



# HANDS-ON-LEARNING: Play Spaces @ the Library

*Upper St. Clair Township Library, Pittsburgh PA*

Debra Conn  
connd@eiNetwork.net

Colleen Miles  
miles@eiNetwork.net



# What is a Play-to-Learn Space

A space intentionally structured to encourage early learning through play.

The space encourages social interactions as well as interactions with the physical environment.

















# Why should we have Play Spaces?



- More kids will visit the library!
- Encourages meaningful interactions between adults and kids and kids and kids.
- Gives kids meaningful play opportunities while they are in the library.
- Provides important early learning support for kids and caregivers.



# What We Did

- Redesigned and repurposed our space to create open areas dedicated to play.
- We weeded and made the decision to operate with a smaller collection.
- We added higher shelves.
- We removed desktop computers and the tables that housed them.



# What REALLY Works

Comfy adult seating keeps adults in the area and encourages reading together.





# *Have books in your play space!*



## *Good Books for Grown-Ups*



# What Kids Use the Most

Kitchen Play Table

Amazing Tracker





# How We Shelf Kits



*Color-coded for easy clean up!*



# Play Kit Storage

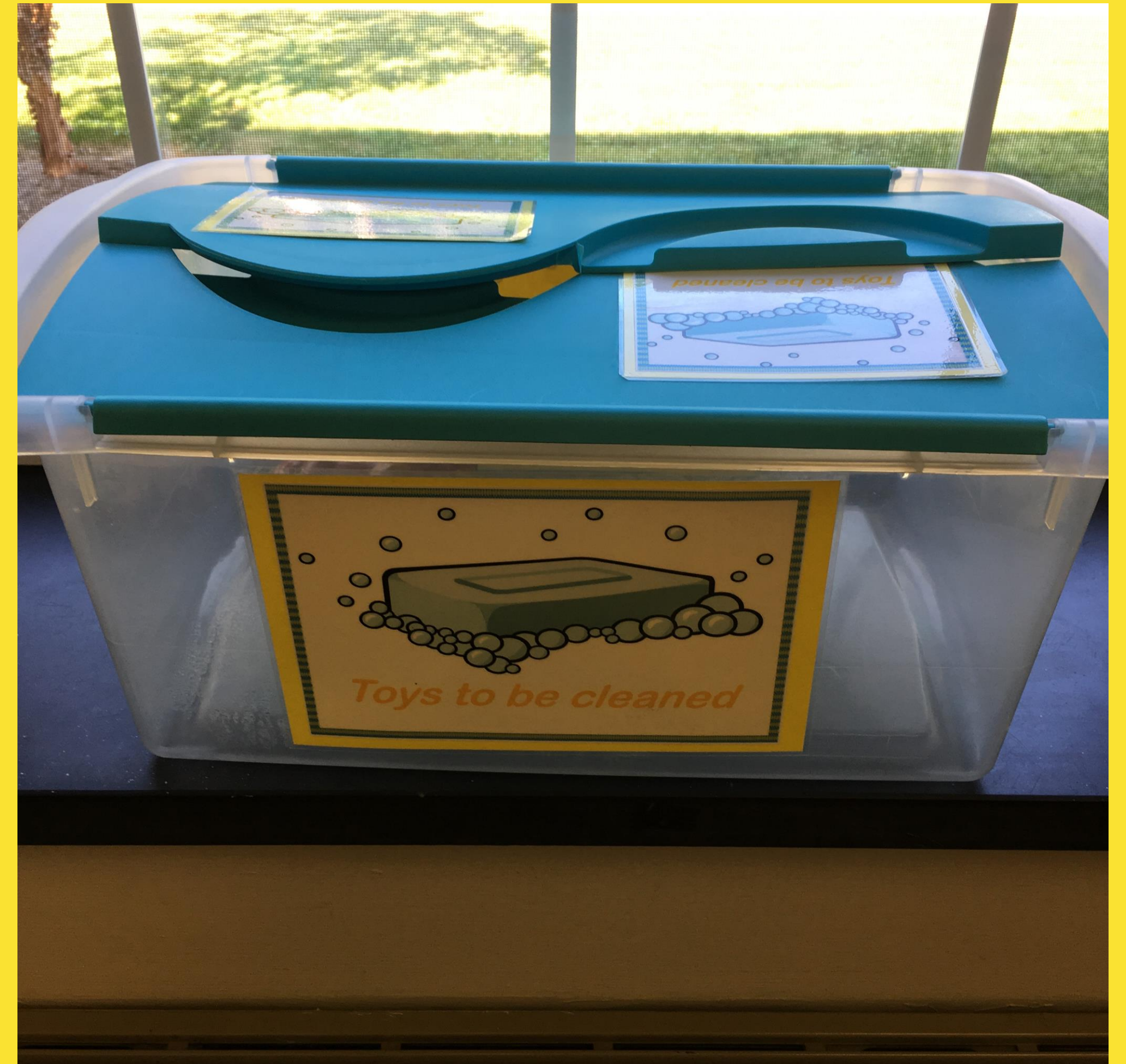
- Bins are labelled with name and/or photo of kit.
- Simple instructions on how to clean up!





# Challenges

- Material loss and damage.
- Continuing evolution of play kits:
  - Some kits had too many pieces.
  - Total amount of kits available was reduced.
- Things need to be cleaned: toys, kits, tables, chairs.
- BODILY FLUIDS!





# Challenges

- NOISE LEVEL!
- Kits and toys must be replaced and refreshed regularly.
- Kits are used without adult assistance.
- Behavioral issues.
- Staff





# Play Area Etiquette

## Library Rules

Use inside, quiet voices.

Please walk in the Library.

No running or climbing.

Have fun, but respect others!

## In the Play Area

Use one kit at a time.

Return all kit pieces to their container before opening another kit or leaving the Library.

Pick up toys, even if you did not get them out or play with them.



**Please use the  
diaper changing  
stations  
located in the  
restrooms on  
the First Floor.**





# Explore-to-Learn

*A space created with the goal to offer STEM exploration for kids 7 to 12 years of age and their parents or caregivers.*



















# What Kids Use the Most



Materials

Board Games



# Challenges

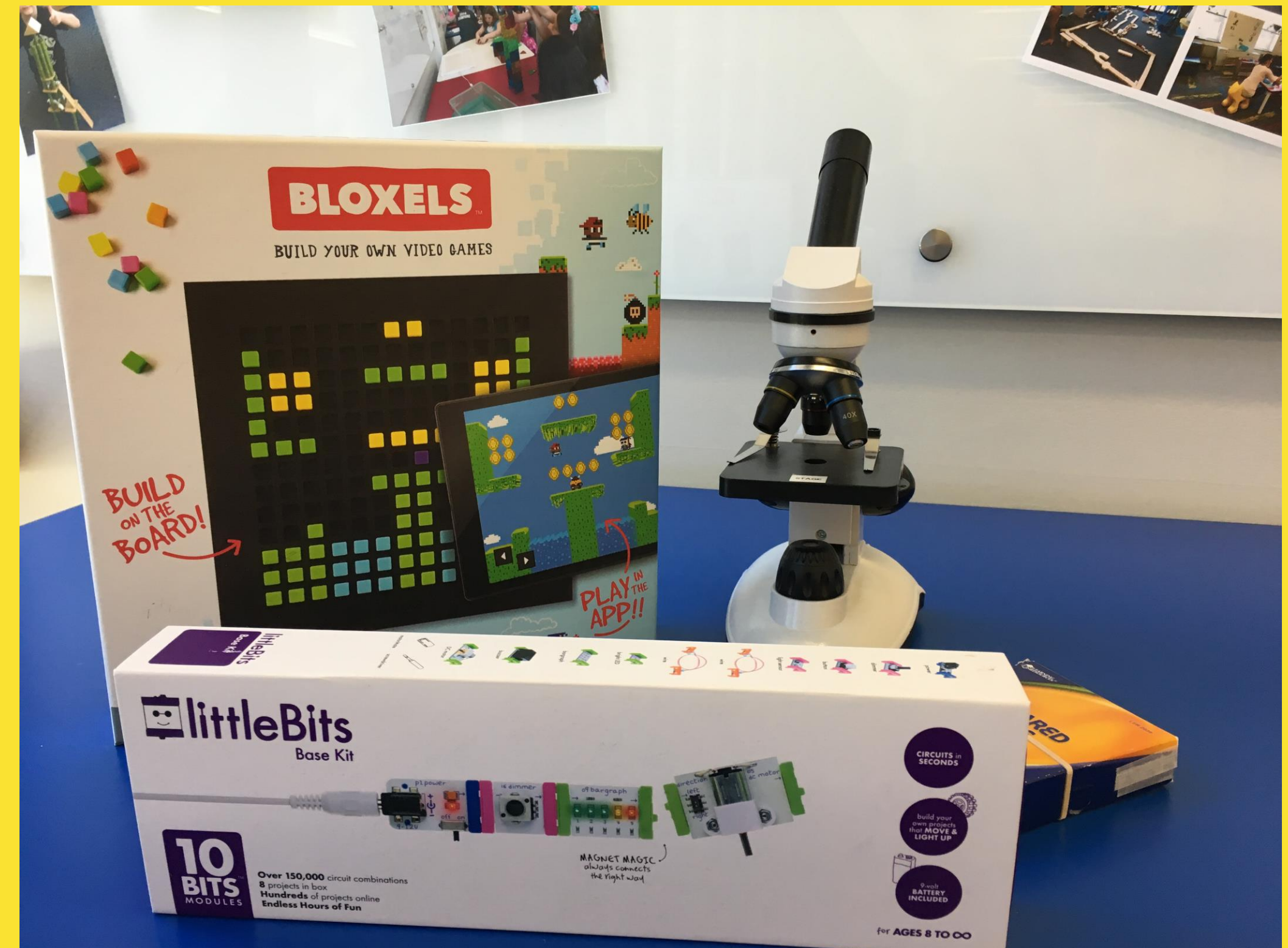
- Material loss and damage.
- Replaced a broken Programmable Robot with a Fisher Price Code-A-Pillar.





# Challenges

- Continuing evolution of STEM Kits.
  - Area became an attraction for younger children. Kits had to be simple to use.
  - Items like LittleBits and Microscope were not as popular as anticipated.





# Challenges

- Director and staff.
- Money and space.
- Overall maintenance.





# What We Learned

- Items that are used the most are easily accessible and easy to understand.
  - Building “materials” such as City Blocks, MagnaTiles, and Panda Blocks.
- Informational signage was unnecessary—just put up pictures of kids!
- All items work best with adult supervision!





# Maker & More Time



In the summer teen volunteers help us showcase a variety of Explore-to-Learn Activities that are not available throughout the school year.





**BUILDING WITH STRAWS & CONNECTS!**



**SAND TABLE!**





**ARTS & CRAFTS!**



**RICE TABLE!**





# Vendors We Use

## Amazon

[www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

## Childcraft/School Specialty

[www.childcraft.com](http://www.childcraft.com)  
[www.store.schoolspecality.com](http://www.store.schoolspecality.com)

## Constructive Playthings

[www.constructiveplaythings.com](http://www.constructiveplaythings.com)

## Hatch

[www.hatchearlylearning.com](http://www.hatchearlylearning.com)

## Jonti-Craft

[www.jonti-craft.com](http://www.jonti-craft.com)

## Kaplan Early Learning Company

[www.kaplanco.com](http://www.kaplanco.com)

## Lakeshore Learning

[www.lakeshorelearning.com](http://www.lakeshorelearning.com)

## People Friendly Places

[www.peoplefriendlyplaces.com](http://www.peoplefriendlyplaces.com)

## TAG—Think and Grow

[www.tagtoys.com](http://www.tagtoys.com)



# DIY Cleaning Solutions



## Simple Cleanup Solution

1 gallon water

1 tablespoon bleach

Use to clean toys and play tables.

## Non-Bleach Cleanup Solution

Empty 1-gallon jug

1 bottle of rubbing alcohol

5-6 drops of liquid dish soap

1 cup vinegar

Mix all ingredients in the empty jug. Fill jug with water.

Use to clean toys and play tables. Will not leave a residue.