

Preschool Sensory Bin Planning & Material Safety Checklist

Plan the play • Check the materials • Track the learning

SESSION DETAILS

TEACHER / ROOM

DATE

BIN THEME

AGE RANGE / # OF CHILDREN

SUPERVISING ADULT(S)

UNIT / CURRICULUM FOCUS

How to use this checklist

Complete Parts 1–2 before the bin goes out. Choose your learning goals from Part 3, use Part 4 to record what you observe, and finish with Part 5 at cleanup. Always follow your program's licensing, health-authority, and allergy policies; this checklist supports them but does not replace them.

WHAT'S INSIDE

PART	CHECKLIST SECTION	WHEN TO USE IT
PART 1	Plan the Bin + Filler Quick Reference	Before setup — theme, goals, filler, tools, group size and roles.
PART 2	Material Safety Checklist	Before setup — choking, allergens, toxicity, hygiene and supervision.
PART 3	Play Activities & Learning Metrics	Choose activities and what to look for in each learning domain.
PART 4	Observation & Progress Record	During play — rate each child 0–2 per domain.
PART 5	Cleanup, Review & Sign-Off	After play — clean, store, reflect and sign off.

Part 1 | Plan the Bin

✓	CHECK ITEM	NOTES / ACTION
☐	Theme chosen and linked to the current unit or classroom interest	Theme: _____
☐	1–2 learning goals selected from Part 3 (more than two dilutes the play)	Goals: _____
☐	Base filler selected (see Filler Quick Reference)	Filler: _____
☐	Tools and props chosen to match the goals (scoops, tongs, funnels, cups, sorting trays, number cards)	_____ _____
☐	Group size set so children are not crowded (about 3–4 per bin is a common guideline)	# at bin: _____
☐	3–5 target vocabulary words planned	Words: _____
☐	Open-ended questions prepared ("What do you notice?" "What might happen if...?")	_____ _____
☐	Adaptations ready for children with sensory sensitivities, mobility needs, or who avoid messy textures (tools, gloves, observer role, alternate filler)	_____ _____
☐	Material Safety Checklist (Part 2) completed before setup	_____ _____
☐	Setup, supervision, and cleanup roles assigned	Who: _____

Filler Quick Reference

Match the base filler to your learning goals, and check the “watch out for” column against Part 2 before setup.

FILLER	GREAT FOR	WATCH OUT FOR
Dry rice, oats, or pasta	Scooping, pouring, counting, sound	Food allergens (wheat, oat cross-contact); dust; replace if damp
Sand / kinetic sand	Molding, measuring, shapes, fine motor	Dust and eyes; use sand labelled for children; keep slightly damp; wash hands after
Water & soap bubbles	Sink / float, pouring, measuring	Slippery floors; bacteria buildup (fresh water each session); never unsupervised
Shredded paper, fabric, cotton	Texture, tearing, hide-and-find	Dust; paper cuts; cotton balls and fuzz if mouthed; skip glitter and sequins
Natural items (leaves, pinecones, stones, shells)	Sorting, classifying, science observation	Pesticides, mold, insects, sharp edges; stones small enough to swallow
Playdough / cloud dough	Hand strength, shaping, tools	Wheat / gluten; discard when dried out or dirty
Water beads / gel beads	Not recommended for this age group	Swell when wet; serious blockage risk if swallowed

Part 2 | Material Safety Checklist

STOP RULE If any item below cannot be checked, change or remove the material before children use the bin.

A Choking Hazards & Small Parts

✓	CHECK ITEM	NOTES / ACTION
☐	Nothing in the bin fits through a toilet-paper tube (about 4.4 cm / 1¾ in wide), the standard small-parts test	
☐	No marbles, small beads, coins, button batteries, magnets, or balloon / latex pieces	
☐	No whole nuts, hard candy, popcorn kernels, whole grapes, or other foods that are choking hazards	
☐	Water beads / gel beads are not used (they swell when wet and can cause serious blockages if swallowed)	
☐	All tools and props checked for cracks, chips, loose parts, and sharp or splintered edges before each use	
☐	Plan in place for children who mouth objects (closer supervision, alternate filler, or a different activity)	

B Allergens & Food-Based Materials

✓	CHECK ITEM	NOTES / ACTION
☐	Every filler and prop checked against all children's allergy and dietary records (e.g., wheat, peanut, tree nut, egg, milk, soy, sesame)	
☐	Ingredient labels read for hidden allergens and cross-contact (pasta, oats, cereal, flavoured extracts)	
☐	Food-based fillers approved under program policy; family cultural, religious, and food-waste concerns considered	
☐	No raw red kidney beans (toxic when not boiled); other dry beans only with close supervision	
☐	Allergy action plans and emergency medication are accessible, and staff know where they are	

C Toxicity & Chemicals

✓	CHECK ITEM	NOTES / ACTION
☐	All materials labelled non-toxic and age-appropriate	
☐	No borax-based slime, essential oils, strong fragrances, or cleaning-product residue in the bin	
☐	Colourants are food-grade and tested first for staining of skin and clothing	
☐	Foam / shaving cream (if used) is fragrance-free, and children are reminded to keep it away from eyes	
☐	Natural items (leaves, pinecones, shells, stones) checked for pesticides, mold, insects, and sharp edges, then rinsed and fully dried	

D Hygiene & Cleanliness

✓	CHECK ITEM	NOTES / ACTION
☐	Children wash hands before and after play; cuts or sores are covered	
☐	Bin and tools cleaned and sanitized before use, following your health-authority guidance	
☐	Dry fillers inspected for moisture, mold, pests, and odour; discarded immediately if wet, damp, or smelly	
☐	Water play uses fresh water each session; bin emptied, cleaned, and dried afterward	
☐	Children or staff who are ill or have open sores do not share the bin	
☐	Bin covered and stored in a clean, dry place when not in use	

E Physical Safety & Supervision

✓	CHECK ITEM	NOTES / ACTION
☐	Bin sits on a stable, level surface at child height and cannot tip	
☐	Floor around the bin has a mat or tarp, and spills are wiped promptly (slip hazard)	
☐	An adult is within sight and reach for the entire session, including water play	
☐	Ground rules reviewed in simple words with a visual cue ("Hands, not mouths." "Keep it in the bin.")	
☐	Staff hold current first-aid / choking-response training; first-aid kit and incident log are within reach	

Part 3 | Play Activities Linked to Learning Metrics

Check the activities you will offer; the metric is your “what to look for.” Adjust targets to each child and your program’s curriculum framework.

✓	PLAY ACTIVITY	SKILL TARGETED	OBSERVABLE METRIC (WHAT TO LOOK FOR)
FINE MOTOR & PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT			
☐	Scooping and pouring with spoons, cups, and funnels	Hand-eye coordination, wrist control	Transfers material between containers with few spills (target: 5+ scoops without spilling)
☐	Picking up items with tongs, tweezers, or fingers	Pincer / tripod grasp, hand strength	Picks up and releases items using a pincer or tripod grasp (count items moved in 1 minute: __)
☐	Digging for and burying hidden objects	Bilateral coordination	Uses both hands together (one steadies, one digs)
EARLY MATH			
☐	Counting objects into a cup or egg carton	Counting, one-to-one correspondence	Counts to __ touching each object once; states how many in all
☐	Sorting by colour, size, or shape	Classification	Sorts by one attribute and names the sorting rule (stretch: two attributes)
☐	Comparing full / empty, more / less, heavy / light	Measurement, comparison language	Uses comparison words correctly and identifies which container holds more
☐	Making or extending patterns with objects	Patterning	Copies or extends an AB (or ABB) pattern
☐	Measuring: “How many scoops fill the jar?”	Estimating, measuring	Makes a guess, counts scoops, and compares the guess to the result
LANGUAGE & LITERACY			
☐	Describing textures, colours, and actions while playing	Descriptive vocabulary	Uses 3+ descriptive words in a session (e.g., smooth, cold, heavy)
☐	Letter or sight-word hunt with hidden cards	Letter recognition, letter sounds	Identifies __ letters / sounds correctly
☐	Pretend scenes and storytelling with props	Narrative skills, new vocabulary	Tells a short story with a beginning and an event; uses at least one target word

PART 3 (CONTINUED)

✓	PLAY ACTIVITY	SKILL TARGETED	OBSERVABLE METRIC (WHAT TO LOOK FOR)
SCIENCE & INQUIRY			
☐	Predict and test (sink or float, what absorbs water)	Prediction, cause and effect	States a prediction and describes what actually happened
☐	Sorting natural vs. man-made or living vs. non-living items	Classification, reasoning	Sorts items and gives a reason for each group
☐	Observing change (wet vs. dry sand, melting ice)	Observation, change over time	Describes a change using before / after language
SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL & SELF-REGULATION			
☐	Sharing tools and space at the bin	Turn-taking, cooperation	Asks for a tool or waits a turn using words, without adult prompting
☐	Building or playing together on one scene	Cooperative play	Plays with (not just beside) a peer and adds to a shared idea
☐	Trying again after a spill or failed attempt	Persistence, problem solving	Tries a new strategy and stays with the task for __ minutes
☐	Engaging with unfamiliar textures	Sensory regulation, flexibility	Participates, or opts out using a strategy (tools, observer role); follows the “keep it in the bin” rule

Part 4 | Observation & Progress Record

Rating key

- 0 Not yet observed
- 1 Emerging (needs prompting or help)
- 2 Consistent (does it independently)

Use the metrics from Part 3 for each domain. Leave a cell blank if you did not observe that domain.

CHILD'S NAME	DATE	FINE MOTOR	MATH	LANGUAGE	SCIENCE	SOCIAL-EMOT.	NOTES / NEXT STEP

Part 5 | Cleanup, Review & Sign-Off

✓	CHECK ITEM	NOTES / ACTION
☐	Children helped with cleanup (wiping, sweeping, returning tools)	
☐	Filler sifted, inspected, and stored in a sealed container, or discarded if wet, dirty, or damaged	
☐	Tools washed and sanitized, and checked for damage	
☐	Bin, floor, and nearby surfaces cleaned; hands washed	
☐	Any incidents, allergic reactions, or near misses recorded and reported per program policy	

Session Review

Which learning goals were met?	
What will I change next time?	
Children to follow up with	

Sign-Off

COMPLETED BY	DATE
REVIEWED BY	DATE