



Helping Hands

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



Family Engagement

Back to School Tips for Families

With another school year on the horizon, there's no better time to start encouraging healthy habits that help your child begin the year feeling confident and ready. From re-establishing routines to checking off school forms, immunizations and back-to-school physicals. A little preparation now can make the transition smoother for the whole family.

Schedule Back to School Physicals

Re-establish Your Routines

Provide Healthy Lunch & Snack Options

Plan Outfits the Night Before

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

<https://www.adventhealth.com/blogs/10-ways-prepare-your-child-a-healthy-back-school-season>



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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.

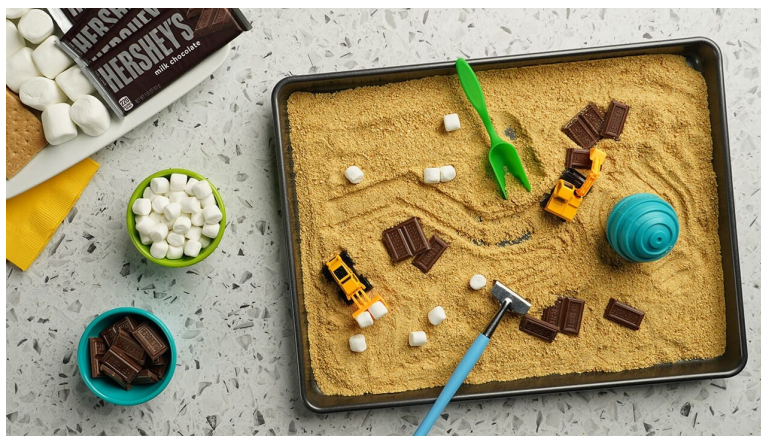
Thanks!
Brianna DeOsca
Editor



Resource: [S'mores Sensory Bin | Hersheyland](#)

August 10th is National S'mores Day! What better way to celebrate in your Infant and Toddler classrooms than with a S'mores Sensory Bin?! Sensory bins can be adapted for infants and toddlers of all ages to explore each of the five senses. Using edible ingredients, children can safely see, hear, smell, taste, and touch pillowy yet sticky marshmallows, finely crushed graham crackers, and sweet melty chocolate. Infants can use their hands to squeeze marshmallows and melt chocolate pieces before inevitably putting their hands in their mouths to taste the sugary ingredients! Toddlers can bury the marshmallow and chocolate pieces into the graham crackers and use tools like scoops and rakes to find them (before taking a quick nibble)!

To set up the sensory bin, finely crush graham crackers and add a pinch of water. Press the graham crackers into the bottom of a cookie sheet or aluminum pan. Add miniature marshmallows or cut large marshmallows into safe-sized pieces and add to the graham crackers. Finally, break chocolate bars into small squares and place onto the graham cracker "sand" along with other sensory bin items such as scoops and rakes. Have fun exploring!



CLASS Connections:

Infant - Facilitated Exploration: Encourage infants to persist in experiences through verbal encouragement and enthusiasm, such as saying, "Squeeze it, look it's melting!" and "Taste it!" when an infant holds a piece of chocolate.

Early Language Support: Label tools and ingredients. Narrate your own and infants' actions, such as, "You're squeezing the marshmallow," and "I'm breaking the chocolate."

Toddler - Facilitation of Learning and Development: Encourage thinking skills through questioning, problem solving, and predicting, such as asking, "How does it feel?" and "What happens to the chocolate when I hold it in my hand?"

Language Modeling: Engage in back-and-forth exchanges with children using open-ended questions such as, "What can we do with these tools?" and "What is your favorite part of the sensory bin?"

Chocolate Chip Cookie Day

April Bradford, Program Assessment Specialist

Resource link: [Preschool Cooking Theme - Planning Playtime](#)

In honor of National Chocolate Chip Cookie Day on August 4th, let's bake some cookies! Preschool children love to help in the kitchen, and this is the perfect opportunity to build procedural knowledge, problem-solving, and language skills while baking and enjoying a delicious treat!

Start by reading a procedural cookie baking book, such as Mr. Cookie Baker by Monica Wellington. Be sure to discuss the different ingredients and tools used in the baking process while showing real-world examples (the tools you will use with children to bake their own cookies). Discuss what might happen if certain ingredients were left out of the recipe or times that children may have baked with their parents at home before. After reading, use your favorite recipe to have children help make the cookie batter! Show children how to measure out ingredients before allowing children to complete each step to mix the batter. Have a responsible adult bake the cookies in an oven before enjoying the cookies together as a class!



To continue celebrating National Chocolate Chip Cookie Day, check out the link above for fun baking-themed Math centers!

CLASS Connections:

Concept Development

Relate baking to children's real-world experiences, asking if they have ever baked with their parents at home before or if they have ever baked cookies before.

Ask children analysis and reasoning questions such as, "What would happen if we skipped an ingredient?" and "Why is it important to follow the recipe?"

Language Modeling

Narrate each of the steps as you and children complete them, such as, "Now I am pouring in the sugar," "He is measuring the flour," etc.

Exploding Watermelon Volcano

April Bradford, Program Assessment Specialist

Resource link: [Exploding Watermelon Volcano | Little Bins for Little Hands](#)



Celebrate National Watermelon Day on August 3rd with this fun science experiment! School-age children will love watching the chemical reaction that takes place inside a watermelon. The combination of baking soda and vinegar creates carbon dioxide, which pushes the mixture out of the top like lava from a volcano. The best part? Celebrating the explosion with a sweet, hydrating treat in the August heat!

- Cut a small hole in the top of a watermelon and hollow it out, just like carving a pumpkin. Keep in mind that the smaller the hole at the top, the bigger the eruption! Children can assist by using a melon baller to scoop the insides. Store the watermelon pieces in a bowl to enjoy after the experiment.
- Place the watermelon standing up on a cookie sheet or in a bin with clear sides.
- Have a child measure and pour $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of baking soda into the watermelon. If using a bigger watermelon, use $\frac{3}{4}$ of a cup.
- Add a few squirts of dish soap. You can add food coloring to this step if you prefer.
- Begin pouring in vinegar to see the eruption. You can keep adding baking soda and vinegar to continue and repeat the reaction.
- Enjoy the watermelon pieces while you watch!

Using Progress Monitoring to Support Differentiated Instruction

Robert Kozak, Child Development Specialist

Source: [Rock Your Classroom](#)

Effective teaching relies on using progress monitoring to guide instruction and ensure that every child has opportunities to succeed. Educators should regularly review progress data to develop differentiated instructional strategies that address each child's individual learning needs. These strategies can be reflected in lesson plans and adjusted as children demonstrate growth or require additional support. By recognizing different levels of participation and making instructional changes as needed, teachers can create learning environments where all children are active participants in classroom lessons and activities.

Progress monitoring is most effective when it becomes part of daily classroom routines. Teachers can use assessment data to evaluate learning trends, set new goals when students show consistent progress, or reteach concepts and modify instruction when progress slows. Collaborating with families also provides valuable information about student performance across multiple settings, allowing for more comprehensive instructional and behavior planning.

To support differentiated instruction, teachers may use developmental skill assessment checklists and ongoing classroom observations to gather information related to both classroom performance and for children receiving specialized services. These tools help educators identify specific skills that need reinforcement and determine the best times during daily routines to collect meaningful data.

For children requiring more intensive support, instructional goals should be broken into smaller, developmentally appropriate steps for the child. Frequent data collection allows teachers to closely monitor progress, evaluate the effectiveness of interventions, and make timely adjustments to goals, lessons, and teaching strategies. By using progress monitoring as an ongoing instructional tool, educators can provide responsive, individualized instruction that promotes student engagement, supports diverse learning needs, and helps all children make meaningful progress.



On the First Day of School and After

April Bradford, Program Assessment Specialist

Resource link: [Getting a Kick Start for Kindergarten: Tips for a Successful Transition](#)

You've read the books, practiced the routines, packed the backpack, and spent the summer preparing. The time is finally here: The first day of kindergarten!

It can be a nerve-wracking day for children, parents, and educators alike. For children, it is the beginning of building a lifelong love of learning. For parents, it's an important milestone filled with pride. For educators, the first day of school is the first chance to build trust, spark curiosity, and set the tone for children's educational journeys.

Here are a few simple strategies that can help turn all of that preparation into a confident, successful start for children and the adults cheering them on:

Keep a positive attitude and make sure drop-off is an encouraging experience for children.

Be specific about when children will be picked up to ease the drop-off process.

Ask children about how their day went and what they are looking forward to for the school year.

Expect that there will be big emotions! Be sure to acknowledge children's feelings, allow space for adjustments, and offer ways to release energy and feelings.

Remind children of their strengths and what is going well.

Whether you're a parent, caregiver, or educator, your support helps children feel safe, confident, and ready to learn. Wishing everyone a joyful and successful start to the school year!



National Exercise with Your Child Week

April Bradford, Program Assessment Specialist

Resource link: [Celebrate National Exercise with Your Child Week: August 4th - 10th! | Gateway Pediatric Therapy Physical Activity Facts | Healthy Schools | CDC](#)

Shiela Madison created Exercise with Your Child Week in 2010 to promote family physical fitness and encourage healthy, active lifestyles for all ages. This effort gained national recognition and the first National Exercise with Your Child Week was celebrated in 2013. According to the CDC, children aged three to five should be physically active throughout the day, children 6-17 should be active for 60 minutes each day, and adults need at least 150 minutes of physical activity each week. Children and adults who meet these recommendations show improved cognition, academic performance, and memory, as well as reduced symptoms of depression and cardiovascular disease.

To celebrate National Exercise with Your Child Week, observed during the first full week of August, here are some fun activities:

Have a dance party

Explore nature at one of Florida's many state and local parks

Go for a family walk or bike ride after dinner

Start a new hobby or sport together as a family

Jump rope, hula hoop, and hopscotch



T.E.A.C.H.

The T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education And Compensation Helps) Early Childhood® Scholarship Program funded by the Florida Division 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/>



**For CDA information and
questions, please contact
Danesha Davis, Professional
Development Coordinator
904-726-1500 ext.2299
904-536-2119 (cell)**

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.



VPK FAST

Information was sent to providers through Constant Contact and through regular email regarding the VPK FAST Test Administrator Trainings for 26-27 program year. The training is now available through Educator Academy. If you have any questions regarding the training or did not receive the email, please contact Roushawn Saunders at VPK@ecs4kids.org

The training certificates and forms **MUST** be received before the test administrator can assess any children for the 26-27 school year program.

Providers can upload the 3 documents together in one file labeled First name Last name_VPK 26-27 to the document library folder 26-27 VPK FAST Test Administrators, or email them to VPK@ecs4kids.org

The 3 documents needed are the Security Agreement, the Prohibited Activities form and the VPK FAST Test Administrators course certificate.

Contract Department

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

contracts@ecs4kids.org * www.ecs4kids.org

Warm Line 1-800-238-3463

Ext. 2281 (Clay, Nassau, Baker, Bradford)

Ext. 2227 (Putnam, St. Johns)

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.

