

# Early Learning Parents' Pages

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THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE  
OFFICE OF EARLY LEARNING

## How Can Reading Help?

**M**arch is [National Reading Month!](#) The single most important activity you can do with your child to help them learn to read and succeed in school is to read aloud to them daily. Research shows that [reading to your child every day](#) from birth prepares them to be ready to learn when they start kindergarten. Did you know that only [48 percent of young children](#) in our country are read aloud to daily?

Reading to your child 15 minutes every day for five years [exposes them to the reading process](#) for 27,375 minutes. It introduces them to new words that become [part of their vocabulary](#). Your baby's brain develops rapidly during the [first three years of their life](#). It is important to make reading together a daily routine.

If you are wondering what books will be the best to read to your child, check with the librarian at your local, public library. Also, look for suggested book lists for your child's age level such as the lists from [Brightly](#), [Lit World.org](#) or [Read Aloud 15 Minutes](#). The Center for Early Literacy Learning (CELL) offers [Practice Guides for Parents](#). These guides have suggested books for infants, toddlers and preschoolers as well as tips for early literacy activities such as [Looking at Books Together](#) or [Let's Read Together](#).

For a change of pace, there are [virtual read alouds](#) that you and your child can watch together. [Storyline Online](#) is the SAG-AFTRA Foundation's Daytime Emmy®-nominated and award-winning children's literacy website. It streams videos featuring celebrated actors reading children's books alongside creatively produced illustrations. Readers include Oprah Winfrey, Kristen Bell, Rita Moreno, Viola Davis, Kevin Costner and dozens more. [Mrs. P.Com](#) brings classic children's stories to life such as the *Velveteen Rabbit* and *The Ugly Duckling*.

SEE  
WHAT'S  
INSIDE

Florida Prepaid 2021



Summer VPK



Development Disabilities & Cerebral Palsy Awareness



Crayon Day



Poison Prevention

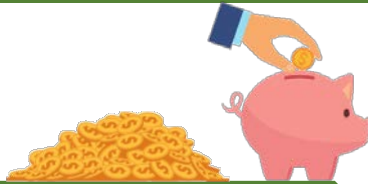
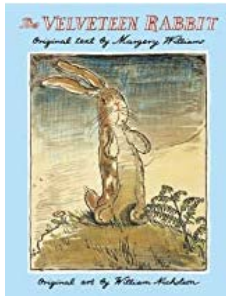
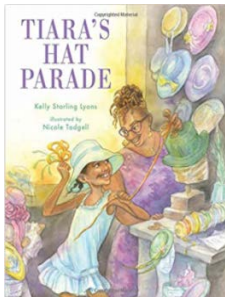


## How Can Reading Help?

*Continued from page 1...*

[READ.GOV](http://READ.GOV) features children's book authors talking about or reading their books and has activities related to the books for you to do with your child.

Make every day a reading day and every month a reading month with the National Education Association and [Read Across America's 2020-2021 Calendar](#). The calendar features monthly themes and stories. Read your child the featured story for March 2021, *Tiara's Hat Parade*, and have your own "Hat Parade" at home.



## TAX TIME

It is the time of the year to start preparing your annual income tax return. April 15<sup>th</sup> is the last day to file your income tax form with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). You can learn how families with children can benefit from the [Earned Income Tax Credit \(EITC\)](#) and the [Child Tax Credit \(CTC\)](#). EITC and the CTC, help to reduce poverty for working families. In 2018, the [EITC lifted about 5.6 million people out of poverty](#), including 3 million children. The IRS offers [informational flyers and guides](#) to help you learn more about the EITC and CTC.



The IRS offers a [free on-line tax assistance program](#), Interactive Tax Assistant, to answer questions about your tax return or use the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) site's free tax help and preparation.

Go to <http://bit.ly/VITATaxes> or call 1-800-906-9887 to find a site.

## Florida Prepaid 2021

As families continue to recover from the pandemic, Florida Prepaid College Savings Plans has launched its annual Open Enrollment with five affordable plans starting at \$45 per month, each built for flexibility and guaranteed by the State of Florida.

In a recent study conducted by the Board, more than 90 percent of Florida parents say college is more important than ever or just as important in the wake of COVID-19. Florida families last year purchased more than 50,000 plans, committing to their children's future even as the pandemic hit.



"As challenging as things continue to be, we are encouraged to see how many Florida families are looking to brighter days ahead and the importance of a college education," said Board Chairman John D. Rood. "We hope that every family will consider enrolling in a Prepaid Plan, which offers them secure, guaranteed and affordable college savings options. Prepaid Plans offer certainty in an uncertain world."

The Florida Prepaid College Board is encouraging Floridians to continue to plan for a brighter tomorrow by finding a plan that meets their budget and goals. Anyone who enrolls in a Florida Prepaid Plan during the month of March or April will save \$25 on enrollment using promo code **ELC2021**. For more info, click [myfloridaprepaid.com](http://myfloridaprepaid.com).





## Did you know there are different VPK Program options?



Parent choice is a VPK priority, with the summer VPK program being an option. The program provides instruction during the summer with class sizes no more than 12 children to 1 teacher. The teacher must have a bachelor's degree or higher in certain education-related fields.

All providers must meet VPK Program and quality standards. VPK programs must deliver high-quality instruction including:

- A curriculum that is developmentally appropriate with a focus on early literacy skills.
- A program that prepares children to be ready for kindergarten based on standards adopted by the State Board of Education for use in VPK.

VPK is **free** for eligible children. Parents may apply for their child to attend the summer VPK program online on the Family Portal at <https://familyservices.floridaearlylearning.com/>. On the application, parents must provide documentation to prove VPK age eligibility and Florida residency requirements.

- Provide documentation that their child age was 4 years old on or before Sept. 1 of the current school year. Parents of children born between Feb. 2 and Sept. 1 may wait until the following year to enroll when they are 5 as long as they do not enroll in kindergarten.
- Provide documentation that shows their child lives in Florida.



## Summer Camp Registration

March is a great time to start looking into summer camp options for your child. Many summer camp programs open registration in March. Summer camps usually fill their available student spots quickly. Starting your search early can help make planning for the summer easier! When you are considering a summer camp for your child that meets the needs of your family, you can use the [Selecting A Summer Camp for your school age child](#) to help you make the best decision. A Spanish version is also available. Contact your local [early learning coalition](#) to get more information on available summer camps in your area.

## Learn about CLASS Scores



If your child is enrolled in a preschool program that is contracted with the local early learning coalition to provide services for children through the [School Readiness Program](#), their child care provider will have a CLASS score. [CLASS scores](#) are based on the effectiveness of the teachers' interactions with children. These positive interactions support children's learning and development. The [CLASS scores](#) are based on an assessment tool, the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS®). [Click here to find more information about Class scores.](#)



## MARCH IS...

### DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES AWARENESS MONTH AND CEREBRAL PALSY AWARENESS MONTH



March is Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month and Cerebral Palsy Awareness Month. Developmental disabilities include [intellectual disability](#), [cerebral palsy](#), [epilepsy](#), [autism](#), [learning and language disorders](#), [vision impairment](#) and [hearing loss](#). In 2019, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [reported](#) that 1 in 6 children in the United States has a developmental disability.

Children with developmental disabilities have limitations in three or more areas of major life activities such as self-care, language, learning, mobility and/or self-direction. If your baby, toddler or preschool child is diagnosed by a healthcare professional with a developmental disability, there are 8 steps recommended by [KidsHealth](#) to help them.

1. Contact an early intervention organization. These organizations will inform you of the steps you need to take to get extra support for your child. Federal law entitles your child to available support in reaching their developmental milestones such as talking, walking and learning to feed themselves. Your child can receive services or interventions by therapists in your home, at their child care program or a specialized health care facility. In Florida, you can contact [Child Find](#) if you are concerned about your [child's development](#).
2. Your child may suffer from health issues that require constant supervision and assistance. Contact your hospital's care management team (usually made up of nurses and social workers) who will help you find the type of assistance your child needs in your home. They will request your child's doctor to write a prescription for needed services. Contact your insurance company to find out the amount of coverage you have for your child's care.
3. Apply for [Medicaid](#) for your child even if you have private insurance. Medicaid may cover services for your child that are not covered by private insurance.
4. Find a child care provider with specialized training in serving children with developmental needs. Make sure the child care facility has the necessary accommodations for your child's safety.
5. Talk with a lawyer about [legal and financial planning](#) for children with special needs. Also, ask the lawyer to assist you in making a will to designate who would care for your child in the event of their parents' deaths.
6. Take your child to "Mommy and Me" classes, neighborhood play dates, story-time at the library and other social events. It is important for your child to interact with other children. Join a support group for parents of children with special needs. Your child will benefit from interacting with other children and you will benefit from being with other parents who are experiencing similar challenges.
7. Your child will be eligible to receive educational services through the local school district when they are 3 years old. Contact [Child Find](#) to assist you in applying for these services.
8. It is important to find time for yourself. Your life with a child with special needs can seem overwhelming at times. Take time for yourself by asking family members and friends to help or trade "time-off days" with other parents who have children your child's age. You can offer to keep their child one day a week and they will keep your child one day a week or for a set time several days a week. Another option is [Respite Care](#). Find private respite programs in your community through the [ARCH National Respite Network](#). Tell them what kind of care you need and they will give you a list of providers that may include visiting nurses, child care centers and camps.



Take advantage of all of the [support systems in Florida for families](#) who have children with special needs. It may be difficult to find the best support system for your child without support from your community and local school district. Working together with these organizations, you can make sure that your child will get all of the help they need to learn and reach their full potential.



# NATIONAL POISON PREVENTION WEEK (MARCH 21-27)



Each year, the third week of March is dedicated to poison prevention. The main purpose of this week is to bring attention to how poisonings can occur within your own home. Any [household cleaning product](#), [pesticide](#), [medicine](#) for humans or pets, [plants](#), [art and school supplies](#) and [other items](#) can be dangerous and cause serious harm to you and your family. The National Poison Prevention Week was established in 1961. In 1962, the National Poison Prevention Week Council was created to oversee the week of awareness. Over 2 million have reported poisonings each year in the U.S. Over 90% of poisonings occurring in homes involve young children. This makes it important for all families to learn more ways to prevent poisonings.

The [Health Resources and Services Administration \(HRSA\)](#) provides poison prevention articles, prevention tips and [toolkits](#) for the public. HRSA also offers great tips relevant for [Spring](#) and [Summer](#).

If you or someone you know has possibly been poisoned:

1. Call **9-1-1** if a person is unconscious or has trouble breathing.
2. Call Poison Help (**1-800-222-1222**) to connect to your local poison center.
3. Stay calm – most poisoning emergencies can be resolved quickly.



Protecting your child is the top priority. Become involved and knowledgeable about what is in and around your home and help your child learn too. A list of [Florida's Poison Control Centers](#) can be found on the HRSA website.



Ages 1-2

## Sing, Read, Repeat

Your child enjoys listening to their favorite stories and songs over and over again. After singing or telling stories with them, ask if they want more. How do they respond? Do they nod or squirm away? Talk about their actions like, "You said yes!" or "You look like you're all done."

## Brainy Background

Children learn through repetition and shared back and forth conversations. Repeated storytelling and singing helps your child understand the meaning behind words and sets the stage for talking and eventually reading. They're learning the basics of communication!





March is National Nutrition Month! Help your family be healthier by developing good eating habits together, limiting calorie intake, staying active and getting enough sleep.

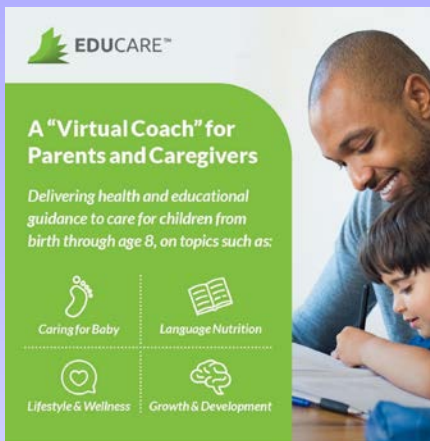


Families can find [tips](#) and [resources](#), even with a busy schedule, to plan healthy activities and meals together. Share a photo or story about one of your family's nutritious meals on [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#) using #NationalNurtitionMonth21.



# EDUCARE

## FLORIDA GRADE-LEVEL READING CAMPAIGN



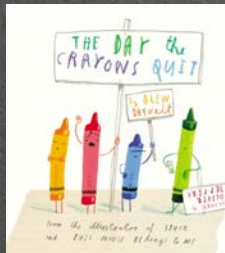
The Florida Grade Level Reading Campaign offers families a new program designed to support their children's education and development. The EduCare program:

- Is designed for families with children from birth to 8 years old.
- Sends parents personalized text messages with tips and educational information based on their child's age.
- Provides 24-7 access to a FREE library of resources, including stories, games, activities and other learning and development tools.
- Keeps families up to date with important wellness information, specific health, growth and learning milestones.
- Is available in English and Spanish.

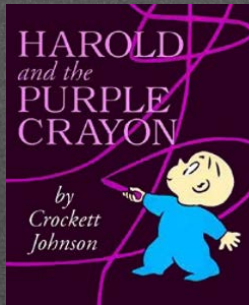


Sign up for this free program at <https://fglrc.gomoeducare.com>

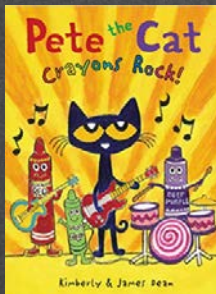
## National Crayon Day Book List



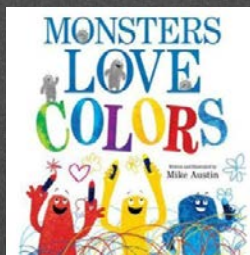
*The Day the  
Crayons Quit*



*Harold and the  
Purple Crayon*



*Pete the Cat:  
Crayons Rock*



*Monsters  
Love  
Colors*



## National Crayon Day Activity

The average child wears down 720 crayons by his or her 10<sup>th</sup> birthday. Most parents can agree there are always broken or leftover crayons lying around the house. To celebrate National Crayon Day on March 31, you can help your child [recycle those old crayons](#) into new ones! Recycled crayons also make great, no-cost gifts or party favors.

### Materials:

1. Broken or leftovers crayons
2. Muffin tin or silicone molds



### Instructions:

1. Preheat your oven to 250 degrees.
2. Help your child gather all broken crayons. Unwrap them together and show your child how to break them into small pieces. You can use the knife to make smaller pieces.
3. Help your child fill each cup or mold with 1-inch-thick layer of crayons. Ask them if they want one color or if they want to mix them to create a rainbow?
4. Bake for 15 to 20 minutes or until the wax has melted. Read a crayon book while you wait!
5. Allow the crayons to cool and harden completely before touching and using.

Still have too many leftover crayons? Another fun idea is to make a candle. Once you have safely removed the melted crayons from the oven, place a wick in the middle of the melted wax before it hardens. Share your child's creations on [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#) using #NationalCrayonDay.

## March Special Dates:

- |                                 |                          |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 3 – World Wildlife Day          | 14 – Daylight Savings    |
| 17 – St. Patrick's Day          | 20 – First Day of Spring |
| 30 – National Down Syndrome Day | 31 – National Crayon Day |

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