



A Look at the Oasis Kids' Room

by Kimberly Herbert

Kimberly Herbert has served as the childcare director at Houston Oasis since 2016. Kimberly is a retired teacher who has taught 2nd, 4th, and 5th grade as well as computer classes. She has taught Gifted & Talented classes that have included mainstreamed Special Needs students.

Here are a few thoughts that guide our set up in the kids room at Oasis: Oasis doesn't have a doctrine, so we don't need traditional Sunday School type classes. Kids today do not get much of an opportunity to play freely with different age groups, which they need to develop motor and social skills. We provide space, time, and activities that allow our Oasis kids to learn and grow.

Photography/Name Tags

We have color coded name tags similar to the ones used in the main room. Blue means the parents are giving us permission to post pictures to Oasis Social Media. Red means do not post. Kids do not understand the potential issues of social media and being part of a secular community in the south. We generally take action shots of kids doing things, but if a child asks for a photo to be taken -- we take it. If the child has a red name tag it is deleted when the children have moved on. The back of the name tags has two preprinted phone numbers mine and Alexis's We ask the parents to add their number. If we have to evacuate we have contact information for each child.

Special Needs

If your child has special needs, please contact me at kimberly@houstonoasis.org. We will work with you to make sure your child has a happy, safe experience. Our current room has smooth concrete floors and high metal ceilings. People sensitive to noise may find the room loud even when people are speaking at normal tones. If your child uses ear protection/sound-canceling headphones typically to cope with noise, we highly suggest you bring them at least for your first visit. I usually have a set in my computer bag also.

Story Time

We start with a story time. The books come from the Harris County Public Library. Our goal is to have a rotating selection of books, both fiction and non-fiction. I have a file of over 1,000 titles gathered from various sources. I use multiple themed lists put out by teacher groups and activists, searches based on requests from our members, and topics that interest our kids (especially topics that illustrate Oasis core values, like compassion, acceptance and reason). The kids are allowed to play with the toys during Story Time quietly. I have reviewed many of the books we have used on the <https://www.houstonoasis.org/> site under resources.

Free Play

We have a toy center, art center, big kid art box, and the library. Most of the time in the Kids' Room, it is free-play. The kids get to choose their activity and play together. The kids range in age from toddler to

middle school. We encourage the children to find ways to include different age groups. We remind the kids of basic social niceties and Oasis Core Values.

STEAM

Each week we introduce a STEAM activity. These are on the Houston Oasis website under resources. Once we present the activity, we usually keep the supplies in the "Big Kids' Art Box" These include things like a paper cutter, scissors, nail polish (for making rainbow paper). The kids have to ask to use these materials for safety reasons. We encourage the children to find new ways of incorporating the different STEAM activities in further explorations.

Personal Toys

Sometimes a kid needs their favorite doll, blanket, or Fire Truck. They are welcome to bring them. The volunteers take a picture of the toy, so if it ends up misplaced, it is easier for us to find. A bigger problem with matchbox cars than Teddy Bears. Oasis owned toys must be shared. Personal belongings are a little more complicated. The kids don't have to share and can give us the toy to hold. The exception is you can't exclude people by only sharing with certain people.

Electronics

Personal electronics are allowed, and there is wifi. The kids have joined each other in Minecraft and other games. I expect school-aged kids to know and follow their family's rules about screen time.

Outside Play

We try to go out to the playground for the last 30 min each Sunday. Kids should wear clothing appropriate for playing outside. The kids help pack up the boxes before we go to the playground. We try to time our return to be just after the last song.

Snack

We provide water, fruit, and chips as a snack. Please tell a volunteer about any allergies. Children can bring in their own breakfast/snack. Several of the kids and I are allergic to peanuts. We ask that parents not bring anything with peanuts into the room.

Junior Volunteers

Many schools and some school clubs are now encouraging kids to volunteer. Junior volunteers (10 yo - 18 yo) work under the direct supervision of the adult volunteers. They help setting up, cleaning up, assisting kids in getting snacks and water.

Adult Volunteers

Adult volunteers are background checked and go through mandatory CPS/Child Abuse training.

So now you've been given a bird's eye view into our Sundays across the walkway. We're always looking for new ideas, people and supplies, so if you're interested in contributing to Oasis kids, find me in the Kids' Room or e-mail me at kimberly@houstonoais.org and we'll chat.