Nurturing Empathy and Kindness

Much attention is given to the effects of bullying in the news and on social media. You are probably aware of the effects of frequent bullying on children and youth. If you have a young child you may think that your child won’t have to deal with bullies until he starts elementary school. But recent research tells us that young children are sometimes experiencing “mean kids” in their preschool or parents may be getting reports that their child is not being kind to others.

Around 6 months of age, your child begins to use “social referencing” or being sensitive to your reaction in new situations. He will begin to smile at people that you greet with a smile or get upset when you are angry. He will become very aware of the way you treat him or react to the things he says and what he does. Your reactions and words will become his model for the way he speaks and treats others.

To nurture empathy and kindness in your child, talk with him about his feelings and your feelings, identifying the positive and negative feelings and actions you see in him and others. “That dog has a loud bark and it scared you.” “You are feeling sad because your sister took your toy. Let’s ask her to share the toy with you.” “Riding the tricycle looks like fun. Ask your friend if he will take turns with you so you can ride it too.”

Use “I messages” to help him understand his emotions and those of other people. “I don’t like it when you hit me with your toy. It hurts.”
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“I know you feel angry because you wanted to play with your blocks and put them away. It is bedtime and you can play with them tomorrow.” You can use pretend play to help him understand his feelings. Let him be the parent and you be the child. Let him tell you what you need to do to get ready for bed.

As a parent, you need to be aware of the social and emotional skills related to establishing relationships or making friends to support your child’s ability to treat others with kindness and empathy. Young children learn empathy through developing important social skills during the first years of their lives. A secure and strong attachment to you is the base he will build use to develop empathy. When your child feels the love and acceptance you give him and knows the difference between being kind and being mean, he will learn how to accept and understand others as he grows. Children who know the affect their words and actions have on others have learned the value of kindness from their families and will treat others with kindness and empathy.

Click here for more information.

Head Start Awareness Month

Head Start began in 1965, designed to provide comprehensive health, nutrition and education services to children in poverty. The Head Start Model has continued to develop over time and adapts to changes based on current research and teaching techniques to meet the needs of the community.

Head Start has four components to the program:

**Education:** Provides a variety of learning experiences to help children grow intellectually, socially, and emotionally.

**Health:** Provides health services such as immunizations, dental, medical, and mental health, and nutritional services, and early identification of health problems.

**Parent Involvement:** Involves parents in planning activities and workshops. Parents serve on policy councils and committees and participate in classes and workshops on child development. Parents are valuable volunteers in the program.

**Social Services:** Provides outreach to families to determine what services they need.

Head Start supports families who are experiencing difficult circumstances.

The early interventions and family supports provided by the Head Start Program have a lasting positive effect on families and their children. Research shows that the health benefits and the program’s focus on the social-emotional development of children have a huge impact on the future success of the children.

Head Start supports families by providing access to quality child care and education during their child’s early development. The program provides families information and resources to help them understand how children learn and offers guidance on how to support their child’s development.

For more information visit www.nhsa.org.
Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) is the sudden, unexplained death of a baby younger than 1 year of age that doesn’t have a known cause even after a complete investigation. Learning about SIDS and safe sleep is important for everyone who takes care of your baby. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, babysitters, child care providers, and anyone else who cares for your child should learn the best ways to keep her safe when she is sleeping.

There are various myths surrounding the cause of SIDS. Health care professionals have concluded that SIDS is not:

• The same as suffocation and is not caused by suffocation.
• Caused by vaccines, immunizations, or shots.
• Contagious.
• The result of neglect or child abuse.
• Caused by cribs.
• Caused by vomiting or choking.
• Completely preventable, but there are ways to reduce the risk.

There are many ways to reduce the risk of SIDS for your infant including the use of a safe sleep environment, not smoking during pregnancy or after your child is born and taking your infant for well-child visits. You should have a safe sleep environment prepared in your home for your infant when you bring her home from the hospital. As she grows, you may have to make adjustments such as lowering the crib mattress.

Safe Sleep Environment for Babies:
• Place your baby on his or her back for all sleep times—naps and at night.
• Use a firm, flat sleep surface, such as a mattress in a safety-approved crib, covered by a fitted sheet.
• Keep your baby’s sleep area (for example, a crib or bassinet) in the same room where you sleep until your baby is at least 6 months old, or ideally, until your baby is one year old.
• Keep soft bedding such as blankets, pillows, bumper pads, and soft toys out of your baby’s sleep area.
• Do not cover your baby’s head or allow your baby to get too hot. Signs your baby may be getting too hot include sweating or his or her chest feels hot.

For more information about SIDS and safe sleep environments, please visit the American Academy of Pediatrics website.
Fall into a book with your child

Fall is the beginning of cooler weather where you can cozy up with your baby, toddler, or child and fall into a book. This is when you and your child are engaged in the wonder of a story. When children are enjoying what they are doing, they are learning at the same time. As a parent, it is important to create positive experiences with books and reading. If children learn to love books and reading at an early age the more likely, they will be to continue to grow in early literacy. Here are a few helpful ways you can engage your baby, toddler or child in reading for early literacy.

- Allow your child to decide how much time you spend reading and looking at pictures. The gives your child the opportunity to explore the book in the way that best interests her.
- Let your child turn the pages of the book. You may have to help with this until your child can do this independently.
- Make the story come alive by reading with different voices for the characters. It’s OK to be silly!
- Talk to your child about connections in a story. When you are reading a story that relates to you child or family, talk with your child about these connections.
- Encourage your child to ask questions. As your child gets older, the child will naturally start asking questions. Take this time to answer them and encourage their natural curiosity.
- Make reading a part of your child’s daily routine. Making sure reading is a part of your child’s everyday routines will increase the possibility they will continue reading for fun!
- Use old magazines to cut out pictures and create your own story. You and your child can have fun with making your own book using your own words. This promotes creativity and self-expression.

Taking a trip to a local public library to find fall themed books is another way to get your child excited about reading. A list of books can be found here.

A fun activity you can do with your child is to go outside and collect several different leaves of all shapes, sizes and colors. Glue the leaves down in the shape of a leaf person based on the book, Leaf Man by Lois Ehlert.

Before bed, unwind with your child as you read a soothing story. Watching your child drift off to sleep as you read is a perfect way to end any day.
November is Family Engagement Month

As a family, you can begin planning for November’s Family Engagement in Education Month. You may wonder what family engagement is and why it takes a whole month to celebrate or learn about. Family engagement happens when parents engage with their child’s education programs and teachers to build positive relationships that support children’s learning and healthy development.

Research shows that family engagement supports the healthy development of all children, especially those less likely to succeed in school. Children with families who support their learning at home and at school:

- Have increased motivation to learn.
- Develop social-emotional skills that lead to success in school.
- Develop higher level critical thinking skills.
- Have a higher level of school readiness skills (attention, memory, impulse control and planning skills).

By engaging with your child’s school, you will learn ways to recognize the indicators of healthy development or milestones. This helps you recognize developmental delays and cognitive, physical or other health related problems in your child at a younger age. When you are aware of the topics and skills she is being taught at school or in child care, it is easier to talk with her about what she is learning. Find activities that relate to the topics or skills by reading newsletters or emails from the school or your child’s teacher.

Using apps such as Vroom, Talk with Me Baby or Bedtime Math make finding activities to use at home easy and enjoyable for you and your child. She will enjoy the games and activities on websites such as PBS Parents and Talking is Teaching. The Office of Early Learning (OEL) has many resources on the OEL website for families to find activities that will be fun for both your child and you.

When families are engaged in their child’s learning during the early years, they are more likely to continue supporting and being involved in their child’s education and school events. Plan ahead for all of the activities you want to do with your child throughout November and continue to find ways to connect her with new learning opportunities throughout the year!

**Special Dates in November**

November is Family Engagement Month

- Nov. 1 National Family Literacy Day
- Nov. 2 Book Lovers Day
- Nov. 6 Saxophone Day
- Nov. 8 Parents as Teachers Day
- Nov. 11 Veterans Day
- Nov. 12 Young Readers Day
- Nov. 13 World Kindness Day
- Nov. 17 National Take a Hike Day
- Nov. 28 Thanksgiving Day

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