



### **"I Didn't Get It Out"**

By Melodee Simmons, Preschool and Early Childhood Representative

#### **The Problem**

Have you ever looked around your classroom and found toys everywhere? The children take the blocks from the construction center and leave them in the dramatic play center. The puzzles from the manipulative center are in the writing center. No one wants to clean up the mess, including you. When you ask the children to help, everyone says "I didn't get it out!"

My preschool and pre-k teachers had this problem. They were tired of trying to keep the room presentable and get the children to help with the clutter.

We labeled the shelves and toy containers to make it clear where the children should put away the materials. The children still did not put away the toys when they finished playing with them. It was time for classroom management!

#### **The Solution**

I demonstrated a simple check-in and check-out system. In each center, I attached a small sign with the center's name and spaces for children to hang their name. Velcro dots on the sign indicated the number of children who could be in the center at one time. Each child was given a rectangle with his or her name and picture on the front. There was a velcro dot on the back.

At circle time, the teachers explained the check-in system to the children. The teachers told the children to place their name on the sign when they wanted to play in that center. If there were three dots, three children could play there. When the children finished playing with a toy, they needed to put it away and take their name tag to the new center.

This helped the children to take turns, share, and take care of the things with which they played. There were no more children saying, "I didn't play with it." The children took ownership of their classroom. The teachers praise the children for what they do and give gentle reminders when needed.

### **The Results**

The classrooms are neater. The children are more involved in their play. The squabbling over who had what first has diminished. The tone of the room is softer. This happened because of a little additional structure.

The children enjoy this system because it gives them the opportunity to make choices and play in small groups. They like showing me their names. I heard a child tell another child that he had finished in a center, so the other child could have a turn.

Parents like to see the neater, calmer classes. They see how the children are learning to pick up after themselves and take turns.

The teachers enjoy being able to spend more time with individual children and small groups instead of refereeing and picking up toys.

The teachers are happy to expand their knowledge of classroom management and feel successful in their careers. Children are learning life skills that will help them throughout their lives. That is what we are here to do!

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