



Parents' Pages

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Teachable Moments: Arts in Education

The arts play a vital role in a child's development and offer a unique and beneficial way for a child to express his or her thoughts and ideas creatively. Artistic activities can help children develop vocabulary and communication skills. Having children engage with different art materials improves fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination while fostering problem solving and critical thinking skills.

You can provide ways to encourage your child's artistic expression with materials in your home. Scrap paper, rolling pins and cookie cutters are readily available tools to create art. Manipulating playdough, building a collage with scrap paper or using finger paints creates visual interests and excitement about learning.

Another form of expression is through music. Music is a wonderful tool for inspiration and can reinforce positive behavior. It can stimulate children's minds, encourage imagination and even help in their cognitive development. Playing music in the car or at home inspires children to listen, move, dance and sing along. Household items such as wooden spoons and plastic bowls can mimic drum sounds heard in a favorite song.

Sensory art experiences, music, creative movement and imaginative play are a few ways children can express themselves artistically. Support your child's innovative efforts by talking with them about their work of art and providing them multiple opportunities to have fun. Remember to just focus on their enjoyment of creating art and not the end product.

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Positive Behavior and Self-Awareness

Children are developing and discovering a lot about themselves at an early age. When they develop positive self-awareness, they will try new things and work toward achieving goals. This exploration builds confidence in their ability to reason and problem solve. When you show empathy and kindness to others in front of your child, it helps them understand how they should treat others. Helping someone when they need assistance and using kind words display a positive behavior your child can follow.

Children also need to learn how to express their thoughts and feelings in words so others will be able to help them. Read books that show kindness, empathy and gratitude. Talk about the appropriate and inappropriate ways to act in situations. Praise them when you notice positive behavior: "It was so responsible of you to pick up your toys and put them away," or "I love the way you offered your favorite toy to your friend."

Suggest they look at their behavior and how it might affect others: "I saw you take that toy from your friend. How do you think that made him feel?" It is normal for children to think primarily about themselves. Be supportive and patient as it will take time to develop these social skills. Recognizing and learning to control strong emotions is the basis for having successful relationships in a family, at school and in the community.

Developing empathy at an early age allows kids to communicate better, build social skills and become kinder individuals.

How to Understand Your Child's FAST Results and Get Involved!

Emergent literacy skills are essential for children to develop into proficient readers in the future. Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten program (VPK) helps your child gain critical skills in emergent literacy for kindergarten readiness.

VPK uses the Florida Assessment of Student Thinking (FAST) Star Early Literacy to monitor the progress of VPK students. FAST is a quick way to see what early literacy skills your child has already obtained and what they are ready to learn next.

Your child will take part in progress monitoring at least three times over the course of the school year. VPK instructors will use information from progress monitoring to customize instruction based on your child's needs.

What can you do as parents to help your child? Here are three simple steps:

1. Encourage your child to do their best.

Before progress monitoring, tell your child you are excited for them to "show what they know"!

2. Obtain your child's results from the VPK program.

VPK programs must share progress monitoring results with parents within seven calendar days of the administration. Review the results with your child's VPK instructor and ask how you can help at home.

3. Support your child's learning at home.

Check out our [online resources](#) for ideas and activities to use with the VPK teacher's suggestions. The [developmental standards](#) have examples of how you may support your child – just click the information icon to view these suggestions.

For more information about FAST Star Early Literacy, visit the Division of Early Learning's [website](#) or email us at vpkfast@del.fldoe.org.



Your Child's Health and Wellness: What is on Your Child's Plate?

Nutritious, balanced meals are essential for a child's growth and development now and later in life. The foundation for eating fruits, vegetables, healthy meals and staying physically active starts with you.

Infants: Your 4- to 6-month-old infant will show signs of readiness to start eating stage 1 pureed baby food when they place their toys towards their mouth and get excited seeing you eat food. Because babies develop at their own pace, always consult your child's pediatrician to learn how to safely introduce solid foods. Introduce one fruit or vegetable at a time to observe if they may be allergic to that specific fruit or vegetable.

Toddlers: Offer two or three options of fruit for a snack and give them the one they select.

Preschoolers: Offer a variety of fruits and vegetables during mealtimes. Support your child's interests once you learn their favorites and provide those weekly.

Family Mealtime and Snacks:

- Involve your child in the meal planning process. Make a list, shop for the items together and ask your child to help prepare the meal or snack.
- Model eating fruit or vegetable snacks and talk about the importance of healthy eating habits.
- Health and Wellbeing is a development domain outlined in the [Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards](#).
- [The Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services](#) provides food and nutrition resources for families.



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Family Fun Physical Activities

Roll a medium ball away from your infant and wait for your infant to crawl toward the ball to pick it up.

Pretend to hop like a rabbit with your toddler.

Draw a line on the ground with a piece of chalk and ask your preschooler to skip with you to the line.



Manny Diaz, Jr.
Commissioner of Education



Cari Miller
Chancellor of Early Learning



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