Helping Hands

Offering a helping hand to School Readiness Providers

A publication from Childcare Resource & Referral

NOVEMBER 2026 VOLUME 21, ISSUE 5

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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 us an e-mail to:
Brianna.Deosca@ecs4kids.org
Rebecca.Huth@ecs4kids.org
We will do our best to find the answer, post the comment, and address the concern.
Thank You
Brianna and Rebecca
Editors



Fall Fun In & Around Jacksonville

Fall means harvest season, and it brings out the best in our area. Corn mazes, pumpkins, festivals and more! Here are some fun activities to keep kids busy during fall break.

- Farm Activities
- Corn Mazes
- Pumpkin Patches
- Fall Festivals

To read the full article & see additional ideas, please visit the website:
https://jacksonville.kidsoutandabout.com/content/master-guide-fall-fun-and-around-jacksonville-fl



Upcoming Events & Trainings Calendar

Here is a look at our upcoming events

NOV 5 — **Canvas Training**
Activities & Ideas for School Age Children

NOV 5 — **Director's Workshop Training**
Virtual on TEAMS

NOV 17 — **Early Literacy and the CLASS Tool**
Virtual on TEAMS

FEB 27 — **Save the Date**
Annual Educator's Conference
New Location at the Shultz Center

More information and secure your spot for meetings and trainings here:

Meetings and Trainings
*Registration may not be open for some. Check back soon!



Trainings on the Move

This October, FLAYCE was hosted in Jacksonville and ECS showed up in full force. We had a booth with information about our organization, teamed up with others to provide the pre-conference session for sponsors, and ECS Staff presented 3 training sessions that was designed for leaders which focused on responding to behavior concerns with intention.

ECS Coaches, Jazmine Jackson and Krystol Berry, led a session called "Again! Again! Again! The Science Behind Repetition in Infant Brain Development" that explored how intentional, consistent language use strengthens early brian development and sets the foundation for lifelong skills.

We are so proud of them for sharing their knowledge with so many!

Gratitude and Kindness Through Play

Alisha Williams, Education Specialist

Infant/Toddler

For infants and toddlers, gratitude and kindness are not taught through direct instruction, but through consistent, responsive, and engaging experiences. Young children develop social-emotional skills through warm, responsive interactions and everyday experiences with caregivers. These early relationships form the foundation for empathy, trust, and positive behavior.

Play-Based Activity: "Kind Hands, Caring Hearts"
Materials: Soft toys or dolls, blankets or cloths, sensory items

Directions (Step-by-Step):

1. Set Up the Environment: Place soft toys and materials within reach in a comfortable play area.
2. Model Gentle and Kind Behavior: Show children how to gently hold, pat, or cover a toy with a blanket.
3. Narrate Actions: Use simple language to describe what is happening: "You are being so gentle." "You are taking care of your baby."
4. Encourage Participation: Invite children to imitate actions: Offer a toy and say, "Can you help take care of the baby?"
5. Reinforce Kindness and Gratitude
6. When a child engages: "That was kind of you." "Thank you for helping."
7. Extend Through Interaction
8. Encourage turn-taking and sharing when possible: "You gave your friend a toy—that's kind.

CLASS Connections

Facilitating Exploration
Educators sit near infants, ask simple questions, and mirror their actions to support learning. (Offer a toy and say, "Can you help take care of the baby?") When interest fades, we offer choices and encourage continued play through verbal prompts and varied materials.

Supporting Language Development
We label objects, use self-talk, and model sounds to encourage infants to vocalize("You are being so gentle." "You are taking care of your baby.")Back-and-forth exchanges during play help build early communication skills. ("You gave your friend a toy—that's kind.")

Kindness Through Play

Alisha Williams, Education Specialist

Prek

Preschool children are beginning to understand how their words and actions affect others. Through dramatic play, they can practice showing gratitude, expressing kindness, and working cooperatively with their peers.

Play-Based Activity: "Kindness Cafe"
Materials: Play food, Menus (child-created), Notepads and pencils, Aprons or role-play accessories

Directions (Step-by-Step)

1. Discuss ways people show kindness and gratitude when visiting a restaurant.
2. Invite children to choose roles such as customer, server, cook, or cashier.
3. Encourage children to take orders, serve food, and interact respectfully with their peers.
4. Model and encourage polite language during play.
5. Pause periodically to recognize acts of kindness that occur naturally.
6. After play, gather children together and discuss how it felt to help, serve, and thank others.

CLASS Connections:

Concept Development: Creating Brainstorming/Planning: Discuss and write out children's responses of kindness before dramatic play: Ask questions that show how kindness/gratitude is shown at restaurants, Integration (Connects Concepts Before & after visiting café: revisit responses from earlier discussion, Real world application (Play with in the café)
Quality of Feedback: Feedback Loop while having discussion in café. (Ask open ended question: Tell me more about that. Why did you do that?)
Language Modeling: Frequent conversations (Between children & educator), Educator is using open ended prompts, Narration (during café dramatic play)

Solving Everyday Problems

Alisha Williams, Education Specialist

School Age

STEM learning encourages children to become innovators and problem-solvers. Through invention challenges, students learn that mistakes are a valuable part of the learning process. By testing ideas, making improvements, and thinking creatively, children develop skills that will help them succeed in school and beyond. Encouraging children to think like engineers by identifying everyday problems and designing innovative solutions. The engineering design process promotes creativity, persistence, collaboration, and critical thinking while helping children understand how STEM can make a positive impact on the world.

Play-Based Activity: "Problem Solvers"

Materials:

Paper, Pencils, Markers, Recyclable materials (cardboard, bottles, boxes, etc.), Tape or glue

Directions:

1. Ask students to identify a problem they experience at school, home, or in their community.
2. Brainstorm possible solutions.
3. Sketch an invention that could solve the problem.
4. Label the parts of the invention and explain how it works.
5. Create a prototype using available materials.
6. Test the invention and discuss improvements.
7. Share designs and explain the problem-solving process.

Open-Ended Questions

What problem does your invention solve? Who would benefit from your invention? How does your design work? What would you improve if you built a second version? Why do inventors test and redesign their ideas?

Kindergarten Readiness Play Challenge

Alisha Williams, Education Specialist

Transition to Kindergarten

The transition to kindergarten is an exciting milestone for children and families. Along with excitement, children may also experience feelings of uncertainty as they prepare for new routines, new friends, and a new learning environment. As educators and families, we can help children build confidence by focusing on the skills that support school success rather than strict academic drills.

One of the most effective ways to prepare children for kindergarten is through intentional play. Play helps children learn how to take turns, solve problems, follow directions, communicate ideas, and build positive relationships with peers and adults. These skills are essential for a successful transition to kindergarten.

Goal: Support children's transition to kindergarten by strengthening social-emotional, language, and problem-solving skills through playful learning experiences.

- Building blocks or construction toys, Paper and crayons, Books about starting school, Pretend play materials (backpack, lunchbox, school supplies)
- Read a book about starting kindergarten and encourage children to discuss their thoughts and feelings.
- Create a pretend kindergarten classroom using dramatic play materials.
- Practice common kindergarten routines such as: Lining up, raising hands, following simple directions, Cleaning up materials
- Encourage children to work together and solve problems as they build.
- Ask open-ended questions that promote thinking and discussion.
- Celebrate effort, persistence, and teamwork throughout the activity.

Use questions and prompts such as: "What do you think kindergarten will be like?", "How can we work together to build our school?", "What should we do if we have a problem?" "How do you think a new student might feel on the first day?", "What can we do to help our friends feel welcome?"

Parent Engagement

Playing, Learning, and Growing Together: Strengthening Family Connections Through Play

Alisha Williams, Education Specialist

As we enter the month of November, many of us begin reflecting on the people and experiences for which we are grateful. While gratitude and kindness are often associated with the holiday season, they can be nurtured throughout the year in simple and meaningful ways. One of the best ways to encourage these values is through play. Family play experiences help children feel connected, supported, and valued while creating opportunities for learning and growth.

This month, we invite families to participate in a Family Play Night. The goal is not to create a perfect activity or spend money on special materials. Instead, focus on spending quality time together through play, conversation, and shared experiences. These moments help children build confidence, develop communication skills, and learn the importance of kindness and gratitude.

Build Together

Gather blocks, cardboard boxes, pillows, recycled materials, or other household items and work together to create something special. Build a tower, a fort, a bridge, or an imaginary town.

Talk together while building: What should we build? How can we make it stronger? What happens if we add another piece? What idea would you like to try?

Encourage family members to thank one another for sharing ideas and helping solve problems.

Practice Gratitude Through Play

During your Family Play Night, take a few moments to share something you appreciate about one another.

Simple prompts include:

"I am thankful for...", "I appreciate when you...", "My favorite thing we did together tonight was..."

These conversations help children recognize kindness and develop a deeper appreciation for the people who care for them.







Using Flexible Grouping and Activity Length to Support Student Learning

Robert Kozak, Child Development Specialist

Source: Rock Your Classroom

Effective early childhood classrooms use a variety of group sizes and flexible activity lengths to meet the diverse learning needs of all children. By incorporating whole-group, small-group, and individualized instruction throughout the day, educators create opportunities for every child to engage in meaningful learning experiences. Flexible grouping also allows children to interact with different peers, develop social skills, and receive instruction that is appropriately matched to their abilities and learning goals.

Whole-group instruction provides opportunities to introduce new concepts and build a sense of classroom community, while small-group and individual instruction allow teachers to reinforce skills, provide targeted support, and monitor student progress more closely. Small groups enable educators to observe children's learning behaviors, social interactions, and developmental needs, making it easier to adjust instruction and provide timely feedback. Cooperative learning activities further encourage communication, collaboration, and peer learning.

For children who require additional support, teachers should intentionally organize groups based on individual needs, interests, abilities, and developmental levels. Lessons can be adapted during small-group instruction to address specific learning goals, self-care skills, and social development. Planning tools, such as activity matrices and individualized lesson plans, help educators ensure that targeted instruction is embedded throughout daily routines and that every child receives appropriate opportunities for practice and success.

Children with intensive needs benefit from individualized and small-group instruction aligned with their learning goals. Teachers can support success by adapting lessons, providing additional practice, and ensuring appropriate group sizes and instructional support. Planning for recommended group sizes and instructional ratios also helps ensure that children receive the level of support necessary to participate successfully.

By using flexible grouping strategies and adjusting the length and structure of activities, educators create responsive learning environments that promote engagement, foster positive peer relationships, and provide individualized support. These practices help ensure that all children have equitable opportunities to learn, participate, and achieve meaningful developmental and academic growth.

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/

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

VPK CORNER



VPK Provider Application Updates

As a reminder, per the VPK contract, any changes made to your VPK program during the program year must be updated and submitted through the VPK Provider Application within 14 days of the change. This includes changes in director, teachers, aides or substitutes as well as any calendar or classroom changes.

VPK FAST

The link for providers to search PM dates has been fixed and is now showing the current program year PM dates. You can check your Progress Monitoring Window dates using the link below. You will need the email address (user name) you used for Renaissance and your provider ID. As a reminder, changes made to your classroom calendars may impact your progress monitoring dates. Please verify PM dates anytime you have a calendar change.

https://www.ecs4kids.org/providers/vpk-providers/fast-progress-monitoring/

Additional reminders: Please ensure that the VPK FAST assessments are being completed during VPK instructional hours. Children should be tested 3 times prior to marking them as non-participating.

If you have any questions regarding VPK FAST, please email Roushawn Saunders at VPK@ecs4kids.org.

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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 childcare personnel concerning strategies, curriculum, and environmental adaptations that allow a child to derive maximum benefit from the childcare experience.