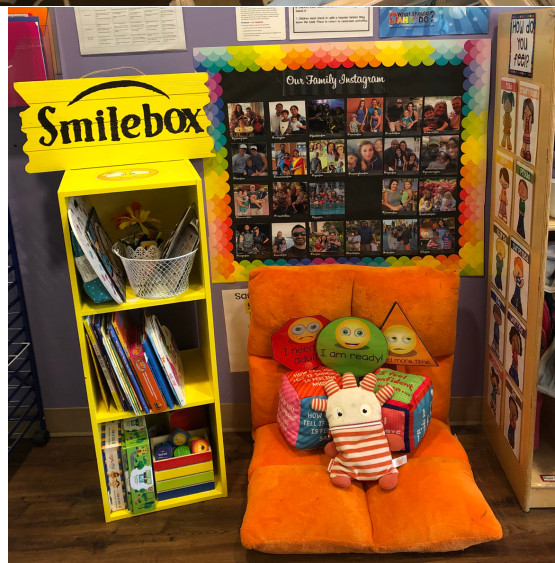


A Pre-K Teacher's Guide to a

# Safe Place



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## Section I.

# What **IS** a Safe Place?

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A Safe Place is a secluded part of a classroom in which children can spend time under specific emotional conditions. This place, corner, or center is designed solely for the purpose of aiding children in their ability to self-soothe, calm, and seek guidance or help. The Safe Place can be called many different names, such as Calming Corner, Soothing Station, etc. While the name varies, the purpose is the same.

The Safe Place is an idealistic location to teach self-regulation in a given moment. We can read an infinite number of books and talk about emotions, but the children will never fully grasp the concepts until they experience them. Is a child missing his or her parent? Use the Safe Place to teach about how to handle missing a loved one. Is a child being aggressive with his or her friends? Use the Safe Place to teach a child how to use his or her words to express his feelings. Is a child feeling hurt because of some unkind words spoken by another child? Use the Safe Place to build that child's confidence and give them a voice to express their feelings to the other child.

The Safe Place should be used only by children who are having emotional difficulties, such as being sick, scared, worried, sad, angry, upset, aggressive, etc. This is not a "Time-out" station. Teachers can encourage a child to use the area as a means to calm down but the child is not restricted to that area indefinitely. It is merely a safe place that a child can go (with or without an adult) to practice emotional self-regulation. When a child returns to a calm emotional state, the child returns to daily classroom activities.

Next, we will learn how to set up a Safe Place in the classroom.

## Section II.

# Setting Up the Safe Place in Your Classroom

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The Safe Place should be a designated and isolated location away from the rest of the hustle of the classroom. Pick a spot that is generally a quieter sector, such as a corner or near the front classroom door. This quieter location will give the students the ability to focus on their thoughts and feelings without the distractions of the other students.

Add comfort to aid your students in their relaxation. A soft chair or cushion, some pillows, stuffed animals, and tissues will help the children feel more secure and safe to express their feelings, much more than a hard, wooden chair in the middle of the classroom.

Many children need the comfort of their parents to help them with the healing process. Unfortunately for these children, parents cannot be at school at every hour to help them with their problems. The safe place is a great space to display family photos. If a child is able to look at a picture of his or her family, they may take comfort in their ability to see them, connect with them, and thus be more readily able to begin calming and healing their emotions.

Objects, books, and toys in the Safe Place need a place to be kept and readily available for the children's use. Have a well-organized shelf or basket to keep resources in. Consider using natural, soothing, and calm colors to add to the serenity of the space. Avoid overstimulating the area.

Next, we will learn what kind of resources are important to have in a Safe Place.

### Section III.

## Safe Place Resources

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The Safe Place should have a variety of resources and tools to help children with their behavior, emotions, and feelings. You can find an abundance of posters and displays created by teachers through a variety of platforms. We recommend [Conscious Discipline resources](#) or [The Pyramid Model for Promoting Social Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children](#). The resources available on these websites (along with many others) include posters that visually show children what each emotion or feeling looks like on a person's face, descriptions of circumstances in which one might feel each emotion, and some suggestions on how to emotionally deal with those kinds of difficulties. Visual posters and displays help children identify how they are feeling without a teacher's assistance. In addition to posters and displays, these creative websites also contain resources such as printable documents, games, puzzles, and more to help children work through their feelings.

There are an infinite number of tools that children could use to potentially work through their problems. When picking out games, toys, and tools for your Safe Place, make sure to put any and all emotions into consideration. A tool that might work for a child dealing with sadness may not work for a child dealing with anger or aggression. Provide some squish toys, stress balls, paper and markers, puzzles, magnetic boards, etc. to engage children in a way that they find most comforting. A sad child might want to draw a picture for his or her family, while an angry child might need to physically get that aggression out by squeezing a stress ball. A nervous child might need a fidget spinner to calm the chaos of the mind, and a confused child might want a puzzle designed to identify different emotions. These games, toys, and tools can be found on an infinite

number of websites and in stores. The Parent-Teacher Store is a great resource for character, behavior, and emotions tools and games.

A child dealing with the stress of a strong emotion might not be capable of verbally communicating with an adult to work out his or her problems. In those circumstances, it is important to have some tools available to communicate and work through those emotions. Consider having some fun buzzer buttons, in which a child could push one buzzer for the answer of “yes” and another for the answer of “no.” A child could also have access to some signs that show how he or she is feeling and/or what he or she needs.

A child who is feeling anxious, angry, scared, or sad may be struggling to breathe smoothly. Have some posters, a book, or a handout on different deep breathing techniques so the children are prepared when it comes time to use one. Teach your students these deep breathing techniques on day one. When a child is hyperventilating in the Safe Place, they will not be able to verbally communicate with you. Already knowing how to “Balloon Breathe” for example, will help the child calm must more efficiently when you ask them to do so, rather than trying to teach him or her in the moment.

Next, we will explore a list of teacher-approved books and toys for the Safe Place.

## Section IV-A

### **Book List**

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The Safe Place should have a variety books covering topics such as behavior, emotions and feelings, stressful circumstances, and more. There should be books that children can explore on their own and books that an adult would need to read to a child. Here are some teacher favorites.

1. *What Should Danny Do?* by Adir Levy and Ganit Levy
2. *What Should Danny Do? School Day* by Adir Levy and Ganit Levy
3. *What Should Darla Do?* by Adir Levy and Ganit Levy
4. *Hunter and His Amazing Remote Control* by Lori Copeland
5. *What Does it Mean to be Kind* by Rana DiOrio
6. *My SELF: 12 Stories about Self Control and Self Esteem* by Newmark Learning
7. *I Just Don't Like the Sound of No!* by Julia Cook
8. *Baditude* by Julia Cook
9. *Decibella* by Julia Cook
10. *Tease Monster* by Julia Cook
11. *Well, I Can Top That!* by Julia Cook
12. *But It's Not My Fault!* by Julia Cook
13. *When Sophie Thinks She Can't* by Molly Bang
14. *Llama Llama and the Bully Goat* by Anna Dewdney
15. *The Way I Feel* by Janan Cain
16. *I Was So Mad* by Mercer Mayer
17. *My No No No Day* by Rebecca Patterson

Next, we will learn how to teach children to use the Safe Place properly.

Section IV-B

## **Toys, Games, and Other Resources List**

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Below is a list of resources, games, and toys that you might consider providing in your safe place.

1. Calming Strategies Poster
2. Feelings/Emoji Dice
3. Emoji Stress Balls
4. Inspirational Bracelets
5. Sand Timers
6. Pinwheels
7. Flowers
8. White Board Faces
9. Emoji stickers



## Section V.

### **Teaching Children to Use the Safe Place**

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Procedures and guidelines are essential to the use of a Safe Place. It is important that children are given specific directions of use from day one. If children do not understand how to use the Safe Place, it will not be beneficial to the classroom. Have a written set of guidelines that the children must always follow when it comes to using the Safe Place. Having the guidelines written and posted will not only help you and your students, but also any additional staff members, parents, and visitors to your classroom understand the purpose of that section of the classroom. Here are some sample guidelines:

1. The Safe Place is used when a child needs a break or is in an overwhelmed emotional state.
2. The Safe Place is not a “Time Out” or a free play center.
3. Only one child may be in the Safe Place at a time.
4. A child may spend up to 10 minutes in the Safe Place, unless otherwise approved by a teacher.
5. Children may use signs to communicate his or her emotional state with the teacher.
6. Children must leave the Safe Place exactly as they found it.
7. Children must check in with a teacher before they leave the Safe Place to return to classroom activities.