



Parents' Pages

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Fall into Reading: Build a Cozy Habit with Books this Season

Pumpkin patches, scarecrows and story time? Yes, please! Fall in Florida may not bring chilly air or changing leaves, but the season is still a good time to snuggle up with your child and a good book – whether you're reading indoors to stay cool or enjoying a story under a shady tree.

Starting at birth, your child benefits from hearing you tell stories and talk about books. It builds their vocabulary, supports brain development and strengthens your bond. Your baby will enjoy looking at pictures and listening to your voice while you read. Just 15 minutes a day can build language skills, spark imagination and help your child develop a love of books.

You don't need cool weather to enjoy these autumn inspired reads. Check out these engaging titles your child will love:

- "Here Comes Fall!" by Susan Kantor
- "Goodbye Summer, Hello Autumn" by Kenard Pak
- "The Leaf Thief" by Alice Hemming
- "Ten Red Apples" By Pat Hutchins

Reading together doesn't have to be complicated and doesn't have to wait until bedtime. Keep books in the car, diaper bag or kitchen so you can squeeze in a few minutes of reading during your day. Try these simple prompts with your child:

- Ask questions: With preschoolers and older toddlers, ask "What do you see in the picture?" or "What do you like to do in the fall?" Asking questions builds thinking and language skills.
- Let them finish the rhyme: Pause during rhyming stories and let your child guess the last word. It's a great way to build phonological awareness.
- Connect to real life: Point out things from the book that relate to your child's experiences. "Remember when we picked out a pumpkin like that?"
- Use movement: Act out parts of the story, count on your fingers or pretend to rake leaves.

Fall pairs perfectly with seasonal traditions like visiting a pumpkin patch or attending local fall festivals. This fall, celebrate the season. Whether you're discussing or picking pumpkins in flip flops or reading about apples under a palm tree, talking and reading together makes memories and builds skills that last a lifetime.

Celebrating the 20th Birthday of Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program!

The Division of Early Learning (DEL) continues to celebrate the 20th birthday of the Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) program by recognizing the following students from the 2005-2006 VPK graduating class. The VPK program helped to prepare these students for kindergarten and beyond.

For more information on the VPK program and how to register your 4-year-old for VPK, visit [What is Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program \(VPK\)?](#)



Daniel Toledo

Daniel started at Kids Paradise Child Care & Learning Center in Miami and today works for the City of Miami Fire and Rescue.

**Bright
Futures
Happen
Here!**



Aikiya Stevenson

Aikiya started at Kingdom Kids in Jacksonville and today is an AI Project Manager at IHG Intercontinental Hotels.

Help celebrate VPK's 20th 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.

Safe Sleep Awareness Month

Every time you put your infant down for a nap or to sleep at night, remember the ABCs of safe sleep:

- **Alone:** Your baby should always sleep alone in their crib.
- **Back:** Always place your baby on their back to sleep until they are strong enough to roll over on their own.
- **Crib:** The crib should be empty of toys, blankets or any loose items while the baby sleeps.

October is recognized as Safe Sleep Awareness Month to focus on safe sleep practices that help reduce the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), the unexplained death of a seemingly healthy baby, usually during sleep, before their first birthday. While the exact cause is unknown, research shows that following the ABCs of safe sleep significantly lowers the risk for SIDS.

It is also important to keep the baby's room cool enough to prevent them from overheating, which is another potential risk factor for SIDS. There is no need for a blanket. Light layers of clothing do the trick of keeping your baby warm while they sleep. Sleep sacks are another option for keeping your baby warm until they start rolling over on their own.

Signs your child may be too hot include:

- Sweating
- Damp hair
- Skin that is red or shows signs of rash
- Reddened cheeks
- Quickened breathing
- A chest that is noticeably hot

Also, check for loose buttons or pacifiers tied to the baby's clothes to avoid potential choking or accidental strangulation.

And remember – bottles don't belong in the crib. Babies who use a bottle while sleeping may develop tooth decay, so it's better to finish their feeding before bedtime.

Learn more at [Safe Sleeping Environment | Florida Department of Health](#).

October Shines a Light on Disability History and Awareness and Support Services for Families

Every October, Disability History and Awareness Month serves to foster greater understanding and respect for those with special needs. There are resources and assistance for parents of children living with disabilities.

Take Steps Early

If you are caring for a child with developmental delays, learning differences, disabilities or special healthcare needs, the Florida Early Steps Directory is a vital resource. It connects families to statewide services like advocacy, education, training and community-based support. This directory serves children from birth to age 3 with diagnosed or suspected delays or disabilities. For more information, call **1-800-218-0001** or visit the [Early Steps](#) website.

Identifying and Supporting Special Needs

The Child Find program, part of the Florida Diagnostic & Learning Resources System (FDLRS), provides free diagnostic, instructional and technology support. Specialists collaborate with local school districts to identify children who may benefit from early intervention services. Find your local FDLRS office at [FDLRS](#) or call **1-386-312-2265**.

Early Screening Makes a Difference

Regular developmental screenings offer valuable insights into your child's strengths and help you support their healthy growth, preparing them for learning environments like child care centers or schools. Concerned about your child's development? Speak with your child's pediatrician or contact [Help Me Grow Florida](#), a program that assists with screenings, answers questions and connects families to local services.

Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Options for Children with Disabilities

Families of 4-year-olds with special needs may be eligible for [VPK Specialized Instructional Services](#). This educational option provides services outside the traditional VPK classroom, based on your child's individual educational plan. For more information, [contact your local early learning coalition](#).

Nurturing Early Development

Looking to support your child's early development? Explore the [Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards and Professional Competencies](#) for activities and ideas. For questions relating to helping children with disabilities thrive in early care settings, the Division of Early Learning's Warm Line offers guidance and support. This toll-free service is available to both families and providers seeking consultation around special healthcare needs. To locate a Warm Line in your area, [contact your early learning coalition](#). For additional funding information, go to the [Florida Department of Education website](#).

Celebrating 60 Years of Head Start

Held in October, Head Start Awareness Month recognizes the impact of the Head Start program in supporting young children and moving families to economic self-sufficiency. Founded in 1965, Head Start programs are offered in a variety of settings and now serve approximately 45,000 Florida children and their families every year.

Head Start serves families with children ages 3 to 5, while Early Head Start serves expectant mothers and infants and toddlers up to age 3.

The Division of Early Learning administers the contract for and houses the Florida Head Start State Collaboration Office (HSSCO), a federally funded office that supports and works to improve collaboration between Head Start and educational, medical and social services providers in Florida.

An integral part of Head Start is family involvement. Parents and caregivers are engaged as partners in their child's development, creating stronger, more supportive home environments.

Learn more about [Head Start & Early Head Start](#) and be part of the celebration of these programs.



Florida Head Start
State Collaboration Office

New Worlds Reading Offers Free Monthly Books for Eligible Children

The New Worlds Reading Initiative is a free Florida literacy program for VPK students who are not yet meeting standards on the Florida Assessment of Student Thinking (FAST) assessment.

This statewide book delivery program is a collaborative effort with the Florida Department of Education, school districts, the University of Florida Lastering Center, and other local and state organizations.

Enrollment flyers are available in [English](#) (PDF), [Spanish](#) (PDF) and [Haitian Creole](#) (PDF). [Enroll today!](#)



You Can Still Register!

It's not too late to register for VPK. To be eligible for VPK, children must live in Florida and be 4 years old on or before September 1 of the current school year.

Families can register their eligible child on the [Early Learning Family Portal](#). Then check out the [Prekindergarten Family Guide](#) for tips and resources for a successful program year.

Registration for the 2026-2027 program year will begin January 1, 2026.

Looking ahead to November...

Family Engagement Month

November celebrates the vital role families play in their children's early learning. Building strong partnerships between families and early learning programs is vital to support development and success. Look for resources to help strengthen the bond between you and your child while achieving developmental milestones at home and in school.



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Fun Fall Family Science Activities

- **Leaf Color Change Investigation:** Why do leaves change color? Collect green and colored leaves, then soak them in a jar of rubbing alcohol for 30 minutes. Place a small piece of a coffee filter in the jar and watch the magic as the pigments from green and colored leaves are extracted. (This activity aligns with [Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards](#), VI.A Scientific Inquiry Through Exploration and Discovery.)
- **Apple Sauce Science:** Gather a few apples and discuss their properties that include round, hard, smooth and crisp. Cut the apples into small chunks and start to cook in a pot. Let your child mash, stir and observe the transformation with supervision. Discuss that heat changes the apples' texture and scent. (This activity aligns with [Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards](#), VI.C. Physical Science.)
- **Fall Theme Sensory:** Let your child use their sensory organs (eyes, ears, skin, nose and mouth) to discover different textures, sounds and tastes with fall-themed objects. Let your child hear the sounds of crunching leaves, feel the slimy and smooth textures inside a pumpkin and explore the flavor of apples by tasting fresh apple slices. (This activity aligns with [Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards](#), VI.A Scientific Inquiry Through Exploration and Discovery.)



Anastasios Kamoutsas
Commissioner of Education



Cari Miller
Chancellor of Early Learning



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Early Learning
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WITH US!**

