



December

Helping Hands

Offering a helping hand to School Readiness Providers
A publication from Childcare Resource & Referral



Family Engagement Opportunities

Episcopal Children's Services

Volume 18, Issue 6

December 2023

Christmas Activities You Can Do All December Long

Fun and free? These holiday ideas for kids, adults and families will get everyone into the spirit.

When the holiday season is in full swing, you'll be feeling the Christmas spirit with friends, family and even those you don't know – that's just the magic of it. Since you'll get off work for some extra days, you'll have to figure out how to keep yourself (and your family) busy and in the holiday spirit. That's when a fun Christmas activity comes into play.

To help you brainstorm the perfect holiday plans, we've gathered some of the best Christmas activities to do with family, friends and the community near you. Although some of the best places to spend Christmas might not be your hometown, these activities can be done anywhere and everywhere. From making Christmas crafts for kids to planning epic party games for adults, we've compiled a list of festive pastimes those of all ages can enjoy.

The best part is that all of these fun ideas really capture the magic of the winter season, and therefore, can be done anytime in December!

For more information check out this website: <https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/holidays/christmas-ideas/g29777938/fun-christmas-activities/>



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ATTENTION HH READERS...

If you have a question, comment, or concern you would like addressed in an upcoming issue of Helping Hands, please send an e-mail to:
Brianna.Deosca@ecs4kids.org.
We will do our best to find the answer, post the comment, and address the concern.
Thanks!
Brianna DeOsca

Email Me

ELC of North Florida's Teacher of the Year 2023

The Early Learning Coalition of North Florida Pre-school Teacher of the Year Awards 2023

The Early Learning Coalition of North Florida is hosting its 8thth Annual Preschool Teacher of the Year Award! ELCNF is accepting nominations to recognize the contributions of outstanding preschool teachers. The nomination deadline is open until Dec. 19th, 2023.

Two teachers from the six counties we serve will be honored for going above and beyond the call of duty to set the learning foundation and better prepare students for elementary school and beyond. There are two categories this year. The first is the **Infant/Toddler teacher award** and the second is the **Pre-school teacher** of the year who works with ages 3-5. The winner will be notified between January 8th – 12th 2024 by a "Surprise" prize visit featuring a visit by a beloved character like Pete the Cat or Clifford along with balloons and flowers. The winners will be honored during an awards ceremony at our Early Educators Conference on February 3rd, 2024, at the Thrasher Home Center in Orange Park.

The winners will receive free admission to the conference along with a \$500 cash prize, courtesy of our conference sponsor Kaplan Early Learning Company and Clay Electric. Nomination forms are available on the ELC of N. Florida website: www.elcnorthflorida.org. Here is the direct website form download link: <https://elcnorthflorida.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/2023-Preschool-Teacher-of-the-Year-Nomination-form.docx>.

Please be sure to fill this out completely as all information is crucial to this award. Take time to write extensively about the nominee.

Contact Joan Whitson with any questions at joan.whitson@ecs4kids.org or 904-342-2267 ext. 202

Last Year's Winners

Traci Green from Advent Lutheran Preschool in Orange Park.
Takila Anderson From Anderson Family Child Care in St. Augustine.



ELC of North Florida's Early Educator's Conference



ELC of N. Florida's Annual Early Educators Conference
Saturday, Feb. 3, 2024
Thrasher Horne Conference Center
283 College Drive
Orange Park, FL 32065
Cost: \$30 Lunch Included
Registration will open January 2nd
You will register by visiting the ELC of N. Florida website
at: www.elcnorthflorida.org

This year's keynote speakers will be:
Patty Shukla from Patty's Primary Songs – visit: pattysprimarysongs.com
And Dr. Teri La Ducca – visit: impactearlyed.com



CEUs will be provided

Festive Sensory Bottles



Its December, which means red, and green is everywhere so let's have some fun with the infants using colors they are constantly looking at. Using bottles of any size fill with items that are red or green add in items that are both soft and hard and even liquid items such as oil/water, hair gel/water and dye the items. While the infants are exploring the bottles talk to the infants about the items in the bottles makes statements such as "I see you are shaking the green rice" "do you see the bubbles moving around" and "I wonder how the beads got into the bottle." Facilitate a child's exploration by placing the bottles just out of reach of children who are almost crawling and encourage the child to crawl to the bottle, infants who are not crawling place the item just above the infant and encourage them to reach for the bottle stretching their arms. Allow the infants to watch as you prepare the bottles allowing them to help when able, talk to the infants and tell them what you are doing while you are doing it example "I am putting green rice into the bottle" "I am putting red beads in the bottle with the red pom poms."

Snowflake Splatter/Animal Shadow



December is here and that means it is a little chilly and although it doesn't snow in Florida, we can still do some fun snow activities. Using a clothespin and cotton ball or pom pom have the children dap with paint on a light blue paper before children start to paint tape a polar bear or any animal the child chooses and encourage the child to paint all around the animal. Once the paint is dry pull off the animal leaving the animals shadow. While the children are painting talk to the children about what they are doing, "(child's name) you are painting snowflakes, have you ever seen snow before" "what would you wear if you were in the snow." Provide the child with information on the animal they chose "did you know that polar bears live the artic where it is very, very cold" "did you know that polar bears eat fish" "did you know polar bears have a thick layers of fat called blubber that keeps them warm."

Arctic Animals

December is a fun time to talk to children about animals who live in the cold such as polar bears, penguins, and seals etc. Ask children what their favorite cold animal is, print out their animals that they choose along with pieces of tissue paper, allow children to rip or cut their tissue paper, along with glue mixed with water. Have children paint their cardstock paper with the water/glue mixture, while children are completing this step ask them what they think the glue mixture might do in their craft. Once they have placed the glue on their paper have the children arrange the tissue paper on the paper anyway they choose, ask them what the colors they choose represent example blue could be for the sky or the water however if the child states that blue is for grass follow up with questions that prompt the students to think of why blue would not represent grass such as “have you ever seen blue grass?” “Do you think there would be grass in the artic in winter” “do you think there would be snow covering the grass?” Then allow the children to glue down their animal in the way they want, be creative you can provide one big animal as pictured or smaller animals and allow the children create their own artic animal scene. Show regard for the children and allow them to do all the steps on their own and in the way they want allowing them to be creative and have the full power to explore their imagination.



National Play Outside Day!

Resource: <https://nationaldaycalendar.com/national-play-outside-day-first-saturday-of-every-month/>

National Play Outside Day is the **first Saturday of every month**. The next one is Saturday, December 2nd, 2023. So, no matter what month it is, everyone put down your electronic devices and get outside! National Play Outside Day is a reminder to stretch our legs and expend some energy in the great outdoors.

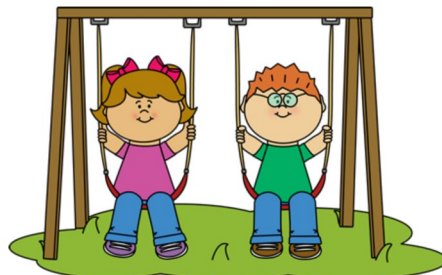
Benefits of Outdoor Play

Playing outdoors is a freeing activity. It frees us from routines, enclosed spaces, and frames of mind. The outdoors fills us with energy. It clears the cobwebs from our brains. Outdoor play provides terrific physical activity for our bodies. Our hearts pump fresh oxygen to our limbs and brains. We experience new sights and sounds. Children get to experience the world around them. As a social activity, playing outside encourages positive interactions. When you play outside every month, it becomes habit-forming – and this is one good habit to have! It stimulates the imagination. Outdoor play almost has no boundaries.

HOW TO OBSERVE NATIONAL PLAY OUTSIDE DAY

Explore hiking trails near you. Visit the local swimming pool or even take swimming lessons. Check out every park in your neighborhood and climb, slide or swing on every playground set. Start a game of catch, kickball, tag, or Frisbee or make up a game. Go to the beach. Go camping or fishing. Fly a kite. Jump in a pile of leaves. Build a fort – of leaves or snow or whatever is handy. Walk around the block. Go for a bike ride. Build a snowperson or go sledding. Identify the constellations at night and look for meteors. Visit your favorite state or national park. Get out and celebrate this month!

**NATIONAL
PLAY OUTSIDE
DAY** THE FIRST
SATURDAY OF EVERY
MONTH



Transition from the Holidays

Transitions back to school from the holidays can be a lot like the start of the school year however there are some things you can do to help the transition while on break.

Tips for a smooth holiday break:

- Keep your sleep routine
- Keep the child's eating routine
- Try to do things throughout the day that the child would do in school such as reading a book, going outside, music, art etc.
- Talk to your child about going back to school and count down the days on a calendar this helps your child know when it is coming and will lessen the shock.

Keeping a healthy sleep routine throughout the break helps the child remain in school mode and will lessen having a sleepy child the first couple of days back. Talking to your child about why they can't stay up all night and why they have to go to bed at their normal bedtime even though they don't have to go to school will help them understand from an early age how important it is to get a good night's sleep and will promote healthy sleep habits.



Joy in Lights

This time of the year is filled with many, many lights and in the eyes of a child this brings so much joy. Looking at Christmas lights whether in a store display, on a Christmas tree, in a neighborhood or on tv there's so much joy that can be found in this simple and free activity.

While looking at lights you are spending time with your children creating memories and creating lifelong bonds and traditions. Talk to your child/ children about what their favorite lights are, their favorite displays, do you like looking at lights on a tree or a building more etc. Engage in back-and-forth conversations with your child allowing them to lead the conversation, the walk and the topics focus on your child and soak in the memories and the moments. Walk your neighborhood with a cup of hot chocolate stopping and talking about what you love about the lights and displays listen to Christmas music and even better do so in PJS!



T.E.A.C.H

The T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education And Compensation Helps) Early Childhood® Scholarship Program funded by the Florida Office of Early Learning provides scholarships for early childhood teachers and facility/family home directors to work toward earning a degree in early childhood education (Associate, Bachelor's, or Master's), an Infant-Toddler Certificate, Florida Staff Credential, Director Credential, National CDA Assessment, or credential renewals.

Your T.E.A.C.H. scholarship will cover the majority of the cost of tuition and books, a per semester student access stipend, a tiered bonus structure for degree-seeking scholars, and much more!

Contact our office today at 877-FL TEACH (877-358-3224) to see how T.E.A.C.H. can work for you.

<https://teach-fl.org/>

T.E.A.C.H. Scholarships



DIVISION OF
Early Learning

LEARN EARLY. LEARN FOR LIFE.



Local Professional Development Opportunities (Training Calendar)

To register for one of our great training opportunities, please visit our website:

<https://www.ecs4kids.org/programs/regional-training-institute/>

Click on the registration link to see a list of available courses.

Click on a course and follow the directions for registration and payment.

The website provides a list of trainings and descriptions offered

For CDA information and

questions, please contact

Danesha Davis, Professional

Development Coordinator

904-726-1500 ext.2299

904-536-2119 (cell)

VPK Corner Sarah March, Contract Coordinator

VPK FAST PM2 Reminders!

The PM2 start date will begin in November for most providers. Please check our website for your PM2 start date and end date through our new automated system that is updated weekly! All you will need is the email used as the FAST contact in your provider profile and your Provider ID. <https://www.ecs4kids.org/programs/vpk/providers/progress-monitoring/>

Please remember, any changes to your classroom calendars can impact your progress monitoring dates, please verify these dates anytime you have a calendar change.

Some reminders for the PM2 testing period.

Testing: All VPK children must be tested before the end date of the testing window.

Please make sure you are checking your **STAR Testing Activity Report** periodically during your testing window to ensure all children have been tested, and that any newly enrolled children have also been tested.

Non-Participation Status: If you have a child that has a non-participation status, please make sure that you are entering this into Renaissance.

Parent letters: Please make sure that the parent letters are given to the parents within seven (7) days from the date of the child being tested.

Documentation: Per your VPK Contract, you must keep records for five (5) years. This now includes the **STAR Test Activity Reports** and **Star Parent Reports** for all progress monitoring windows. If signatures and dates are not included on the Star Parent Reports, documentation showing the parent was given the parent letter within seven (7) days will also need to be kept on file and available for monitoring as needed.

If you have any questions or concerns during your PM2 window, please contact Roushawn Saunders via email at Roushawn.saunders@ecs4kids.org or by phone at 904-726-1500 ext. 2241.



Warm Line 1-800-238-3463

Ext. 2281 (CNBB)

Ext. 2227 (PSJ)



Do you have a concern about the health, development, disability, and special needs of a child? If so call the Warm Line. The purpose of the warm line is to provide advice to child care personnel concerning strategies, curriculum, and environmental adaptations that allow a child to derive maximum benefit from the child care experience.