



# Parents' Pages

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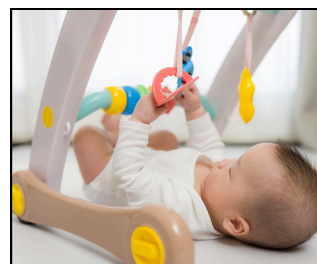
## Safe and Fun Toys that Match Your Child's Age

When holiday shopping for your child, keep in mind that the best toys spark imagination and support learning while keeping your child engaged. Following age guidelines will help you choose toys that are not only safe but also align with your child's developmental stage.

For infants from **birth to 8 months**, it is best to get toys that stimulate their senses. At this stage, infants enjoy bright colors, soft textures and gentle sounds. Toys that encourage reaching, grasping and listening give them new ways to learn.

Examples include:

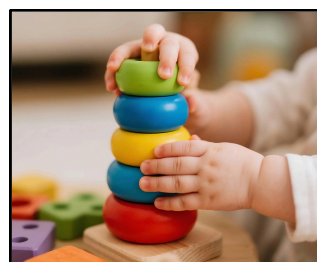
- Soft cloth rattles or wrist rattles
- Play gyms with hanging toys
- Baby-safe mirrors
- Soft fabric books with textures



For babies **9-18 months**, toys should build motor skills, spark curiosity and allow the babies to imitate actions they see adults do. At this stage, children are on the move and eager to explore the world around them.

Examples include:

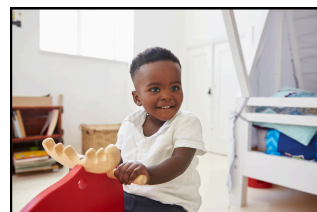
- Push toys with handles (for example, toy lawn mowers or shopping carts)
- Stacking rings or nesting cups
- Large knob puzzles
- Musical toys with buttons to press



For toddlers **19-24 months**, toys that promote independence and creativity work best. Children at this age enjoy simple challenges that build problem-solving skills.

Examples include:

- Ride-on toys with foot power
- Shape sorters with large pieces
- Pretend cleaning tools (for example, child-size broom or duster)
- Foam bath blocks or pouring toys



***Safe and Fun Toys - Continued on page 2***

## Safe and Fun Toys - Continued from page 1



For toddlers **2 to 3 years old**, pretend-play toys boost imagination and social skills. Children at this age benefit from toys that encourage active play.

Examples include:

- Play kitchens with pretend food
- Toy tool sets with chunky pieces
- Large wooden building blocks
- Ride-on scooters (three-wheel for stability)



For preschoolers **3 to 4 years old**, toys that support storytelling and hands-on learning strengthen communication and fine motor skills.

Examples include:

- Train sets or car tracks
- Easels with chalk or dry erase boards
- Matching card games
- Playsets with animals or people figures



For preschoolers **4 to 5 years old**, toys that encourage both independence and teamwork build important social skills. Look for games that involve sharing and cooperation to prepare children for group play.

Examples include:

- Board games with simple rules
- Craft kits with stickers or stamps
- Picture books with longer stories
- Child-sized sports gear (for example, plastic bowling sets, T-ball stands)

Supervision matters at every age. Be sure to discard toys with broken parts, loose pieces or sharp edges and clean toys regularly. By choosing age-appropriate toys, you can make playtime safe and fun and support your child's development.

## Happy 20<sup>th</sup> Birthday VPK!

As we continue to celebrate 20 years of early learning success through the Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) program, let's recognize some of our early learners from 2005 and where they are today!



**Zachary Neto**

Zachary started at Kids' Paradise Child Care and Learning Center in Miami and today plays Major League baseball for the Los Angeles Angels.



**Bright  
Futures  
Happen  
Here!**



**Allison Rench**

Allison started at Future Care Learning Center in Auburndale and today is pursuing a business degree.



Help celebrate VPK's 20<sup>th</sup> birthday! If you have a student who participated in the 2005-2006 VPK program or know of teachers, directors or programs that have been supporting the VPK program for the past 20 years, share pictures and details with DEL at [VPKQuestions@del.fldoe.org](mailto:VPKQuestions@del.fldoe.org).



# Choosing Quality Early Learning Programs

Choosing an early learning provider is one of the most important choices you can make for your family. The Division of Early Learning offers two resources to support you on this journey.

## [The Family Guide to Selecting Quality Early Learning Programs](#)

### What the Family Guide Offers

The Family Guide is designed to help you understand:

- The different types of early learning providers
- Early intervention services
- How to evaluate providers based on your child's unique needs

It encourages families to:

- Be a smart shopper
- Do research
- Make an informed decision

When selecting a provider, consider your child's sleeping habits, routines and any special needs to see if their needs fit with the services offered.

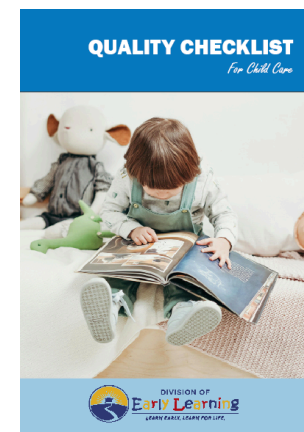
## [The Quality Checklist for Child Care](#)

### What the Quality Checklist Offers

The Quality Checklist complements the Family Guide by offering specific questions and an observation tool to use during provider visits. It focuses on key areas, such as:

- Is the facility clean, secure and well-maintained? Are children constantly supervised?
- Are inspection reports available upon request and up to date?  
Find these reports on [DCF Cares](#) website.
- What curriculum is used? Is it developmentally appropriate?
- Do children seem happy and comfortable?
- Do caregivers speak kindly and respectfully to children?
- How are updates shared with families and are parents encouraged to visit or volunteer?
- Do caregivers provide daily notes or logs for meals, naps and diaper changes?
- Are meals and snacks healthy and nutritious?

By using both the Family Guide and the Quality Checklist, you'll be equipped to make a thoughtful, informed decision that supports your child's growth and your family's values. These tools empower you to ask the right questions, observe carefully and choose confidently.



## Family Fun Math Activities

While your child is home for the winter holidays, you have time to create more family memories through fun activities. Your child can enjoy the following creative math exercises at home, in the car or with other family members.

These activities are based on the [Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards](#). For more details on how the following activities are measured, see the standards that define the skills needed for each activity.

**Sorting Fun** – While decorating your holiday tree, ask your child to identify and sort the different colored ornaments. Sorting ornaments is a great family activity where you and your child can reminisce about where the ornaments came from, how new or old they are and about special memories. Once your child has sorted the ornaments by color, ask them to count and identify which group has more or less than the others.

**Standard V.D.2.** Describes, sorts and classifies two- and three-dimensional shapes using some attributes such as size, sides and other properties (color).

**Holiday Patterns** – Using a variety of holiday items, such as holiday cards, ornaments, cookie cutters and mini trees, ask your child to create a fun holiday 'AB' pattern. An 'AB' pattern may include the following:

- 1 holiday card, 1 ornament, 1 holiday card, 1 ornament, etc.
- 1 tree, 1 cookie cutter, 1 tree, 1 cookie cutter, etc.

**Standard: V.C.2.** Identifies and extends a simple AB repeating pattern.

### Upcoming in January!

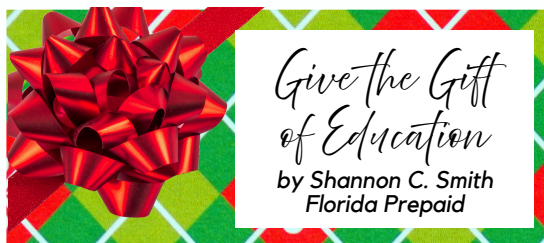


Celebrate Literacy Week, Florida!, January 26-30, 2026, aims to inspire Florida's students and families to make reading part of their daily routines. The week will celebrate America's 250<sup>th</sup> birthday with the theme "Read, White and Blue: Celebrating 250 Chapters of America."

**Don't miss an issue!**  
**Scan the QR code**  
**and sign up to**  
**receive Parents' Pages.**



[Sign up to receive  
Parents' Pages.](#)



Toys break and kids' interest in them ebbs and flows, but the gift of postsecondary education is life changing. As you enter the holiday season and a new year, consider a Florida Prepaid College Savings Plan and the many benefits of 529 Plans, including affordability, flexibility and tax advantages.

Here's what's new (and exciting!):

- A redesigned website at [MyFloridaPrepaid.com](#) that's mobile-first and super easy to use.
- A new Plan Builder Tool to help you find the right savings plan for your budget and goals.
- Faster enrollment with a simple, cart-style experience.
- More flexible options — including standalone Dormitory Plans!

Whether your child dreams of college, trade school or technical training, Florida Prepaid plans are built to grow with them — and help you save with confidence. 529 plans are tax-free and can be used in-state or nationwide.

And parents aren't the only ones who can save for a child's future. Grandparents and other loved ones can open plans for a Florida child, and multiple families can contribute to the same child's college savings.

Start at [Florida Prepaid](#) and take the first step toward your child's future.



**Anastasios Kamoutsas**  
Commissioner of Education



**Cari Miller**  
Chancellor of Early Learning



DIVISION OF  
**Early Learning**  
LEARN EARLY. LEARN FOR LIFE.

**CONNECT  
WITH US!**

