



# Helping Hands

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



## Family Engagement Opportunities

### 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/>



**ECS4Kids (Episcopal Children's Services)**

**Volume 20, Issue 6**

**December 2025**

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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 Conference

## SAVE THE DATE

ELC of N. Florida and ECS4Kids Early Educators Conference

Saturday, February 21 2026

Thrasher Horne Conference Center

283 College Drive

Orange Park, FL 32065

9:00 am – 3:30 PM

CEU's provided

Cost: \$25.00 per registrant

Lunch provided

Registration opens January 23rd 2026 (More details to come on specifics of where to register)



Keynote Speaker: Shawn Brown

Mr. Shawn Brown, a former Chicagoan has developed an innovative curriculum enhancement program that utilizes catchy music for captivating and engaging audiences of children from Pre-school to elementary grades - all while teaching them how to have "Super Fun"! His popular live show, "The Super Fun Show" has spread across the country gaining tremendous success as he visits schools and conferences nationwide.

Role Model Professional Development is an educational and entertainment powerhouse that equips Early Childhood Educators and Family Childcare Providers with high-quality programs to keep children engaged while they learn. From live concerts, trainings for teachers, multi-media platforms to online content – their innovative solutions are designed to boost your current teaching system by making it more interactive and exciting!

# Tissue Paper Snow Prints

Tatum Goad, Program Assessment Specialist

Resources: [Preschool: Winter - Mrs. Plemons' Kindergarten](#)

## Materials:

- Bleeding tissue paper squares (blues for winter theme)
- Paint/sponge brushes
- White paint
- Snowflake stamps
- White Paper (use cardstock for more durability)

## Steps:

1. Have children place different color tissue paper pieces on a blank white paper.
2. Take a sponge or paint brush, dip it in water, and paint the tissue paper pieces until damp enough to stick to the paper.
3. Let the water dry and then peel off the tissue squares.
4. Dip snowflake stamps in white paint and stamp them onto the paper.



## CLASS Connections:

**Regard for Child Perspective:** Provides Choices, Allows Movement and Talking, Materials Accessible

**Facilitation of Learning and Development:** Provides Opportunity for Exploration and Learning, Teacher is Involved in Children's Activities to Support Learning and Development

**Language Modeling:** Variety of Words and/or Descriptive Vocabulary, Labeling,

## Bead and Button Snowflakes

Tatum Goad, Program Assessment Specialist

Resource: [Feeling the Cold: Winter Themed Sensory and Creative Play Ideas for Toddlers and Young Children - Inspire My Play](#)

Holidays can be a great opportunity for creative expression for your little one. Making winter ornaments and/or decorations can be fun for everyone. Using beads and pipe cleaners, let your children help add to your holiday decorations. Follow these steps for some cute snowflakes.

**Materials:**

- Pipe cleaners
- Beads
- Buttons

**Steps:**

1. Twist pipe cleaners into snowflake shapes.
2. Lace beads and buttons onto pipe cleaners. Encourage children to create patterns on each of the snowflake branches.
3. Once pipe cleaners are filled, twist the ends to prevent beads/buttons from falling off.



**Class Connections:**

**Concept Development:** Why/How Questions, Prediction/Experimentation, Comparison, Evaluation

**Regard for Child Perspective:** Encourages Student Talk, Elicits Ideas, Incorporate Students' Ideas

**Language Modeling:** Open-Ended Questions

# Sled and Slope Experiment

Tatum Goad, Program Assessment Specialist

Resources: [15 Wonderful Winter STEM Activities - Feel Good Teaching](#) (There are several other STEM related activities your children could enjoy as well.)

This experiment provides an opportunity for children to explore the concepts of force & motion, friction, and potential & kinetic energy. It also allows children to focus on the shape of the sled and degree of slope to determine how that affects the speed and distance of the sled. Have children try this experiment multiple times to see what works the best to get the furthest distance in the sled.

## Materials (Use any combination or whatever you have around the house):

- Recycled items such as cereal boxes, egg cartons, etc.
- Toy people to ride in the sleds
- Scissors
- Strings
- Popsicle sticks
- Straws
- Pipe cleaners
- Toilet paper/Paper towel roles
- Various materials to add weight if needed

## Procedures:

1. Brainstorm and plan out how to use materials to build a sled and slope.
2. Build sled and slope using materials available.
3. Predict how far the sled will go.
4. Test the sled and record the distance traveled.
5. Compare the distance traveled to the predicted distance.
6. Discuss what worked and what didn't and think about things to change.
7. Make changes as discussed to see if sled will go further, repeating steps above.
8. Record and compare data to determine what worked best and why.



## CLASS Connections:

**Concept Development:** Prediction/Experimentation, Comparison, Evaluation, Brainstorming/Planning/Producing

**Instructional Learning Formats:** Interesting and Creative Materials, Hands-on Opportunities, Active Participation, Advanced Organizers

# Routine Based Support Guide: Circle Time

Robert Kozak, Inclusion Specialist

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

Circle Time is vital for many things, including learning, routine building, and tone- setting for each day. Let's explore ways to ensure children understand everything they need to from each Circle Time.

- **Positive reinforcement** – Praise can be an effective source of positive reinforcement. Noticing when a child who has difficulty sitting for circle time exhibits the behavior you're requiring is crucial. Once you see the child or children complying with your demands, be sure to let them know they've done a great job meeting your expectations.
- **Visual Supports** – The use of a visual schedule allows the child to be able to see what they must do in order to engage in the activity that follows Circle Time. Seeing the visual of a child sitting correctly in Circle Time first and then gaining access to play time will act as an establishing operation for sitting properly in the circle.
- **Use Preferred Items in Circle Time** – If the child has a preference for a certain book or song, try to incorporate that book or song into the Circle Time. Instead of withholding a preferred item from them until they complete the Circle Time, use it to motivate that child to participate.
- **Bring Attention to the Child** – If attention is the main motivator for a child exhibiting maladaptive behaviors, then use this motivator to your advantage. Draw attention to the child by saying "Look at how (child's name) is sitting so quietly and still in their spot" or "I like how (child's name) is signing and dancing and participating in Circle Time. Be sure not to ignore the attention-seeking child, as this will cause even more problem behaviors to arise.
- **Give Transition Warnings** – Before a Circle Time, be sure to give transition warnings to students so that there's no surprise when they must stop their activity to go to Circle Time. Perhaps the child is upset that they have to suddenly stop doing a preferred activity and must now sit still for 10 – 15 minutes on the rug. So, by providing frequent transition warnings to help children prepare, it cuts down on frustration and makes major transitions easier to manage.



## Keeping a Routine

Tatum Goad, Program Assessment Specialist

References: [The Importance of Routines for Kids - Zero to Thrive](https://www.zerotothrive.com/importance-of-routines-for-kids)

In preparation for kindergarten, children should be comfortable with keeping routines. Routines are important for staying on task and provide a sense of security and predictability. When they get to kindergarten, it will be essential in making sure your children succeed. Keeping a routine at home is a great way to make sure your child is prepared. Research suggests many benefits with routines such as supporting healthy social-emotional development, self-regulation skills, and problem-solving skills. Establishing routines at home can be simple and fun for you and your child. However, be sure not to keep overly defined schedules to prevent creating anxiety and pressure. Start with a few daily routines such as a consistent morning routine, household rules, and a consistent bedtime routine. For at least one meal, try to keep it at the same time each day when the whole family can come together. Not only does this create consistency, but it also allows for a time children can count on when you can all spend time together. Special rituals are also a good way to incorporate routines into your days while creating a sense of safety and accountability. You can start rituals such as Taco Tuesdays or Family Night Fridays. These rituals can help to connect children to families and buffer the impact of stress or trauma on mental health. By implementing routines into your children's daily lives, you can help prepare them for the upcoming transition into kindergarten and ensure they are ready to succeed in whatever comes their way.



### CLASS Connections:

**Regard for Student Perspective:** Allows Choice, Gives Students Responsibility

**Instructional Learning Formats:** Interesting and Creative Materials, Hands-On Opportunities, Focused Attention

## Making Holiday Cookies

Tatum Goad, Program Assessment Specialist



Holidays are a great time to come together and participate in activities as a family. They are also a great time for holiday goodies. Including the children in making cookies is beneficial in a multitude of ways. Measuring ingredients provides opportunities to practice reading numbers, counting, and practicing early fraction skills. Decorating cookies helps practice fine motor skills like hand-eye coordination and dexterity. It also allows for creative expression and teamwork along with patience and focus. Along with the educational benefits, making cookies together also provides opportunities for quality time and making memories together. This holiday season, take the opportunity to bake together as a family.

Use your favorite family recipes for sugar cookies and icing.

Invite children to help pour and mix ingredients, allowing them to measure out the ingredients. Encourage children to practice math skills at their level (choose the right measuring tool, fill ingredients to proper amount, etc.).

When baking cookies, give children responsibilities such as allowing children to set the timer.

Use cookie cutters relevant to celebrated holidays (Christmas, New Years, Hanukkah, winter, etc.). As children cut cookies out, ask questions about what they are doing, what shapes they are making, etc.

Have children help to make the icing for decorating. As children decorate cookies, ask questions about their choices for colors and how they decorated.

### **CLASS Connections:**

**Regard for Student Perspective:** Allow choice, Allow Students to Lead Lessons, Gives Students Responsibility

**Concept Development:** Experimentation, Planning & Producing, Real-World Applications

## 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  
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## 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 each quarter.

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 Provider Applications

As a reminder, please be mindful that you are updating and resubmitting your VPK providers applications (VPK 10,11A,11B) with any changes to classrooms, instructors, directors, substitutes, and calendars as soon as possible when they changes occur, so that the new information can be verified and approved by ECS staff, ensuring that your program remains in compliance throughout the program year.

### VPK On-site Monitoring

On-site VPK monitoring is underway. If your VPK program is selected for on-site monitoring, ECS staff will contact you prior to the date of the visit to inform you. To ensure compliance with VPK program requirements be sure to always update the VPK provider application with any program or instructor changes as soon as possible, but no later than 14 days of the change and resubmit the application for review and re-certification. Parental Choice Certificates (PCC's) will be requested for on-site and off-site monitoring. Please make sure all applicable fields are completed on PCC's and that parent's sign and date the document.

### VPK FAST Reminders

**1. Testing Newly Enrolled children:** Any child that is enrolled in the VPK Program during the Progress Monitoring Window should be tested. Even if they are enrolled one or two days before the end of the testing window. Please ensure that the child's enrollment is added to the provider portal in a timely manner. It may take 24-48 hours for the child's information to update in Renaissance.

**2. STAR Testy Activity Report:** Always check your STAR Test activity report prior to the end of a Progress Monitoring Window to ensure all children have been tested.

**3. Progress Monitoring Window dates:** Please remember if there is a calendar change or closure, this may change your Progress Monitoring dates

**4. Non-Participating Status: Non-English Speaker and Failed Practice Test:** Before marking a child as Non-Participating for Non-English Speaker or Failed Practice, the child must be tested 3 times before being marked as Non-Participating.

**5. Non- Participating Status: Absent during testing window:** If the child is absent during the time that the children are tested but returns before the end of the Progress Monitoring Window, the child must still be tested.

**Questions:** If you have any questions regarding VPK FAST, please contact Roushawn Saunders via email at: [Roushawn.saunders@ecs4kids.org](mailto: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.