



Helping Hands

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



Family Engagement Opportunities

10 Fun, Fall & Easy Things for Kids

Fall comes and goes in a flash! But you can pack maximum fun into these busy days with budget-friendly fall learning activities and experiences.

Visit the Library & Track Your Reading
Go Leaf Peeping
Have Fun in the Garden
Try Kid Friendly Science Experiments

To read the full article & see additional ideas, please visit the website:

<https://www.scholastic.com/parents/family-life/free-fall-books-learning-activities.html>



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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.

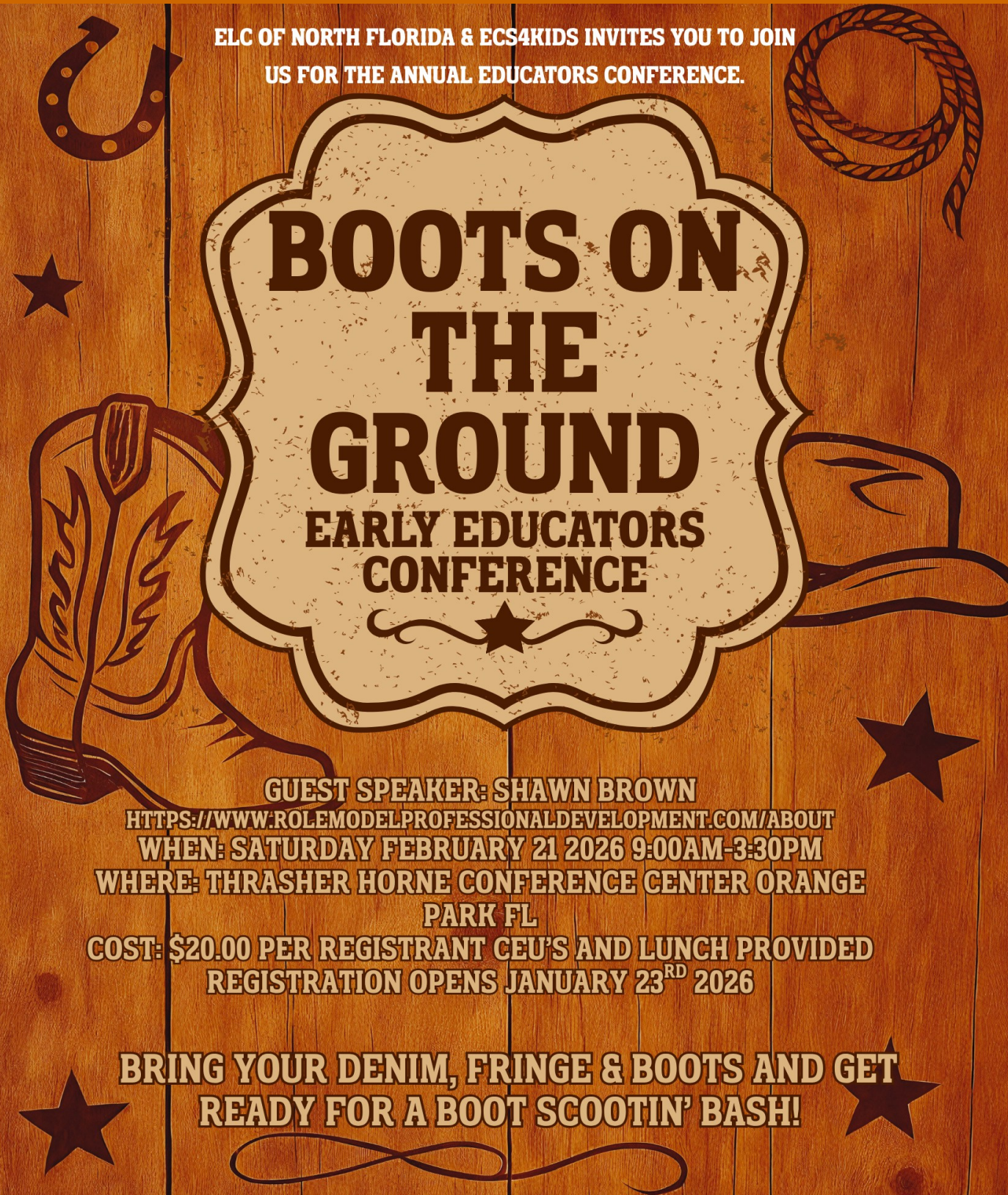
We will do our best to find the answer, post the comment, and address the concern.

Thanks!
Brianna DeOsca



ELC of North Florida Updates

ELC OF NORTH FLORIDA & ECS4KIDS INVITES YOU TO JOIN
US FOR THE ANNUAL EDUCATORS CONFERENCE.



BOOTS ON THE GROUND

EARLY EDUCATORS CONFERENCE

GUEST SPEAKER: SHAWN BROWN

[HTTPS://WWW.ROLEMODELPROFESSIONALDEVELOPMENT.COM/ABOUT](https://www.rolemodelprofessionaldevelopment.com/about)

WHEN: SATURDAY FEBRUARY 21 2026 9:00AM-3:30PM

**WHERE: THRASHER HORNE CONFERENCE CENTER ORANGE
PARK FL**

**COST: \$20.00 PER REGISTRANT CEU'S AND LUNCH PROVIDED
REGISTRATION OPENS JANUARY 23RD 2026**

**BRING YOUR DENIM, FRINGE & BOOTS AND GET
READY FOR A BOOT SCOOTIN' BASH!**

Edible Apple Pie Sensory Bin Alisha Dexter, Education Specialist

Resource Link: <https://kidactivitieswithalexa.com/fall-activities-for-baby/>

Introducing the **Edible Apple Pie Sensory Bin**, a safe and stimulating activity designed especially for our youngest learners! Using oatmeal as a base, along with real or play apples and a sprinkle of cinnamon, this sensory bin offers a rich, multi-sensory experience. The warm scent of cinnamon enhances the activity, creating a comforting and engaging environment for exploration. This hands-on experience encourages infants to explore textures, develop fine motor skills, and begin building early language through sensory play. It's a thoughtfully crafted opportunity to support brain development while allowing infants to discover, engage, and grow in a fun and nurturing setting.



Facilitating Exploration

Educators sit near infants, ask simple questions, and mirror their actions to support learning. When interest fades, offer choices and encourage continued play through verbal prompts and varied materials.

Supporting Language Development

Label objects, use self-talk, and model sounds to encourage infants to vocalize. Back-and-forth exchanges during play help build early communication skills.

Squishy Sensory Apple Pie Alisha Dexter, Education Specialist

Resource Link: <https://kidactivitieswithalexa.com/fall-activities-for-baby/>

Celebrate the season with a fun and safe sensory bin that's perfect for toddlers! Use plain or cinnamon Cheerios as the base, add apple-shaped gelatin molds for a playful touch, and include cinnamon sticks for a cozy fall scent. A spoon and bowl can be added to encourage fine motor skills like scooping and pouring—activities toddlers love. Best of all, it's completely edible and safe for curious little ones!

You can find the recipe here: [gelatine cubes recipe](#). Check out [this mold](#) for fun apple shapes!



CLASS Connections for Toddlers: Sensory Play

Facilitation of Learning and Development

During sensory activities, toddlers are actively engaged—physically and verbally—as they explore and manipulate materials. To expand their thinking, ask open-ended questions like: “What do you see?”, “What does it feel like?”, or “Have you felt something like this before?” These prompts encourage observation and cognitive growth.

Language Modeling

Support language development by using advanced vocabulary and parallel talk. Label objects and describe actions in real time, such as: “Kimbra is squeezing the red apple.” This helps toddlers connect words to actions and builds their expressive language skills.

Pumpkin Patch Sensory Bin Alisha Dexter, Education Specialist

Resources: [UF Literacy Institute – Toolbox of Activities and Resources](https://ufli.education.ufl.edu/foundations/toolbox/)
<https://ufli.education.ufl.edu/foundations/toolbox/>

Celebrate fall with a hands-on sensory experience designed just for preschoolers!

The **Pumpkin Patch Sensory Bin** features dried corn as a base, mini pumpkins, and scoops to encourage exploration and fine motor development. Add number cards to introduce early math skills like counting and number recognition in a playful, engaging way. Children will love scooping, pouring, and discovering while building foundational cognitive and motor skills. This activity blends seasonal fun with purposeful learning—perfect for curious preschool minds!

How to Implement: To set up the Pumpkin Patch Sensory Bin, start by filling a large bin with dried corn to create a textured base, then scatter mini pumpkins throughout. Add scoops, cups, and spoons to encourage digging and pouring, and place number cards either inside the bin or nearby for playful learning. Invite children to explore by counting pumpkins, matching them to numbers, scooping and comparing corn, and sorting items by size, color, or type.



Facilitated Exploration:

- Encourage active engagement by sitting with children, asking open-ended questions like, “How many pumpkins did you find?” or “What does the corn feel like?”

Support cognitive growth by introducing sorting, counting, and comparing sizes or textures.

Concept Development:

- Extend learning by connecting the activity to real-life experiences: “Have you ever been to a pumpkin patch?”

Use problem-solving prompts: “How can we fit more pumpkins in this basket?”

Language Modeling:

- Label materials and actions: “You’re scooping the corn into the orange bowl.”

Use parallel talk and advanced vocabulary to describe textures, colors, and quantities.



Looking for a fun and educational fall activity? Try the **STEM Apple Stack Challenge**! Using apples and toothpicks, children are encouraged to build the tallest, most stable structure they can. This hands-on challenge promotes problem-solving, engineering skills, and teamwork. It's a great way to blend seasonal fun with science and creativity. Children will explore balance, structure, and design while learning through trial and error. The challenge also encourages collaboration and communication as students share ideas and strategies.

Facilitation Tips:

- **Start with a demonstration** of how to safely insert toothpicks into apples.
- **Encourage planning** by asking children to sketch their design before building.
- **Prompt critical thinking** with questions like, "What makes your structure strong?" or "What could you change to make it taller?"
- **Celebrate all efforts**, not just the tallest tower—highlight creativity, teamwork, and perseverance.
- **Incorporate measurement** by having students record and compare structure heights.

Outside: Lining Up Robert Kozak, Child Development Specialist

Resources: [Teacher Routine Guide.pdf](#)

Lining up is a skill necessary to maintain order, and most importantly, safety. Head counts and attendance taking are much more efficient when all the students are in a neat, organized line. The chances of missing a child or double counting may skew when there is chaos during the transition. Here are ways to maintain order while lining up.

Visuals – There are a plethora of different visual aids that are incredibly useful for transitions and lining up. Perhaps the most helpful is the visual timer. When children can see the countdown, it helps solidify their understanding of how close they are to when they must stop the activity they're doing. Pictures of children in a line (like the one above) can help children reflect on what the current status of their line actually is. If what they're seeing doesn't match up with the exemplar, some students may take the initiative to adjust themselves.

Transition Songs and Chants – Transitioning can be very difficult, especially for children who have trouble focusing on the task at hand. Singing songs like "The Clean Up Song" can keep children focused on putting away toys. Chants such as '1, 2, 3, Eyes on Me' help direct focus back to the teacher, so demands may be reiterated.

Bring Attention to Those Listening – Attention is a very common motivator among all age ranges. Children generally like to be told they're doing something well, so make sure to reward students complying with instructions with some verbal praise. Praise is free, unlimited, and easy to deliver. Be sure to praise loudly to draw the attention of other students to the ones that are setting a great example.



Transition to Kindergarten Alisha Dexter, Education Specialist

Resources: What Your Child Needs to Know to be Ready for Kindergarten

Division of Early Learning - Early Learning and Developmental Standards

As we reach the midpoint of the school year, many families begin to wonder: "Is my child on track?" The Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards provide a helpful framework to guide teachers, parents, and children through these early learning milestones. Here are a few thoughtful questions to help you reflect on your preschooler's growth so far:

Social-Emotional Development

Can your child express their feelings in appropriate ways? Are they learning to manage emotions and build friendships?

Physical Development

Is your child beginning to take care of personal hygiene, like washing hands or brushing teeth with guidance?

Social Studies

Does your child understand and follow basic rules at home and in the classroom?

Creative Expression

Can your child share their thoughts and feelings through drawing, painting, or other creative activities?

Mathematical Thinking

Is your child using words like beside, below, behind, or under to describe where things are?

Scientific Inquiry

Can your child make simple predictions, like how water might change a dry sponge or how ice melts?

Language & Literacy

Is your child listening with understanding, speaking in complete sentences, and using new vocabulary?

Approaches to Learning

Does your child show curiosity, plan how to start a new activity, or reflect on what they've learned?

These questions aren't meant to be a checklist, but rather a way to celebrate progress and support continued growth. Every child develops at their own pace, and with love, encouragement, and partnership between home and school, they'll be ready for the exciting journey ahead!



Family Engagement Month Alisha Dexter, Education Specialist

Resource: [Florida Department of Education – Family Engagement Month
https://www.fldoe.org/schools/family-community/activities-programs/parental-involvement/family-engagement.stml](https://www.fldoe.org/schools/family-community/activities-programs/parental-involvement/family-engagement.stml)

November is Florida Family Engagement Month, making it the perfect time to promote meaningful learning experiences at home. Take-Home Sensory Kits are a wonderful way to support this initiative by encouraging families to bond through playful, hands-on learning. These kits not only foster developmental skills but also create special moments for exploration and connection.

Encourage learning at home with Take-Home Sensory Kits! Each kit includes safe, simple materials like cinnamon-scented rice, scoops, and themed items such as mini pumpkins, felt leaves, or apple shapes. With easy-to-follow instructions and activity suggestions, families can enjoy sensory play together while reinforcing classroom learning in a fun and engaging way.

Suggested Items for Fall-Themed Sensory Kits

Base Fillers (Taste-Safe & Textural)

Cinnamon-scented rice or oat, Plain or cinnamon Cheerios, Dried corn kernels or popcorn (uncooked), Colored pasta (dyed with food coloring), Dried beans or lentils

Themed Sensory Items

Mini felt or foam leaves, Apple or pumpkin-shaped erasers or cutouts, Small pinecones or acorns (real or plastic), Cinnamon sticks or whole cloves (for scent), Apple-scented playdough (homemade or store-bought)

Tools for Fine Motor Practice

Small scoops or measuring spoons, Mini tongs or tweezers, Small bowls or cups for sorting and pouring, Silicone muffin liners or ice cube trays

Extras for Engagement

Laminated activity cards with prompts (e.g., "Can you find all the red items?") or A note encouraging families to share photos or feedback

Let's Celebrate Learning Together

Family engagement plays a vital role in a child's growth and success. This November—and all year long—let's continue building strong connections through playful, meaningful learning experiences at home and school.



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

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

904-310-2105 (cell)

VPK Corner Sarah March, Contract Coordinator

VPK FAST UPDATES:

We received guidance from DEL regarding children who will not engage in the assessment. If the child will not engage with the assessment, the Test Administrator should hit the dismiss button (a total of 8 times per assessment) this will mark the assessment as a failed practice. The assessment must be attempted 3 times. After the third failed practice test, the child can then be marked as Non-Participating: Failed Practice Test.

We also received guidance for children who are enrolled at the end of the PM window. If the provider enrolls a child and their actual start date is within the 24-48 hour waiting period between the portal and Renaissance, then the child can be marked as Non-participating: Absent during testing window. As it is no fault of the provider that the child is not showing on the Renaissance roster and can not be tested due to that 24-48 hour waiting period. However, if the child is enrolled at the end of the PM window and the child actually started prior to being enrolled, then the child can NOT be marked as non-participating.



Warm Line 1-800-238-3463

Ext. 2281 (CNBB)
Ext. 2227 (PSJ)



Do you have a concern about the health, development, disability, or 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.