



Helping Hands

Offering a helping hand to School Readiness
Providers

A publication from Childcare Resource & Referral



Family Engagement

ECS4Kids (Episcopal
Children's Services)

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January Activities For Children

The New Year is here! That means we have a whole year of fun with our families ahead of us! Head to your local library for story times, explore parks for nature walks, get creative with indoor crafts or check local listings for free museum days and community events in your area!

- * Paper Plate Penguin Craft
- * Winter Snow Globes
- * Smores Popcorn Bark Recipe

For more information check out the link below:

<https://thesimpleparent.com/january-activities-for-kids/>



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 Early Educators Conference

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!**

ELC of North Florida Early Educators 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: \$20.00 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 Preschool 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!

Winter in a Bag Kelley Warner, Education Specialist

Source: <https://alittlepinchofperfect.com/no-mess-sensory-play-frozen-winter/>

Here in North Florida, we typically experience mild winters with average temperatures ranging from the high 40's to the high 60s. How can we share the fun of cold, snowy play with our kids if the weather does not dip to the freezing point? This mess free Winter in a Bag sensory activity offers a fun winter experience to share with our young learners who have an interest in winter weather!

Materials:

- Clear hair gel
- Silver glitter
- Cellophane glitter
- Gallon freezer bags
- Marshmallows
- Uncooked tapioca pearls (optional)

Put half the bottle of hair gel in the freezer bag with the other materials and seal tightly. To be extra cautious use strong tape as an additional seal for the bag. For an extra touch of winter fun, place the bag in the refrigerator or freezer! The gel will be cold to the touch while little hands manipulate the bag.



CLASS Connections:

Facilitated Exploration: Give infants opportunities to explore

Teacher Talk: Use descriptive language to narrate classroom actions

Expansion of Cognition: Give toddlers information about what they are experiencing

National Hat Day Kelley Warner, Education Specialist

Source: <https://nationaltoday.com/national-hat-day/>, <https://artsycraftsymom.com/11-creative-hat-crafts-for-national-hat-day/>,

Get ready to tip your hat—June 15th is National Hat Day! Hats have served countless purposes throughout history, from fashion statements and cultural symbols to protection from the elements. Iconic figures like Abraham Lincoln and beloved characters like the Cat in the Hat have shown us how powerful a good hat can be!

Looking for ways to celebrate in the classroom? Try these fun activities:

- Host a **Crazy Hat Day** where students wear their favorite or wackiest headgear.
- Get creative with an **arts and crafts hat-making session**.
- Gather and discuss images of **historical or culturally significant hats**.
- Organize a **hat parade** to show off unique designs.
- Teach new hat-related vocabulary, such as “fedora,” “tiara,” “bowler,” and “beret”

Want to bring hat-themed stories into your lesson? Check out:

- *The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins* – Dr. Seuss
- *Caps For Sale* – Esphyr Slobodkina
- *Old Hat* – Emily Gravett
- *I Want My Hat Back* – Jon Klassen
- *Whose Hat Is This?* – Sharon Katz

Celebrating National Hat Day is a fantastic way to weave fun, creativity, and learning together. Which activity do you think your students would enjoy the most?



CLASS Connections:

Regard for Student Perspective: Encourages student creativity and input.

Instructional Learning Formats: Uses engaging and varied materials.

Concept Development: Supports classification, comparison, and reasoning.

Real-World Connections: Relates learning to students' lives.

International Brain Teaser Month

Kelley Warner, Education Specialist

Source: <https://nationaltoday.com/international-brain-teaser-month/>

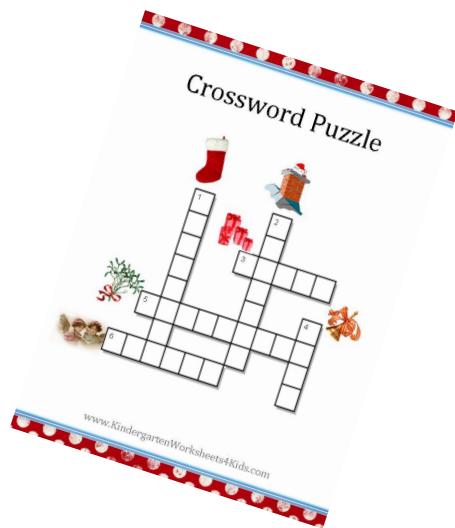
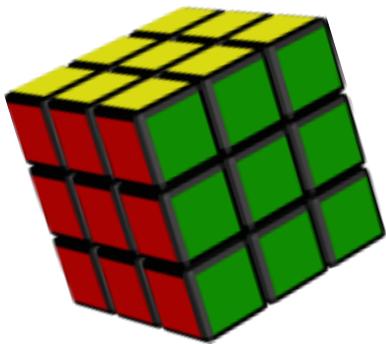
I've got a riddle for you...

In a one-story house everything is yellow. The walls are yellow, the doors are yellow, the furniture is yellow. What color are the stairs?

Riddles are a type of Brainteaser; a puzzle that can help to keep our minds sharp. Just like we exercise our bodies to keep them strong and healthy, we can use brainteasers to exercise our minds! They don't have to be anything serious or strenuous, brainteasers can be hypothetical, philosophical, or even silly. Crossword puzzles, Rubix Cubes, lateral thinking problems, pattern problems, spotting the difference pictures, and optical illusions are all great ways to share brainteasers with elementary school aged children!

Here are some ideas to help celebrate International Brain Teaser month in your classroom:

- Add books of riddles to your classroom library
- Use a riddle as the question of the day
- Create a brainteaser center with hidden picture books, pattern problems to solve, manipulative puzzles, word search and crossword puzzles, etc.
- Challenge your class to a daily mental challenge that they can do independently, in groups, or as a class.
- Invite another class to participate in a mental challenge with you.
- Send brainteasers home for families to solve together.



And by the way, that yellow house I asked you about earlier? It doesn't have stairs; it's only one story!

Does this sound familiar? A child says “no” to using the potty, hides to skip handwashing, or cries unless an adult is close. Bathroom time can be hard for little kids. They might feel nervous, want control, or need help feeling safe. It’s something many caregivers face daily, and it can be draining, especially when you’re pulled in different directions. The good news is that a few small changes can lead to smooth sailing during bathroom time.



Behavior: Child does not want to go to the bathroom

Show a bathroom schedule with real pictures so the child knows what to expect.

Keep bathroom visits short and celebrate small wins.

Encourage the child to just walk into the bathroom, even if they don’t need to go.

Let a trusted adult walk with the child if that helps them feel safe.

Behavior: Child does not want to wash hands

Use a handwashing chart with photos to guide each step.

Sing a short song or count out loud while the child washes hands.

Offer a favorite soap or let them wash next to a friend to make it fun.

Behavior: Child wants attention or an adult nearby

Stay close at first and slowly move away as they feel more comfortable.

Say, “I’ll be right here when you’re all done” to reassure them.

Use a simple phrase like, “First potty, then we’ll wash hands,” then walk away.

Praise the child for small steps like sitting on the toilet or waiting quietly.

Teach: How to follow bathroom steps, ask for help when needed, respond to visual and verbal cues, and feel okay being in the bathroom with less adult support.

All strategies in this article are adapted from the Routine-Based Support Guide. For a comprehensive list of strategies for this routine, visit the NCPMI’s Routine-Based Support Guide: <https://challengingbehavior.org/document/routine-based-support-guide/>

Beyond ABC's Kelley Warner, Education Specialist

Resources: <https://www.weareteachers.com/incoming-kindergarteners-life-skills/#:~:text=Knowing%20their%20important%20family%20info,Caretaker's%20phone%20number.>

Kindergarten Readiness: Beyond the ABCs

When considering kindergarten readiness, we often focus on academic milestones—recognizing sight words, counting to 30, or writing names. While these skills are important, fostering independence through life skills is just as critical in helping children transition smoothly into the school environment.

Families can support this growth by introducing essential routines at home. Start with **personal identification**: children should know their first and last names, their caregivers' full names, a phone number, and their home address. This empowers them with a sense of identity and security.



Next, encourage **lunch independence**. Practice opening common lunch items like yogurt tubes, string cheese, or fruit containers. Teach them which items go in the trash, and which should return home for reuse.



Finally, reinforce **self-care habits** such as bathroom routines, fastening clothing, blowing their nose, tying shoes, and managing outerwear. These seemingly simple tasks build confidence and reduce anxiety in a new setting.

By equipping children with these everyday skills, we're helping them step into kindergarten not only prepared—but ready to thrive.

Fit Family Lifestyles Kelley Warner, Education Specialist

Sources: <https://nationaltoday.com/family-fit-lifestyle-month/>

Many adults set New Year's resolutions to improve their individual health, but why not ring in the New Year with a fresh take on fitness for the whole family! January is the perfect time to incorporate physical fitness into your family's lifestyle. Spending time together as family engaged in healthy activities is fun and beneficial!

Here are some ways to engage your family in a healthy lifestyle:

- Set a goal: go on a 30-minute walk after dinner three nights a week, avoid sugary beverages for the month, reduce screen time to a set amount, etc. Pick a goal and work on it as a family!
- Make healthy meals together: plan a tasty menu each week that you can prepare as a family. From planning to shopping, meal prep to cooking, the whole family can get in on the fun.
- Participate in community events: check out your community's family events website to find a fun way to spend a day being active together.

St. Johns/Putnam <https://fun4auggiekids.com/calendar/>

Clay/Bradford <https://fun4claykids.com/>

Nassau <https://www.nassaucountyfl.com/calendar.aspx?CID=64>

Baker <https://www.bakerchamberfl.com/visitors-info>



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.

T.E.A.C.H. Scholarships

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



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 each quarter.

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 Provider Applications

As a reminder, please ensure that you are updating and resubmitting your VPK provider 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 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 or by phone at 904-726-1500 ext. 2241.

Contract Department

* 8649 Baypine Rd Ste 300 Bldg 7 * Jacksonville, FL 32256

Toll Free: 1-800-238-3463 * Fax: 904-726-1522

contracts@ecs4kids.org * www.ecs4kids.org



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.