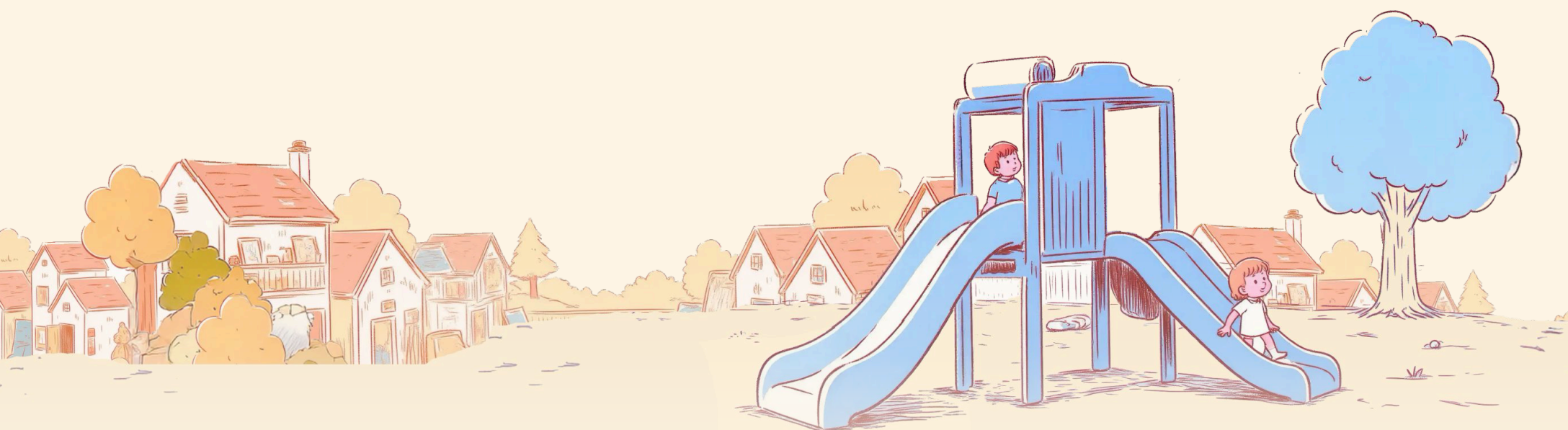


Your First 30 Days

**A classroom management
playbook for new teachers**



How to use this guide

This playbook covers the practical stuff: what to actually say, do and skip during your first month in the classroom.

A few ways to use it:

- Skim it once, cover-to-cover, before your first week
- Keep it in your bag and re-read one section per week during month one
 - *We would recommend using that **one** section as your classroom management focus/goal for the week, giving you time to really hone your routine in that area*
- Tape the scripts and checklists to your desk for easy referral

Managing classrooms, children and families all at once can feel overwhelming at first, but with time and practice you will build a bullet-proof routine that comes naturally – and maximizes the mental space and energy you have available for the children!

A NOTE ON THE CALLOUT BOXES

Throughout this guide you'll spot boxes like this one. They flag places where Playground already does part of the work for you (if your center uses it). Skip them if they don't apply – the advice around them still stands on its own!

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Building a daily rhythm

A common mistake when starting out is to over-plan activities and under-plan transitions. It’s understandable, because the activities themselves form a vital part of the children’s learning. But if you’re busy cajoling another child away from the previous task, they’re never going to access that learning.

Three habits that matter more than any lesson plan:

- Use the same signal every time you transition (a song, chime, lights off/on). Kids don’t resist transitions, they resist transitions they’re not ready for.
- Narrate what’s coming next, out loud, one step before it happens: “In two minutes, we’re cleaning up for snack time.”
 - *A visual countdown timer is particularly useful in conjunction with this, to encourage independence and self-regulation*
- Build in five minutes of nothing between activities. It’s not wasted time, it’s a buffer for unpredictability.

A sample rhythm (adjust to your center’s schedule):

Time	What’s happening	Your focus
7:30 - 8:15	Arrival & free play	Individual greetings, quick visual scan for how each child seems today
8:15 - 8:45	Breakfast / morning meeting	Same seats, same opener – predictability lowers morning stress
8:45 - 9:30	Structured activity	This is where your lesson plan lives
9:30 - 10:00	Outdoor / gross motor	A change of pace or scene to help children reset and swap skill sets
10:00 - 11:00	Choice Time	Float and observe – this is your best documentation window
11:00 - 12:00	Lunch & nap	Start the wind-down signal 10 minutes early, every day

Pro tip: When the children are self-directed during Choice Time, this is the easiest moment for you to jot down some quick observation notes or snap photos for families without stopping instruction.

Surviving pickup

Pickup can be the hardest 90 minutes of your day: the children are tired, parents arrive at different times, and everyone wants your full attention at once. The goal isn't to give every parent a complete recap – it's to make each handoff feel complete in 30 seconds.

Structure is key:

- Have each child's bag, coat, art etc staged and ready before the first parent arrives
- Use a sandwich handoff formula: one highlight + one note + another highlight.
"[Name] had a great day, she painted a whale! She did struggle to reset after lunch, but showed great independence packing up her own bag just now."
 - Unless the note requires a longer conversation, following up with another highlight helps bring a clear end to the handoff, so parents can be on their way
- If three sets of parents arrive at once, greet all three, help the first, and tell the other two *"with you in just a moment"*. A named wait feels shorter than a silent one.

HOW PLAYGROUND HELPS

On Playground, activity updates and photos can be posted to the Feed throughout the day, or as a bundled summary just before pickup. That way parents already know about their child's day when they reach your door. Those Choice Time slots would be a great moment to upload notes for the parents!

Then pickup shifts through most families quickly, leaving time for any longer conversations needed – or for you to reset the classroom.



Sharing a room: working with co-teachers

Most new teachers picture managing a classroom solo. In practice, you're almost always sharing the room with a co-teacher – and the friction that causes usually isn't about the kids at all. When two adults are improvising who's covering what, routines crack and even the most well-planned activities start to crumble.

What to agree in advance:

- House Rules – so you're not contradicting each other's calls in front of the children. Nothing undermines authority faster than mis-matched expectations and consequences.
- Split responsibilities by zone or task – not just “whoever's free”. One of you leads the activity; the other floats for redirection, bathroom runs and prepping materials.
- Split the documentation roster – decide which children in the class you are each observing OR what specific things you are each tracking.
 - *Having a game plan for documentation stops you from doubling up on work with your co-teacher(s) and ensures that every child is covered.*

Example splits for structured activities/Choice Time:

Example splits for outdoor/gross motor:

Teacher A

Task: Activity lead

Documenting:
Development milestones

Teacher B

Task: Floating

Documenting: Highlight
of the day, Potty, Injury

Teacher A

Task: Bathroom runs

Documenting: Child A,
B, C, D and E

Teacher B

Task: Injury monitor

Documenting: Child F,
G, H, I and J

HOW PLAYGROUND HELPS

In Playground's Feed, there are different built-in post 'types' like Potty, Napping or Observation (tied to lesson milestones). You can even create custom post types, such as “Highlight of the day”). These go out only to the guardians of tagged students – sent individually or to the whole class, as appropriate.

You and your co-teacher can see each other's posts for a child, as long as you're both clocked into that classroom at the time the post is made. This helps prevent double-logging and reduces the need for a detailed check-in at the end of the day, since you each already know what the other observed.

Lesson plan building blocks

Weekly planning does not mean creating learning schedules from scratch – individual activities are building blocks for you too, not just the kids!

Once you have a solid activity, re-use it. Each re-use can include a small tweak to the original, introducing more independence to the task for example, and before you know it you're constructing your own spiral curriculum.

From the very start:

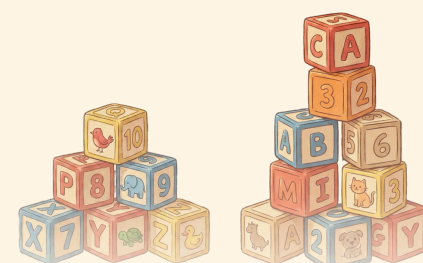
- Build a small activity library up front – just 10-15 activities across your core categories, literacy, motor skills, STEM, etc. This gives you enough to mix and match for months, instead of inventing something new every Sunday night.
- When starting a new week, duplicate a past plan instead of building blank. Swap out a few activities to try a new progression, rather than recreating the whole lot.
- If your center tracks progress against an early learning framework, note down which milestone(s) an activity supports when you build the activity – not months later when a family or a licensor asks for evidence.

Remember: educators don't have to work in a vacuum or reinvent the wheel. A centralized bank of activities for each age group across your program can be built and adapted together, sharing best practice and reducing individual workloads.

HOW PLAYGROUND HELPS

Playground's lesson plans are built from a reusable activity library. Each activity is tagged by category and age range, editable in one place so updates apply everywhere it's used.

If your center has your state's Assessment Framework set up, you can tag which milestones an activity supports as you build it. Then, when you post an Observation for that activity, you're given those exact milestones to rate and check off – leaving a trail of evidence for each individual child's learning journey.



Scripts for behavior

Having a phrase ready before you need it matters more than any philosophy – in the moment, you won’t have time to think of the perfect words. Go-to phrases are part of a bullet-proof routine, you can react quicker and the children know what to expect.

Instead of...	You can try...
“Stop that!”	“Feet stay on the floor. Show me walking feet.” <i>(desired behavior named)</i>
“We don’t hit.”	“I see that you’re upset, but hitting hurts. Use words to tell me what you need. [Do you need XYZ?]” <i>(names the feeling, redirects, [gives example])</i>
Raising your voice	Lower your voice and perform a specific action/stand in a specific place. <i>(children often quiet down to hear what is being said, the action or place draws their attention and starts an association with being quiet)</i>
“Because I said so.”	“We do X, so that Y. ” <i>(it takes longer, yes, but they need a specific reason so the desired behavior becomes ingrained)</i>



After two weeks you’ll have a feel for the interactions/instances you’re going to need these stock phrases for.

Use the rest of the table to fill in your own!

Incident report framework

Incident reports often feel high-stakes, but the actual writing is simpler than it feels – stick to what was observed and never make assumptions. Contextual information and inferences can be passed on to parents in conversation if needed, but only the facts should be written into a report.

A fast, defensible format:

1. What happened and when



- *Fell from the second step at 11:25am*



- *Behaving recklessly during lunchtime*

2. What you did immediately after

- *Picked up and consoled, ice pack held to left knee for 5 minutes*

3. How the child seemed afterward

- *Happily continued play after 5 minutes, small bruise on left knee*

4. Who was there

- *Witnessed by both [own name] and [co-teacher's name]*

HOW PLAYGROUND HELPS

Injury posts in Playground walk through these same fields, default to the current time (editable), and always require admin approval before a family sees them – digital review speeds up documentation.

Some centers have “schedule activity posts for check-out” turned on, but you may want incident posts to reach families before the end of the day. Just create a custom incident post with the “Activity Post” flag turned off, this exempts it from being bundled into the check-out upload. Custom posts are also useful if you need to cover something besides injury.



Remember to write incident reports within the hour while details are still fresh.

If you need to report something more serious always follow your center's policy for escalating concerns.



Boundaries and burnout

The teachers who stick it out aren't the ones who care the least – they're the ones who set boundaries early. Burnout doesn't come from just one hard day, it manifests after months of never fully clocking out.

The first 30 days in the classroom are likely to feel draining, but remember that you are still learning yourself and working towards building your routine.

Remind yourself that:

- You are not required to answer parent messages after hours. A next-morning reply is normal and professional.
- Taking your actual lunch break is not selfish. A tired teacher makes worse decisions.
- It's okay to say *"I need to check that and get back to you"* instead of endeavoring to answer every question on the spot.

Your monthly check-in:

- Look out for the difference between a hard day, and a pattern of dread before starting the week. One is normal, the other is worth raising with a mentor, manager or trusted person to – assess if something needs to change.

HOW PLAYGROUND HELPS

Camber (the built-in AI assistant) can turn a rushed, typo-filled note into a professional and friendly Feed post in one click. It won't do the admin for you, but it can shave a little time off the writing part!

Two other small things that add up: make sure to use 'Shared details' when logging a group activity instead of repeating yourself per child, and let the nap check timer track 15-minute safety checks for you – one less thing to hold in your head while you catch up with other tasks or take a break.

"Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes, including you."

Anne Lamott

