

Frequently Asked Questions: **What's the best floor to use in a preschool room... carpet, or vinyl?**

This question has been around for many years. Some people have strong preferences for one material or the other. Some prefer to use both floors in their preschool classrooms. So what are the issues and how can you determine what is the best method for your situation?

Whatever choice is made, keep these aspects in mind:

- **Floors should allow preschoolers the freedom to participate in a variety of activities.**
- **Floors should be comfortable for seating and for activities.**
- **Floors should be easy to keep clean and sanitary.**
- **Flooring should be safe for preschoolers.**

Carpet has the advantage of being warm to the touch and looking good when first installed. It also adds some padding to the floor to make the floor a little softer to sit on, and for little ones who are prone to falling.

Carpet's disadvantage is that it tends to hold allergens and absorb body fluids and spills so that it can get very dirty very fast in normal use. If you want to make a bad initial impression, let your preschool carpet get soiled and start to smell. You will never convince parents of preschoolers you really care about the safety and wellbeing of their children if the floor in their room looks or smells bad!

To combat this here are some guidelines if you plan to use carpet in your preschool rooms:

1. Do not use a carpet pad under the carpet. This just adds to the absorptive qualities of the carpet and makes it much more difficult to get it really clean.
2. Use an anti-microbial carpet that is designed to fight the accumulation of bacteria and other organisms that can cause odors.
3. Purchase commercial quality equipment to maintain the carpets. A good vacuum cleaner and shampooer should be at hand to clean whenever necessary.
4. Maintain a regular and frequent schedule of cleaning to prevent build-up of food and other odor-causing materials. For rooms that are used during the week for weekday programs, and where meals are served in the rooms, this may be as often as daily vacuuming, and weekly shampooing, with spot-cleaning in between to clean-up spills and other accidents.
5. Create a fund to allow for carpet replacement periodically. Carpet will need to be replaced occasionally, depending on the amount of use. Facilities that are used for weekday programs that run 60 hours per week will require carpet replacement as many times faster than facilities used only for a limited schedule of weekly services.

Tile floors have the advantage of being very easy to appear clean and shiny. Hospitals use vinyl composition tile floors because they can be scrubbed and polished. They do not hold on to the allergens and spills that cause the odors that tend to be a problem in preschool areas. They also last a very long time under normal use and conditions.

The disadvantage to tile floors is they are harder, can seem cold and require regular maintenance to look really good. Tile floors that are not well maintained get dull and look dusty, even though they may be clean. Tile floors that are dull give the impression that there may not be enough attention given to the preschool area.

If you are considering tile floors for your preschool area, consider these tips to doing it right:

1. If the floors are old 9”x 9” tiles they probably contain asbestos and should not be left exposed in a preschool room. They can be covered over with carpet, or with new vinyl composition tile. Removal is usually not necessary, and can be very costly.
2. Newer vinyl composition tile (VCT) should be dust-mopped regularly to clean off dust and other particles that accumulate and can be abrasive and damaging to the surface of the tile. Protect the tile against damage when moving furniture.
3. Follow a regular schedule of maintenance as recommended by the manufacturer of the tile to provide a glossy shine.
4. Purchase the proper equipment to maintain it such as a buffer or high-speed burnisher if recommended by the manufacturer to keep the tile looking new.
5. Use carpet squares and/or rugs to add warmth to the room and create seating areas. Rugs can be laundered and kept clean, and are less expensive than carpet to replace when worn or soiled. For safety, use heavy double-sided tape to keep the rug from slipping.

Some churches choose to floor a preschool room with a split between **carpet and tile**. The advantage is that it allows the teacher to use the tile area for messy things like eating and crafts, and the carpeted part of the room for activities that are better done sitting on the floor.

A disadvantage to this approach is the fact that the custodians must have the equipment and supplies to maintain both types of floors in each room. They have to mop and wax the tile and vacuum and shampoo the carpet. Care must be taken to avoid getting mopping products on the carpet as they may discolor the carpet.

So far the perfect solution to the preschool flooring question has not been found, but looking at the options and evaluating the way your facility will be used and maintained will help you determine what is best for your situation.