities.

A good method is to observe the behaviour of children using the questionnaire below.

Agree on who will observe the use of this area. This can be one pedagogical professional, but you can also agree that several professionals will make observations, for example someone who works on a different day, so that you get observations from several days.

Agree that a colleague will take over tasks when someone is observing. The pedagogical coach can, of course, also carry out an observation themselves.

#### **Required material:**

- a pen
- two copies of the form below, or complete twice on the laptop

**What are you going to do?**

- Observe during a free play period when the children are playing indoors. Do this for 10 minutes twice a day, for example once in the morning and once in the afternoon.
- First, fill in the area you are observing (e.g. building corner, reading corner, etc.), and the date and time.
- You now spend 10 minutes observing what the children are doing in the area for activities
- Then answer the questions in the table below.

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**Observation area for activities**

<b>Date:</b> <b>Time:</b>	<b>Area:</b>
Questions	Observations
How many children are playing?	
Are children playing alone, alongside each other, or together?	
Are children playing in a concentrated manner, or are they easily distracted?	
Are children disturbing each other during their play?	
Is the area being used as intended?	

***After the observations, you discuss the results with each other in a team meeting. Together, determine:***

- How is the area for activities functioning in practice?
- Why do you think that is?
- Are any adjustments / improvements required?