

Early Learning Parents' Pages



We've been celebrating VPK's 10th birthday throughout February. Check out our [VPK Birthday Facebook page](#) for more information.

The Wonder of Wondering

Watching a child learn about the world is a magical experience. An infant staring into a mother's face, toddlers playing with playdough at a sensory table and preschoolers watching an egg hatch are wonderful sights. In an effort to encourage the delight of new things, help your child become a "wonderer."

Asking questions and learning about the world prepares a toddler or a preschooler for a future role as a student. Research shows learning through nature improves children's problem solving, critical thinking and decision-making skills. Spending time outdoors and exploring nature stimulates a child's creativity.

Take your child on a nature walk and model "I wonder" statements as you walk together, such as the following:

- I wonder why the leaves change color in autumn.
- I wonder how birds build nests.
- I wonder why snails leave slime trails.

If you don't know the answers to the "I wonders," you can find the answers together later. The most important part of the walk is to notice things in nature and exhibit the value of curiosity and get your child wanting to know more about the surrounding world.

Being curious and looking for answers to "I wonders" or "why does" statements and questions helps a child find the joy in

learning, as Dr. Ruth Wilson states in *The Wisdom of Nature*; "It's obvious from the many questions children ask and from their eagerness to explore and experiment that they are curious about nature and the way it works. We recognize such expressions of curiosity as being important to early science learning. But it's more than that. Consider each question as 'What happens when the bird dies?' or 'Why should we be gentle with animals?' Engaging children in a thoughtful discussion about such philosophical and ethical questions is another way to foster caring and to help young children develop a positive relationship with nature."



Exploring the outdoors is free and easily available. Encouraging questions and "I wonders" will stimulate your child's thinking and lead to a love of learning as you find the answers together. Find answers to "I wonders" by visiting [Wonderopolis](#).

Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY)

[HIPPY](#) is a home and school readiness program for parents who are eligible for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. Home visitors support parents in forming a successful future for their 3- to 5-year-old children by providing courses, books and materials to assist in teaching cognitive and early literacy skills. The University of South Florida program is research-based and focuses on the development of parents as their child's first and most influential teachers. For additional information contact [Mary Lindsey](#) at 813-974-4858.

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"Each year, an average of 20,000 children under the age of 5 are hospitalized because of influenza complications." – Centers for Disease Control

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Flu Season

Your child wakes up with a slight fever and tells you his or her head and tummy hurt. You must make the decision to keep your child home or send him or her to child care. Is it a cold or is it the flu? Although symptoms can vary, answering the following questions can help you determine what actions to take.

- Was the onset of the illness sudden?
- Is your child extremely tired?
- Does your child have a high fever, headache, decreased appetite, aching muscles or chills?

If the majority of your answers are "yes," call your child's pediatrician.



According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the [flu season](#) can last from October through May. The CDC recommend everyone 6 months of age and older receive a flu vaccination. A child should be vaccinated every year to best protect him or her against the flu. In fact, there are many reasons to receive the vaccine, such as the following:

- Protecting yourself and others who are more vulnerable to the illness.
- Protecting those who are at a risk of becoming seriously ill, such as older adults, people with health conditions and young children.
- Reducing the illness' outcomes and strength.

According to the CDC, an average of 20,000 children under the age of 5 are hospitalized because of influenza complications. You can keep track of your child's immunizations for the flu and other diseases by following the [immunizations schedules](#) from the CDC. If a child is 6 years old or younger, parents can create [specific immunization schedules](#). In addition, an [Immunization Baby Book](#) and video are available on the CDC's website. Prepare for your child's visits and regular immunizations by using the [Well Visit Planner](#) available online.



The "[Is it Contagious?](#)" app is another great resource for parents who are unsure about their child's illness. The app allows you to find important information quickly about contagious diseases, symptoms, treatments and prevention for more than 85 conditions from newborns to teenagers.

Teaching Empathy and Tolerance to Children at an Early Age

Schools and communities have become more diverse. Young children notice differences in appearances and languages of people in their neighborhoods and friends in their schools and churches.

Parents and teachers can work together to help children learn about the unique qualities and customs of all the families in their neighborhoods and classrooms. Having positive encounters and relationships with people from different cultures can help children learn although people look different, they are the same in many ways.

[Bringing Home to School](#), by Maureen Bazeley, offers suggestions for parents to work with teachers to help students learn the similarities and differences among people. [Working with a Diverse Population](#), by Jane Kamau, presents teachers and parents with suggestions for teaching children about different cultures.

[Teaching Tolerance](#) has excellent resources available to assist in answering children's questions in [online magazines](#). The website also includes information on [books](#) for pre-k through second grade children, in addition to complete [lessons for teachers](#). Books marked with  are available free of charge through [Perspectives for a Diverse America](#). To request a free copy, visit the website and click the icon by the book to go to the registration page.



"Putting yourself in someone else's shoes is a crucial building block for other caring emotions."

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Happy Birthday, Dr. Seuss!

March 2, 2016, is Dr. Seuss' birthday and is celebrated across the nation as "Read Across America Day." Celebrate the importance of reading with your family and children by reading some of the great books written by Dr. Seuss. Plan an entire day of celebrating by serving [Green Eggs and Ham](#) for breakfast and creating [The Cat in the Hat kabobs](#) for lunch. Visit [Seussville](#) for recipes, crafts and printable activities you can do with your child to help celebrate this special day.



READING ALOUD TO YOUR CHILD EVERY DAY IS THE BEST WAY TO INCREASE YOUR CHILD'S VOCABULARY AND LITERACY SKILLS. FOR TIPS ON READING ALOUD TO BABIES, TODDLERS AND PRESCHOOLERS, AND TO FIND AGE APPROPRIATE BOOKLISTS VISIT [READ ALOUD 15 MINUTES](#).



Hang on to your hats! It's time to gear up for the [National Education Association's "Read Across America Day"](#) and go wild for reading. On March 2, 2016, tip your hat to Dr. Seuss and celebrate his newly written book, *What Pet Should I Get?* with creative acts of reading and learning for students of all ages. Discover ideas for classroom-based activities and school-wide events that take advantage of students' affinity for animals and Dr. Seuss's talent for creating fantastic creatures in this [activity guide](#).



Video Chat With Babies

Your new baby has arrived and grandparents and other family members are eager to meet the newest family addition. This can prove difficult for family members who live far away, but want to witness some of your baby's "firsts."

Skyping or video-chatting with babies may be the next best choice if you can't be there in person. Recently, researchers discovered infants can tell the difference between a recorded program or video and interacting with a family member on a video call. The research assists with learning more about technology and the role it can play in shaping abstract concepts in early childhood.



A [recent study](#) shows 85 percent of parents have used video-chat to communicate with family members, with 40 percent using technology at least once a week. Video-chatting can also help keep parents in touch on a more personal level when time doesn't allow them to be with their baby in person.

The key to video-chat is the interactive play between the baby and family member. Actions like a grandparent blowing a kiss or clapping his or her hands, can cause the baby to perform the same action. Provide stimulation by singing songs, reading short, lively stories, reciting nursery rhymes and using animated facial expressions.

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Teaching Empathy and Tolerance to Children at an Early Age

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According to a study conducted by the University of California, Berkeley, parents can put forth an effort to promote elements of empathy in children as young as 18 months.

Researchers found 18-month-old children had the ability to tune into other people's emotions. By age 4, children can compare others' feelings to their own. Parents can talk with their children about kindness and concern for the feelings of others to connect the children's actions to these concepts. Young children develop kindness and compassion for others through their play and by modeling the social interactions of family members.



Putting yourself in someone else's shoes is also a crucial building block for other caring emotions. [Raise a Compassionate Child](#) offers parents 11 actions they can practice to raise a caring child. "It's how we develop gratitude, hope, and compassion -- which is the ability to act on your empathy," explains Christine Carter, Ph.D. With these practices, parents can raise a child who shows empathy for others, celebrates differences and recognizes kindness.

Video Chat with Babies

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[Research](#) found that the video-chat interactions often mirror the real interactions that grandparents and grandchildren or parents and children have with each other. Even though the images on the screen are two-dimensional, the voices and images together have been found to be more effective with babies than talking with a disembodied voice on a phone.

If you're a grandparent, aunt, uncle or parent who can't be with a child at a certain time, try video-chats for a chance to be a part of his or her future and "firsts."



We've been celebrating 10 successful years of Florida's VPK program with contests and events all month long. On Thursday, Feb. 11, 2016, nine guest judges from the Office of Early Learning teamed up to critique 25 submissions for the VPK Parfait Presentation Photo Contest from VPK providers and teachers across the state.

The following day, the team traveled to the ELC of the Big Bend Region to assist guest Chef Paula in the VPK Parfait Taste Testing Contest. After tasting an astounding 17 parfaits, Chef Paula received a little help from current VPK student, Annie, in deciding a few tie breakers.

[Bizzy Bee's parfait](#), inspired from the children's story *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom*, claimed first place in our parfait presentation contest, while Kids R Kids' innovative "[Parfait Pops](#)" appealed to the taste buds of Chef Paula, winning them first place in our taste testing contest.



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