

Early Learning Parents' Pages ADA Edition

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"Lovely" ideas for family Valentine's Day activities

February 14 is Valentine's Day – a perfect time to focus on love and friendship with your child. Talk to your child about the people in your family and ask what he loves about each one or what he likes to do with each of them. Ask about his friends and what makes each one a friend. Write what he says about each person and use this to make cards or a book about family, friends or love. Discussing ideas such as love and friendship will help your child learn more about these concepts and feelings while increasing his vocabulary.

To make a book, use what your child told you about a family member or friend and have your child draw a picture of the person or glue the person's picture on the page. A great Valentine's Day gift would be a book for a special family member or friend. Your child could make ***I Love Daddy*** using all the reasons your child loves Dad and what he loves doing with him. Make the front and back covers out of cardboard from cereal boxes and have your child paint, draw or color a design or picture. Dad could read ***I Love Daddy*** to the child at bedtime every night and it won't be long before your child will be "reading" it to himself and others. You can use the same information to help your child make a "Jar of Love." Save a clear plastic jar with a lid and let your child decorate the jar and lid by gluing on small hearts or sequins or other decorative items. Cut out or let your child cut out hearts from white, pink and red paper. Write the reasons he loves Dad on the hearts. Have your child put the hearts in the jar and give it to Dad. Your child may want to do this for each family member.

Make Valentine hugs for grandparents or other relatives or friends who don't live nearby by tracing medium-sized heart cookie cutters or some other heart pattern on colored paper and let your child cut out the hearts. Cut out two strips of paper 8 inches long and 1 to 2 inches wide. Help your child accordion-fold the strips and glue one strip to each side of the heart. Glue a small heart on the end of the strips not glued to the bigger heart making arms and hands for the heart. Your child can draw a face on the bigger heart or glue on eyes and a mouth made from a different colored paper, felt, yarn or other material. This heart becomes the "hug" you can mail to a grandparent or friend.

Music soothes the soul and feeds the brain

Children are born with a natural attraction to music. Quiet background music will help your infant fall asleep. From birth, a child can be calmed and soothed by the soft voice of her mother or caregiver singing a lullaby. According to Zoe Palmer, a musician working on a lullabies project at the Royal London Hospital, "Wherever you go in the world, women use the same tones, the same sort of way of singing to their babies. Many lullabies are very basic with just a few words repeated again and again." Lullabies are usually in 6/8 time, giving them a "characteristic swinging or rocking motion," says Sally Goddard Blythe. This is soothing because it mimics the movement a baby feels in the womb as a mother moves. In addition to helping a baby fall asleep, lullabies are educational. "Singing with a baby is a natural, effective way of sharing new words and sounds," says Colwyn Trevarthen, professor of child psychology at the University of Edinburgh and vice-president of the British Association for Early Childhood Education.

Singing songs and nursery rhymes as you give your baby a bath or change her diaper keeps her happy, makes the task go quicker and helps her language development at the same time. You can build on the natural attraction your child has for music to teach social and intellectual skills as your child gets older. Research has shown that the parts of the brain related to math, reading and emotional development are stimulated by music. Music has been connected to spatial intelligence, visualization of patterns and mathematical problem-solving skills in children and it has the potential to enhance these and other academic skills in children. Music has been linked to development of the left side of the brain, which is involved in processing language.

Show your love for birds

The 2015 Great Backyard Bird Count takes place Feb. 13 – 16. Your family can take part in the count by registering at <http://gbbc.birdcount.org/get-started/>. All you have to do to take part is to count birds 15 minutes a day from Feb. 13 – 16 at any location (your yard, a nearby park or while taking a walk in the neighborhood) and enter your bird sightings at www.BirdCount.org.

The information you collect will be used along with information gathered by tens of thousands of volunteers to help track changes in bird populations on a massive scale. To learn how to identify different species of birds you may want to download a free app, [Merlin Bird ID](#). You can find books to help identify birds and books about birds for children at <http://www.birderslibrary.com/features/childrens-bird-books.htm>.

You can make a Valentine gift for the birds in your neighborhood by making birdseed hearts to hang outside. Mix one package of Knox gelatin with ½ cup of boiling water and stir until the gelatin dissolves. After it cools, add two cups of bird seed. Mix the seeds and gelatin solution together. The seeds will be a little moist. Spoon the seed mixture into a heart-shaped muffin tin or silicon mold. Put straws through the center of each heart-shaped “seed muffin.”

When the seed mixtures hardens, pop the “seed muffins” out of the pan or mold. Put twine or thread through the straws to hang the birdseed hearts outside for the birds to eat. Try to identify the birds that visit your yard to eat the birdseed treats.

For additional information on bird books and bird activities for children, visit <http://delightfulchildrensbooks.com/2011/07/08/birds/>.

For more preschool activities about birds, read this article: *For the Birds! Young Children* January 2008 http://www.naeyc.org/files/tyc/file/TYC_V3N4_Russo.pdf

Edible treats to make with your child

Valentine Smoothie

Ingredients: 5 strawberries or red raspberries, ½ of a banana, 1 cup of milk

Directions: Let your child peel the banana and wash the berries. Put the fruit in a blender and pour in a cup of milk. Blend on high speed until it is blended well.

Pour into a plastic cup and put whipped cream and a whole strawberry on top.

This makes one serving.

Edible Valentine Cards

Ingredients: candy hearts, frosting, Graham crackers, miniature marshmallows

Directions: Give your child a square of Graham Crackers (2 or 4 sections) and let her put the frosting on the crackers. Let her choose candy hearts and marshmallows to put on top of the frosting as decorations or to spell out a message.

You can use candy conversation hearts on the top as the message.

Help your child read the message before she eats the “Valentine” for a snack.

For a healthier version use a

slice of bread (toasted or plain), cream cheese or peanut butter, and berries, grapes, raisins or pieces of dried fruit.

Making a heart stained “glass” suncatcher

Cut out two identical heart-shaped pieces of wax paper. Help your child use a “safety” potato peeler to make small shavings of different colors of crayons (peel the paper off the crayons before starting the project) or grate the crayons

ahead of time. Place one of the wax paper hearts on a paper plate or piece of newspaper. Your child can sprinkle crayon shavings over one of the wax paper hearts. Place the second heart over the first one making sure to clear crayon shavings away from the edges. Leave the hearts on the newspaper and put another piece of newspaper over the top of them. Turn your iron on to the low setting (one without steam). When warm, slowly iron the paper. Check every few seconds to see if the crayon shavings have melted. When all shavings have melted, put the hearts aside to cool. Help your child make a frame for the heart out of construction paper and glue it on both sides of the heart. Punch a hole through the top of the heart and use string or ribbon to hang it on or near a window. Talk with your child about why these are called suncatchers and what the waxed paper does to the sunlight.