

Early Learning Parents' Pages



Summer vacation will soon be a memory as the new school year gets underway in mid-August. The good news is that families have more time to take advantage of back-to-school savings this year. Florida's sales tax holiday will run a full 10 days – Aug. 7 through Aug. 16. To see which items are sales-tax free, check the [Current Topics section on the Department of Revenue website](#).

What to expect as your baby develops

Parents of a newborn struggle to get enough sleep while meeting the needs of their baby and wonder, "Is my child's sleep pattern normal?" or "When should my baby learn to fall asleep on her own and how do we help her learn to do this?"

Parents of infants, toddlers and pre-schoolers look for answers to these questions and others they may have about child development. **Zero to Three, National Center for Infants, Toddlers and Families** has an online [parent portal](#) with information about child development

that may help parents find the best way to meet their child's specific needs in all areas of development. Each area includes

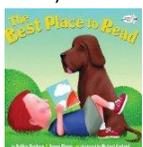
- Tip sheets and brochures
- A monthly newsletter
- Videos on child development and toddlers learning about problem-solving, sorting, spatial relations and persistence
- Podcasts on nurturing brain development
- "Frequently Asked Questions" answered by experts.

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Make every month "Get Caught Reading Month"

Reading aloud is "the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading," according to the landmark 1985 report *Becoming a Nation of Readers*.

Parents and teachers can encourage children to read by celebrating "Get Caught Reading Month" every month of the year.



Read your child the book *The Best Place to Read* by Debbie Betram and Susan Bloom and talk about different places you like to read. Invite your child to find different places to sit and read inside or outside your home. Take pictures of your family reading together and of your child "getting caught reading." Have your child ask grandparents and other family members where they like to read.

Visit the [Get Caught Reading website](#) for posters and other resources to promote reading.

For free posters, flyers and bookmarks, visit the [Read for 15 Minutes website](#).

Parents will find this advice:

"In an era of high-stakes testing and education reforms and revolutions, research has repeatedly proved that one simple parenting technique is among the most effective. Children who are read aloud to by parents get a head start in language and literacy skills and go to school better prepared. Reading aloud to young children, particularly in an engaging manner, promotes emerging literacy and language development and supports the relationship between child and parent," (excerpt from a review in this month's Archives of Disease in Childhood).

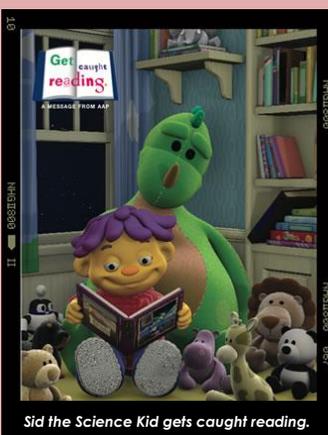
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- What to expect as your baby develops
- Get Caught Reading!
- Scholarship for children with special needs adds 3- and 4-year-olds
- How to hold a Grandparents' Camp
- How to keep your child healthy

"Reading aloud is the single most important activity required for eventual success in reading."



If we want our children to grow up reading, we have to do everything possible, and we have to do it as early as possible.

Scholarships for Children with Special Needs

Selecting educational products and services for a child with special needs can be challenging. What does your child truly need? [Step Up for Students](#) provides parents with information on services that may be particularly helpful to students with special needs.

One resource is a **Personal Learning Scholarship Account (PLSA)** to help customize an educational program for a child with special needs. This year Florida has nearly tripled the size of the program and **increased eligibility to include 3- and 4-year-olds**. It's also expanded the autism definition to take in the entire autism spectrum disorder, including Asperger's, and added children with muscular dystrophy. The changes went into effect July 1.

The PLSA is available for qualified Florida students from age 3 through 22 or high school graduation, whichever comes first. To qualify, students must be diagnosed with one of the following: autism spectrum disorder, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, muscular dystrophy, Prader-Willi syndrome, spina bifida, Williams syndrome or an intellectual disability (severe cognitive impairment). Kindergarten students who are deemed high risk due to developmental delays and are not older than 5 on Sept. 1 may be eligible for the year they are applying.

The PLSA allows parents to direct scholarship funds toward a combination of approved programs and providers they think best meets their children's unique needs. These include approved private schools, therapists, specialists, curriculum, technology—even a college savings account.



Applications for the 2015-16 school year are being accepted now. Scholarships

are awarded on a first-come, first-served basis.

Families interested in the PLSA special needs scholarship for the 2016-17 school year can sign up for the interest list to get notifications about when they can apply for the 2016-17 year. Visit the [Step Up for Students](#) website [to apply](#).

What to expect...

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Areas of development include

- Ages and stages
- Social-emotional development
- School readiness and early learning
- Play
- Challenging behaviors
- Sleep
- Positive parenting approaches

Parents can register for a monthly e-letter, [From Baby to Big Kid](#), with science-based information about how children learn and grow each month from birth to age 3.

Select your child's age to receive a monthly email tailored to your child's developmental stage with

- Age-based information about child development

- In-depth articles on common child-rearing issues and challenges
- Parent-child play activities that promote bonding and learning
- Frequently asked questions
- Research on child development and what it means for parents
- How to sign up to receive Babysteps, a monthly email alerting readers to new information on the [Zero to Three](#) website.

With the information accessible, new parents may feel more comfortable and confident making decisions about their parenting skills and their child's growth and development. And maybe they will be able to get more sleep!

Calling all grandparents. There's still time for Camp Grandma or Camp Grandpa.

"Camp Grandma" or "Camp Grandpa" is a great way to create lifelong summer memories with your grandchildren. Think about summer camps you may have gone to: scout camps, church camp, YMCA camp, sports camps, day camp, horse camp, 4H camp or others. Choose activities you liked and plan similar ones. Make an activity schedule for each day. Grandma and grandpa can plan so each has child-free time. Grandma may bake cookies followed by grandpa building-a-birdhouse project. Consider themes such as "Nature Day" when you take grandchildren to a nursery to buy seeds or plants. They can take plants home to plant a garden and birdseed to put in a birdfeeder they make in the afternoon. Let them visit the library and check out books on plants or birds or look online to find out more about birds or plants in your area. Have them make a nature snack with nuts, sunflower or pumpkin seeds, dried fruit pieces, and Cheerios or Chex Cereal. They can eat the snack and use binoculars to watch birds eat from the birdfeeder. Have the books *Counting is for the Birds* by Frank Mazzola Jr. or *About Birds: A Guide for Children* by Cathryn Sill for the children to read as they enjoy their snack or watch the birds. Check out these websites from Audubon for other ideas about

birds: [Menu of Activities](#) and [Great Backyard Bird Count](#).



Day's end for "Camp Grandma" may be cooking hot dogs over a backyard campfire or grill, roasting marshmallows and making s'mores, or eating watermelon and having a seed-spitting contest. A bedtime story from grandpa or watching the movie, *Race for your Life, Charlie Brown* (the Peanuts Gang at summer camp), can help get the children ready for bed. Another fun book to read is *How to Babysit a Grandma* or *How to Babysit a Grandpa* by Jean Reagan.

Different entities also offer Grandparent Camps – camps that grandparents and grandchildren attend together. They vary in length, activities, cost and amenities. For an online list and descriptions of some of them, check out [Going to Grandparent Camp](#). As your grandchildren grow older, they will remember the fun times and may long for "Camp Grandma" as teens.

Accessible TV for children with special needs

Since Sesame Street first aired in 1969 it has shown that educational programs for children can help them learn.

In the past, children who are visually impaired, blind, deaf or hard of hearing have not been able to use many of the programs. In March, the U.S. Department of Education announced a free, video on demand [Accessible Television Portal](#) project with children's programs and family TV episodes using closed captioning and descriptions. Parents, teachers, child care providers and professionals working with children can visit www.dcmp.org and apply for access. Children's shows such as *Bill Nye the Science Guy*, *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood*, *Super Why!* and *The Magic School Bus* are available. Major television network, producers and distributors like PBS Kids, Sesame Workshop, Cartoon Network, The Fred Rogers Company and Scholastic Media are providing content at no cost. Accessible content will be available to use in classrooms and homes via the web, mobile apps, mobile phones and tablets and set-top boxes. Initially, the portal will allow access to 73 episodes of 19 different children's TV programs with additional programs and content added over the next two years.

Get caught reading...

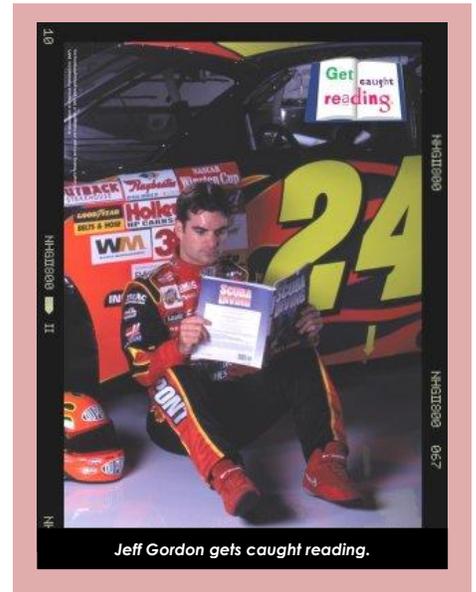
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Dr. Perri Klass, medical director, *Reach Out and Read*, Boston Medical Center, and assistant professor of Pediatrics, Boston University School of Medicine, reminds parents, "As pediatricians know, growing up healthy means much more than the absence of disease. It means growing up with love and attention, and acquiring spoken and written language. It's exciting to offer a child a beautiful book and watch it do its work, cast its spell. Growing up without books is growing up deprived and with a deprivation that puts one at risk for failure...If we want our children to grow up reading, we have to do everything possible, and we have to do it as early as possible."

Keep reading and talking with your child daily to support the literacy and language skills that lead to success in school.

How to keep your child healthy

Many parents are anxious about their child's health and development. They want to know their child is healthy and developing at a normal rate. There are many ways to make sure your child is healthy and protected from preventable diseases such as measles, whooping cough and flu. Feed your child a healthy diet with a balance of fresh vegetables, fruit, whole grains, dairy and sources of protein such as beef, fish, poultry and beans. Encourage him to get plenty of exercise each day, at least eight hours of sleep every night and to drink lots of water. Childhood immunizations and regular visits to a health care professional help keep your child healthy and catch problems early. A "rule of thumb" is for young children to have 13 well-visits to a doctor or other health care professional by age 3. During the first year, babies need to have a well-visit every 1-2 months. A well-visit is a check-up to see



how well your child is developing, learning new things and what to expect next. You can use the [Well-Visit Planner](#) to plan questions and learn what to expect as your child grows. There are three steps:

1. Answer a questionnaire about your child and family. Information collected is secure and is not stored.
2. Pick priorities for what you want to get information about during the visit.
3. Get a guide that you and your child's health care provider use to tailor the visit to your child's and family's needs.

After completing the guide online, print out a copy for you and one for your health care professional and take it with you to the well-visit so you will be prepared to ask specific questions about concerns you may have. Some pediatricians and health clinics will accept the Well-Visit Planner by email so it will be with your child's records when you arrive. Call the office and ask if you can email it before the appointment date.

You can find a variety of helpful [educational materials for parents](#) that are specific to the age of your child as well.



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