

Early Learning Parents' Pages



March 2016

is full of fun activities for parents and their children. Take time this month to encourage reading, healthy eating and participating in events.

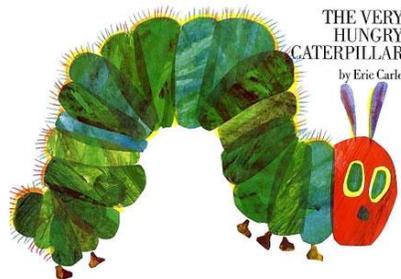
Read Aloud Magic

March is Read Aloud Month and a great time to remind everyone how important it is to read aloud to your child. Pediatricians tell parents that feeding their child healthy food is one of the most important ways they can support their child's physical development. For most children, listening to books read aloud each day is the "magic potion" for becoming a reader. Pediatricians, researchers and early education professionals want parents to know the most important thing they can do to help their child learn to read, is to read aloud to him daily.

Reading to your child should begin at birth and continue during the [early stages](#) of his life. Holding your infant and talking to him about the pictures in a book or reading the text, is a great way to jump-start early literacy skills, while bonding with your baby and showing him reading is a fun activity. If your toddler won't sit long enough to enjoy an entire book, read a few pages during bath time or while he is eating.

Pretend play is another great way to practice early reading skills. Have your child read to you as you pretend to be a preschooler. Even if your child is telling you more about the pictures, he is practicing early reading skills.

Some parents may find it difficult to find [books that are appropriate for their child's age](#). Visiting your local public library and speaking with a librarian can help you find books you can borrow for your child. Thrift shops and garage sales can also be a great source for books. Using your child's favorite toys to create stories can also help with early literacy skills, while [helping your child use his imagination](#) to send a favorite stuffed animal on an adventure.



Find books for your child's specific age by using the [PBS Parents' Bookfinder](#). Don't wait to start your child on a journey to becoming a great reader. Begin reading with your child today and make reading an important part of your daily routine.

Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)

The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is a benefit for parents with low to moderate income. If you pay someone to care for a child under the age of 13 while you work or look for work, you can claim the Credit for Child and Dependent Care expenses on your tax return. To qualify, you must file a tax return whether you owe any tax or are not required to file. The Internal Revenue Service offers [nine points](#) to consider when filing your taxes using the EITC. For more information, see [Publication 503, Child and Dependent Care Expenses](#).

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The Week of the Young Child

The Week of the Young Child is celebrated April 11-14 and sponsored by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). The week recognizes the importance of the healthy development of young children and the role families and teachers or child care providers play in each child's development. Families and child care providers can find ideas for activities for each day of the week on [NAEYC's Week of the Young Child website](#). Great [resources](#) are available for making the most out of your activities.



Each day of the week focuses on a specific theme. From Music Monday, to Work Together Wednesday and Family Friday, the Week of the Young Child is sure to be fun for children, students, parents and teachers.

On **Music Monday**, sing, dance, celebrate and learn through music, while developing math language and literacy skills. Parents can sing songs with their children or make up their own songs about daily routines. Listen to music with your children while riding in the car or doing chores and clap out the beat or march around the room, counting each step you take.

Taco Tuesday is a great opportunity to make healthy tacos together for family dinner. Ask your children which ingredients are vegetables and proteins or ask what color each food item is.

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Is it Time for Toilet Training?

Your toddler is 2 years old and you are getting tired of changing diapers, but how do you know if your child is ready for toilet training? There are certain signs to look for when you are considering [toilet training](#) your child. Your child may be ready for toilet training when she

- Is between the ages of 18 months and 3 years old.
- Stays dry for at least two hours or is dry after naps.
- Can tell you that she is urinating or having a bowel movement.
- Can walk and pull down her pants and get on and off the toilet with little to no help.
- Can follow simple directions.
- Can tell you when her diaper is wet or dirty.
- Shows an interest in using the toilet.



Toddlers are all about trying to gain some control over their world. They are using their growing physical, thinking and language skills to gain some power over themselves, their bodies and their surroundings.

Zero to Three: Learning to Use the Toilet



Do not attempt to begin toilet training if there are any [major changes](#) taking place in your child's life, such as moving to a new home, changing child care providers, switching from a crib to a bed or after an illness. Major family changes, such as a death in the family or birth of a new baby, will affect your child and create a difficult environment for your child to succeed at learning to use the toilet. Create a supportive environment

when you are toilet training your child. Approach toilet training as another skill you are helping your child learn without being emotional. Do not get upset, angry or disappointed if your child wets her pants, or sits on the toilet and does not urinate or have a bowel movement. Putting too much pressure on a child can make her refuse to sit on the toilet or make her feel anxious when she has an accident. Avoid punishment and too much praise around using a toilet.



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Writing and Drawing Help Children Become Readers

When you give a child a piece of paper, he may ask for a crayon or pencil. Children are naturally drawn to sketching or scribbling on paper or other surfaces around them. Parents can show young children that writing and drawing are better suited for paper, and not on walls or floors. Make sure children have washable crayons, markers and pencils available to them to avoid any mishaps. Writing and drawing independently are important early literacy skills for children.



Children as young as 3 years old can tell the difference between pictures and words, and will attempt to write words and draw pictures. Children whose family members or caregivers read aloud and have books available for the children to hold and explore will have a better understanding of words and pictures and will want to imitate what they see in books.

When a 3-year-old makes circles and lines and says, "This is Mommy and Daddy," he understands that the shapes represent people. When a child sees the word "mommy" and is told the word says "mommy," he will begin understanding that the squiggles stand for words or names. Children will accept many different answers when they point to a drawing or picture and ask, "What's this?" than when they point to a word and ask, "What does this say?" At an early age, children will say a drawing of a female may be a drawing of a mommy, girl, sister or woman, but will expect scribbles or letters to be more specific to what the drawing is. When children realize lines and shapes or squiggles represent something that they can see or hear, this is the beginning of symbolic thought.

Ask your child to draw something on paper, then ask him to talk about his drawing. As your child explains the drawing, write down what he is saying and then read it back to him. By doing this regularly, your child will learn pictures represent things he can see and that words tell more about the pictures. This is an important pre-reading skill that will help your child learn to read. Showing the picture to other family members or displaying it on the refrigerator or wall and asking your child to tell others about the picture is a great way for your child to continue learning about reading.

Get out the crayons, pencils and paper today and start preparing your child for reading and writing at an early age.

March is National Nutrition Month

Becoming healthy and staying healthy are important, especially at a young age. During National Nutrition Month, make a plan to stay healthy with the right foods and activities. By making informed choices and developing great eating and exercise habits, you and your children can benefit from a lifetime of healthy choices.

As a parent, time may not always be on your side. Creating healthy snacks and meals for your children can be difficult and time consuming, so check out a few of these great recipes and try them out during the month.

- [Charger Wrap](#): A healthy chicken, veggie and cheese wrap.
- [Peanut Butter and Apple Wrap](#): A quick snack with your choice of any kind of peanut butter or apple.
- [Tiny Pizzas](#): A twist on the traditional pizza, choose your toppings to place on a bagel



Being active is also very important for young children. Check out these ideas for keeping your child active and healthy.

- [Jumping Rope](#): Grab a rope and three friends and jump along to rhymes like Miss Mary Mack or Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear.
- [Dancing](#): One of the easiest ways to exercise is by dancing. Throw on some music and get the dance party started.
- [Running](#): Playing tag or hide and seek in the backyard while running is great for bones and health.

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Is it Time for Toilet Training?

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You need to teach your child the names for body parts, urine and bowel movements. Offer your child a small toilet, seat or stool. Allow your child to decide whether to use the toilet or wear a pull up, diaper or underpants each day. There will be accidents during toilet training, and it's important to handle the accidents calmly and without criticizing your child.

Plan to spend time helping your child learn how to use the toilet and how to wipe. When your child begins doing things on her own, say "good job" and give her small praise when she uses the toilet without assistance. By bringing your child to the bathroom frequently and having her sit on the toilet for small amounts of time, you can create a pattern for when she uses the toilet.

Occasionally, your child may regress and wet her pants after many successful weeks. If this happens, be patient with your child and keep encouraging her to use the toilet. Toilet training is different with every child, so don't compare your child's progress with other children. Take comfort in the fact your child will soon be fully toilet trained and there will be no more diapers in the near future.

The Week of the Young Child

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Enjoy **Work Together Wednesday** by building something together. You can use Legos, building blocks, shoeboxes or empty paper towel rolls to make a train, house or an entire city. Encourage your children to expand their imaginations during this fun activity and talk about the different shapes you used.

Artsy Thursday is a perfect day to encourage your children to be creative and use their imaginations to create something with [Playdough](#), [paint](#) or crayons. Suggest your children create a picture to celebrate spring or a drawing of your family.

On **Family Friday**, spend the day allowing your children to help with simple tasks. Let your children help prepare family breakfast and set the table with dishes and silverware for everyone. Have your children recommend the breakfast items and then share stories around the table.

At the end of the week, help your children create a [family activity book](#) while celebrating the importance of family.

St. Patrick's Day Activities

St. Patrick's Day is full of fun activities for parents, but have you ever wondered what activities are available for your children? Plan some fun activities this St. Patrick's Day that will keep your children entertained throughout the day.

Lucky Charms cereal may be offered year-round, but its St. Patrick's and Ireland themed marshmallows are great for a sensory themed game. Gather a few boxes of the cereal and pour them into a large bucket. Have your children sort through the cereal and remove the marshmallows, while placing them in separate cups. The activity will teach your children shapes and colors as they sort through the marshmallows.

Another fun activity to try is the [St. Patrick's Day Gold Dig](#). While this activity can get a tad messy, your children will feel like real adventurers as they search for the gold coins or rings within the green slime. Learn how to create your own green slime for the [Gold Dig here](#). Check out the Office of Early Learning's [Pinterest board](#) for more St. Patrick's Day-themed activities.



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