



Parents' Pages

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Learn About Autism Awareness Month!

April is recognized as Autism Awareness Month to educate families, service providers and advocates on how to support the autism community. Autism, or autism spectrum disorder, is a developmental disability linked to challenges with communication skills and social development. Early identification and intervention by parents and pediatricians significantly improve overall development.

The [Florida Division of Early Learning website](#) offers information on a range of services, resources and programs to help parents support their children's development. These include [family education videos](#), the [Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards](#) and guides for parents of children [birth to 3-years-old](#) and [4-years-old](#) to track children's expected milestones as they grow. The Warm Line provides support and consultation to families and providers with children who have or may have autism or other special needs. Contact your local [early learning coalition](#) to locate a Warm Line Specialist in your area.

The [Center for Autism and Related Disabilities](#) (CARD) offers information on how to help children reach their highest potential and how to handle challenging behaviors in the home as well as in child care programs. CARD offers services at no cost to individuals and, through partnership with universities, has seven CARD sites throughout the state. Use this [map feature](#) to locate these sites.

Here are a few ways you can build and encourage your child's social development:

- Focus on the "fun" in games. Choose a favorite family game and talk about how to take turns and appropriate ways to respond when winning or losing. Speak with your child about the importance of having fun while learning and enjoying the experience.
- Read books about how to be a good friend, help others and share.
- Provide your child opportunities to interact with peers. Promote activities that involve sharing and collaboration with others, like building a tower of blocks together.

If you have concerns or questions about your child's development, contact your pediatrician.

VPK, PM3 and Me!

If you have a child in Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK), they will soon take the final VPK progress monitoring, known as PM3, of the Florida Assessment of Student Thinking (FAST) Star Early Literacy. FAST Star Early Literacy is administered three times during the VPK school year and is a quick way to see what early literacy and numeracy skills your child has gained, what they are ready to learn next and whether they are ready for kindergarten.

In Florida, children who score 707 or higher on FAST Star Early Literacy at the end of VPK are considered ready for kindergarten. If your child scores as kindergarten ready, encourage them to keep up the good work! Continue to play and read with your child to keep them on solid ground and avoid the “summer slide.”

If your child is not yet kindergarten ready, there is still time and there are plenty of resources to help before they enter kindergarten.

Play and read with your child.

Check out the Division of Early Learning’s [online resources](#) and select an age group to see examples of activities you can do with your child to help them develop important skills they need to enter kindergarten ready to learn.

Register your child for more support.

Depending on your child’s score on PM3 of FAST Star Early Literacy, your child may be eligible for:

- Free books through the [New Worlds Reading Initiative](#)
- Scholarships through [Step Up for Students](#)
- Additional instruction through your school district’s [Summer Bridge](#) program

Review the FAST Star Early Literacy Parent Report from your child’s VPK teacher for more information.

Reach out if you have concerns.

If you have concerns about your child’s development, speak with your child’s doctor and reach out to a Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System [Child Find Specialist](#) to arrange a screening. Early intervention services can make a significant difference.

For more information about FAST Star Early Literacy, please visit [our website](#) or email us at vpkfast@del.fldoe.org.

30th Annual Children’s Week Florida

Children’s Week is held annually in Tallahassee and is an opportunity for hundreds of children and their teachers, families and advocates to gather at the Florida Capitol to celebrate children and those who care for them.

Children’s Week this year will be April 13-18. The event includes the Celebration of the Hands on Sunday, April 13, to display children’s creative hand artwork in the Capitol’s Rotunda, and Children’s Day and Storybook Village on Tuesday, April 15, with a complimentary breakfast and lunch as books are brought to life in Storybook Village.

If you cannot make it to Children’s Week, you can still recognize the celebration with the following suggestions for filling the week with fun:

Musical Monday - Play your child’s favorite song and sing along with them. Talk about the words in the song and explain the meaning of unfamiliar words.

Early Literacy Tuesday - Read a new or favorite story with your child.

Teamwork Wednesday - Let your child help organize bookshelves or toy shelves or help them build a structure using items such as recycled boxes, containers, rocks, leaves or twigs.

Art and Crafts Thursday - Provide crayons, paints, markers and paper to let your child explore making art. Ask them to describe what they drew.

Family Fun Friday - Go to a park, the library, take a walk or dance to the music. Simply look around for ways to engage and inspire your child.

Visit [30th Annual Children's Week](#) for more information.



Child Abuse Prevention Month

In April, you can expect to see blue and silver pinwheels planted throughout communities. The pinwheels are part of the Pinwheels for Prevention campaign, held during Child Abuse Prevention Month, to focus on family wellbeing and protecting children, specifically those at risk of abuse or neglect. Coordinated in Florida by [Prevent Child Abuse Florida](#), the [Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida](#) and the [Florida Department of Children and Families](#), businesses and agencies are encouraged to create pinwheel gardens to advocate for child safety.

If you need assistance, or know a family that may need support, the Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) program at your [local early learning coalition](#) can connect families with local resources. Each coalition has a dedicated CCR&R team to support families and child care providers in their communities.

Plant a pinwheel in your community or wear blue on April 3rd to support families and a healthy, bright future for all children. If you suspect or know of a child being abused or neglected, report it to the Florida Abuse Hotline at 1-800-96-ABUSE (1-800-962-2873).



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Why the Classroom Scoring System Matters

The Classroom Scoring System (CLASS®) is a tool that can help you choose a high-quality child care provider for your family. The CLASS® is an evidence-based tool that measures teacher-child interactions and promotes a supportive and engaging learning environment. CLASS® uses an objective scale to evaluate how teachers foster positive interactions with children. Studies show that positive interactions between adults and children support children's social and cognitive growth, which helps them do better in school.

When choosing a child care provider, look at their CLASS® score as an indicator of the quality of the early learning environment.

To be part of the School Readiness Program, child care providers must have a CLASS® score of 4.00 or higher, unless on a waiver or exempt from CLASS. A score between 6.00 and 7.00 reflects the highest level of consistent quality teaching practices, while all scores 5.00 or above reflect high-quality teaching practices.

Classrooms with high CLASS® scores help children improve their language, math and early literacy skills. You can view a provider's CLASS® scores at [CARES SEARCH](#).

For more information on CLASS®, check out this: [Classroom Assessment Scoring System](#).

Family Fun Nature Activities

I Spy – Take a walk outdoors and turn the “I Spy” game into a fun, nature-inspired experience. Try using phrases that relate to subjects your child may be learning in school like letters of the alphabet. For example say, “I spy something that starts with the letter A.”

Scavenger Hunt – With your child's assistance, create a list of things you might find in nature, such as leaves, rocks, flowers or pinecones. Take advantage of the nice weather and go for a walk to see what you can cross off your list.

Sports and Games – Head to your local park and play games such as kickball, tag or basketball. These games are fun and teach teamwork, coordination and sportsmanship.

“Animal” Races – Set up a race where each participant moves like an animal of their choice. They can hop like a rabbit, sprint like a cheetah or even slowly slide shuffle their feet like a snail. This game develops gross motor skills, such as balance and leg strength.



Manny Diaz, Jr.
Commissioner of Education



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Chancellor of Early Learning



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