



Parents' Pages

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Celebrating Head Start Awareness Month

October is Head Start Awareness Month where the important work for young children and their families is celebrated. For more than 60 years, Head Start has helped children from birth to age five get ready for school and build a strong future.

Through community partnerships, Head Start also helps with health care, healthy meals, mental wellness, disability services, parenting skills, family engagement and school readiness. These services empower parents to be their child's first teacher and give children and families the support they need to learn, grow and succeed.

In Florida, [Head Start and Early Head Start programs](#) serve more than 45,000 children. Every child receives health and developmental screenings. Staff also helps families find doctors and dentists to support their health and well-being.

Head Start's family engagement staff help parents set goals, improve financial stability and connect with community resources. About one out of every five Head Start staff members is a current or former Head Start parent. This shows how the program continues to support families even after their children grow.

Families can apply for [Head Start and Early Head Start](#) throughout the year. These programs help children build skills for school while supporting the health and well-being of the whole family.

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Fall Storytelling: Building Language Skills in Early Learning

Fall is the perfect season to build language skills through stories. Reading together helps young children learn new words, improve listening skills and grow their imagination. Stories about pumpkins, apples, leaves and woodland animals make learning fun while introducing children to the changing season.

While reading, ask simple questions like “What do you think will happen next?” or “How do you think the character feels?” These conversations help children practice speaking and build comprehension skills.

Children can also become storytellers by creating their own fall adventures using leaves, pinecones, pumpkins or favorite toys. Encourage the children to tell what happens first, next and last. Acting out favorite stories is another fun way to build confidence and strengthen communication skills.

Whether you read a book before bedtime, tell a story on a nature walk or make up a pumpkin adventure together, storytelling helps children develop important language and literacy skills. A few minutes of shared reading each day can create a lifelong love of books and learning.

Florida’s Disability History and Awareness Weeks

Florida recognizes the first two weeks of October as Disability History and Awareness Weeks. The observance encourages schools and communities to teach children about the history, achievements and contributions of people with disabilities while promoting kindness, understanding and respect. The goal is to help children understand that everyone has unique strengths and deserves to be included.

Count, Measure and Stir: Learning Math While Making Chili



October is National Chili Month, making it the perfect time to turn cooking into a math adventure! Preparing a pot of chili gives young children hands-on opportunities to practice early math skills while spending time with family.

Invite your child to count ingredients as you add them to the pot. Let them measure cups of beans, corn or tomatoes and talk about words like full, half, more and less. Compare the sizes of measuring cups and ask which one holds more.

You can even sort beans by color or size before adding them to the recipe. As the chili cooks, practice counting spoonfuls while stirring or estimate how many beans are on the plate.

Cooking together helps children build number sense, measurement skills and confidence, all while creating a warm family meal. Learning can happen anywhere, even in the kitchen!

Writing Fun at Home

Young children begin learning about writing long before they can spell words. In [Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten \(VPK\) program](#), children develop emergent writing skills, which means they learn that writing is a way to share ideas, tell stories and communicate. Families can support emergent writing at home by turning fall activities into enjoyable opportunities for drawing, labeling and writing.

Leaf Prints

This activity helps children understand that print carries meaning. Place a leaf under a piece of paper and gently rub over it with a crayon.

When the leaf shape appears, ask your child to:

- Draw a picture of where the leaf came from.
- Try writing the word leaf or the first letter L.
- Dictate a sentence about the leaf while you write it down.

Pumpkin Patch Scavenger Hunt

If you visit a pumpkin patch or park, turn the trip into a simple scavenger hunt.

Ask your child to look for items like:

- Big and small pumpkins
- Yellow and orange leaves
- Round and square objects

After the activity, encourage your child to draw pictures of what they found and attempt to label them. Even scribbles or misspelled words are part of early writing development. When children see that writing can help them share ideas, tell stories and record their experiences, they begin to understand the purpose of writing. These early experiences help build a strong foundation for literacy in kindergarten and beyond.



VPK Eligibility and Registration

Your child must live in Florida and be four years old on or before September 1.

If your child's 4th birthday falls on February 2 through September 1, you can postpone enrollment until the following year when your child is five years old.

Register for VPK in the [Family Portal](#) and check out the [Prekindergarten Family Guide](#) for additional tips and resources for a successful program year.

Florida VPK and Florida Prepaid Unite BIG SAVINGS FOR BRIGHT FUTURES!

Start Early. Save More.

Applying to participate in Florida's VPK program is a great beginning to investing in your child's future!

Not only is VPK proven to help your child enter kindergarten confident and ready to learn, it also opens the door to valuable financial education opportunities that can support your family's future.

- Apply for VPK and sign up for Florida Prepaid to receive a \$100 bonus to start saving for future education costs.
- Apply for VPK and sign up for Florida Prepaid to be entered for a chance to win a \$1,000 college scholarship.

Families who opt in to either opportunity are provided additional information about the options available through [Florida Prepaid](#).



Safe Sleep Awareness Month: Remember the ABCs of Sleep

October is Safe Sleep Awareness Month, a time to raise awareness about safe sleep practices that help protect infants and reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and other sleep-related infant deaths. By following a few simple safe sleep practices every day, parents and caregivers can help create a safer sleep environment for their little ones.

Every time you put your baby to sleep, remember the [ABCs of Safe Sleep](#):

A = Alone: Babies should always sleep alone in their own crib, bassinet or play yard. Avoid placing toys, blankets, pillows or stuffed animals in the sleep area.

B = Back: Always place your baby on their back for every sleep until they can roll over independently. Back sleeping is one of the safest ways to reduce the risk of SIDS.

C = Crib: Use a safety-approved crib, bassinet or play pen with a firm mattress and fitted sheet. Keep the sleep space free of loose bedding and other items.

Keep Baby Comfortable and Safe

Overheating may increase the risk of SIDS. Dress your baby in light sleepwear and keep the room at a comfortable temperature. Blankets are not necessary. Instead, consider using a wearable blanket or sleep sack until your baby begins rolling over. Signs your baby may be too warm include:

- Sweating
- Damp hair
- Flushed or reddened cheeks
- Rapid breathing
- Warm or hot chest
- Heat rash or red skin

Additional Safe Sleep Tips

- Check clothing for loose buttons or accessories that could become choking hazards
- Never attach pacifiers to clothing with cords or strings
- Avoid putting your baby to sleep with a bottle
- Establish a bed-time routine to help your child fall asleep easier and sleep more soundly

What's Inside the Pumpkin? A Fun Way to Practice Thinking Skills

One of the most exciting parts of fall is the return of pumpkins! Whether you visit a pumpkin patch or the store, the search for the perfect pumpkin is sure to delight. There are many ways to learn, create and have fun together with the following activities.

Once you get the pumpkin home, invite your child to guess what might be inside. Ask them to look closely at the pumpkin's shape, color and weight. Encourage them to share their ideas and explain their thinking.

After your child makes predictions, cut open the pumpkin together and explore what's inside. Talk about the seeds, the pulp and the smell. Ask your child if their prediction was correct and what surprised them.

This type of activity supports important skills described in [Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards](#), including curiosity, observation, problem solving and scientific inquiry. It also connects to [Florida's Resiliency Education Standards](#), which encourage children to ask questions, think through problems and try new ideas.



Fall Activities that Foster Big Skills

As the leaves begin to change and the weather gets cooler, fall is a wonderful time to enjoy activities with your family. Activities are more than just fun; they help children build important skills while encouraging creativity and imagination.

Here are a few crafts you can try at home using simple materials.

Apple Stamp Art

What you need:

- Apples (cut in half)
- Paint
- Paper
- Paper plates

What to do:

- Pour paint onto the paper plates
- Dip the apple halves flat side down into paint
- Press them onto paper to make fun designs
- Count the apple prints, create patterns and use different colors

Leaf Collages

What you need:

- Collected leaves (or faux leaves)
- Glue
- Paper
- Crayons or Markers

What to do:

- Glue leaves onto paper
- Add faces, arms and legs with crayons or markers
- Make up names and stories for each leaf person



These fall crafts support the Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards, specifically the [Creative Expression through the Arts](#) domain. So, grab some leaves, slice up an apple and get crafting because fall learning has never been so fun!

NOVEMBER UPCOMING EVENTS

Native American Heritage Month
Family Engagement Month
Military Families Month
Veterans Day
Thanksgiving



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