

What's Up?

JCCDC Newsletter for Parents, Providers, Community Partners & Staff

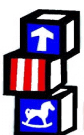


- 5/4 National Fire Fighter's Day
- 5/7 Teacher Appreciation Day
- 5/12 Mother's Day
- 5/24 Brother's Day
- 5/26 National Family Fun Day

- 6/1 National Dare Day
- 6/8 National Best Friend Day
- 6/16 Father's Day
- 6/19 Juneteenth
- 6/27 National Handshake Day



- 5/16 E'Dana Wilkerson, Teacher
- 5/22 Debora Goree, Provider
- 5/29 Rakeya Watts, Teacher
- 6/5 Rolanda Woods, Provider
- 6/6 Stella Baskin, Nutrition Coordinator
- 6/13 Virginia Washington, Provider
- 6/14 Carol King & Shirley Melton, Providers
- 6/27 Stephen McGhee, Accountant





RAISING MENTALLY STRONG KIDS

Submitted by LaTausha Hollifield,
FE/Health & Safety Specialist

Raising a mentally healthy child can help set them up for success as an adolescent and adult, though it can't guarantee individuals won't experience short- or long-term mental health struggles or illness later in life.

Understanding the importance of kids' mental health to their overall well-being is a great place to start. Here are some steps to consider.

- **Acknowledge and OK their feelings.** Kids are learning the world around them at the same time they're learning about themselves. It's normal and expected for them to have big feelings and messy ways of expressing them until they learn other ways to cope. It's important to name their feelings — good or bad — so kids know how to express themselves better as they understand the emotion they're experiencing. For example, if a child is angry, you can say, "You seem angry about sharing a toy. It's OK to be angry, but you cannot hit. You can talk about that anger." The next time the child is angry, they may be able to voice that feeling rather than act on it.
- **Teach them to recognize mental health symptoms.** It's possible for toddlers and young children to be **diagnosed** with common mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety. Therefore, it's important to understand the typical warning signs for mental health struggles and talk to kids about how to recognize their own symptoms. This can be as simple as teaching them to understand when they are feeling overwhelmed or notice significant changes in their mood, activity levels or interests. It's also critical for kids and teens to recognize and speak up when they have thoughts of harming themselves or others.
- **Understand advocacy.** If children or adolescents recognize that they have mental health symptoms, they will still need to learn how to express their concerns. Talk to children about some phrases they can use with trusted adults if they're experiencing mental health struggles. And in case the trusted adult, a child, or adolescent confides their struggles to doesn't take their concerns to heart, they should know they have your full support to keep bringing up their concerns and advocating for themselves until they feel validated.
- **Don't take away challenges; teach them how to work through them.** Parents, guardians and mentors likely have the best intentions when they attempt to cushion kids from the hardships of life. However, it's important to remember that without practice and good role models, kids and teens won't know how to react to negative situations and could respond in unhealthy ways. They need to know they can handle difficult situations and that they'll have your support and guidance while they do it.
- **Model mentally healthy habits.** While proactive conversations can work wonders, allowing kids and teens to learn by watching you can be just as powerful and send subconscious messages that mental health matters. Adults should talk about their good and bad mental health symptoms, within reason, and model healthy habits, like seeking help or taking a break.

What are some actions to avoid in order to raise mentally healthy kids?

- **Neglect or dismiss their symptoms.** If kids don't get quality time with undivided attention from the adults in their lives, they'll learn their needs aren't important and will likely act in negative ways to get the attention they seek. If adults neglect to acknowledge them and their emotional, social and physical needs, their mental health will suffer in the short and long term. **Research shows** that children who experience abuse or neglect have an increased risk for mental health issues, learning problems, difficulties relating to their peers, low self-esteem and post-traumatic stress disorder.
- **Violence toward or in proximity to a child.** Witnessing or being the victim of any violence, even things like hitting or a lot of shouting, can create what is known as toxic stress in children. Not only will they think violence is normal, but these experiences can also create negative mental health conditions, such as PTSD, aggression, anxiety and more.



To prepare your child for kindergarten, focus on developing essential skills, building independence, and establishing routines. Encourage reading, practice writing their name, and help them develop social skills. Consider meeting the teacher beforehand, setting a consistent routine, and finding out what skills are expected.

Here's a more detailed breakdown of tips:

Submitted by Nakendra Massey, EDC Service Mgr.

1. Skills Development:

- **Reading:** Read aloud to your child regularly to boost vocabulary, comprehension, and a love for books.
- **Writing:** Practice writing their name (both uppercase and lowercase) and explore other letter recognition activities.
- **Numbers:** Count with your child, practice recognizing and counting numbers, and play games that involve multi-step directions.
- **Shapes and Colors:** Introduce basic shapes and colors through games and everyday activities.
- **Fine Motor Skills:** Encourage activities that improve fine motor skills, like using pencils, crayons, scissors, and playdough.
- **Self-Help Skills:** Help your child develop self-care skills like dressing themselves, using the bathroom, and brushing their teeth.
- **Following Directions:** Practice following simple directions at home, as this is crucial for classroom success.

2. Independence:

- **Encourage Independence:** Allow your child to try new things on their own, like choosing what to wear or packing their lunch.
- **Assign Age-Appropriate Chores:** Assign simple chores to foster a sense of responsibility.
- **Unstructured Play:** Provide time for unstructured play, which helps children develop problem-solving skills and social skills.

3. Routines and Schedules:

- **Establish Routines:** Create a consistent morning routine and bedtime routine to help your child adjust to a structured schedule.
- **Practice Saying Goodbye:** Practice saying goodbye in a quick and positive way to help your child adjust to separations.
- **Set Expectations:** Talk about what to expect on the first day of school and the general school routine.

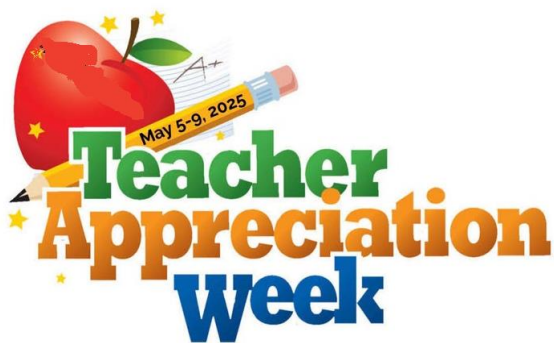
4. Social and Emotional Skills:

- **Practice Listening Skills:** Encourage active listening and practice taking turns talking.
- **Develop Social Skills:** Encourage your child to play with others and help them navigate social situations.
- **Acknowledge Feelings:** Acknowledge and validate your child's feelings, especially around starting school.
- **Peer Conflict Resolution:** Help your child learn to resolve conflicts with peers, teaching them about forgiveness and kindness.

5. Communication and Connection:

- **Meet the Teacher:** Arrange a meeting with your child's teacher before the first day of school.
- **Network with Other Parents:** Connect with other parents in your child's class to share tips and support.
- **Stay Involved:** Stay informed about your child's progress and school activities.
- **Communicate Concerns:** Don't hesitate to reach out to the teacher if you have any concerns about your child's adjustment.

By focusing on these key areas, you can help your child have a successful and positive kindergarten experience.



A Note from the Director

Tena Sales

Teacher Appreciation Week begins on Monday, May 6th and it's great when students and parents show their appreciation for teachers. Here 6 simple, but thoughtful ideas for teacher appreciation gifts. You don't need to spend a bunch of money to show your appreciation for educators!

1. Homemade Card

A simple, yet sweet way to show you are thankful for the teachers in your student's life! Have your child make their teachers a card. Add some glitter and stickers, and they are sure to love it!

2. Painting or Drawing

Homemade gifts are the best. Get out the paint or markers, and let your child be an artist for the day. You can get an inexpensive canvas at your local craft store. Some stores even have coupons to use toward your purchase!

3. Tree Handprint Craft

Just like moms, teachers LOVE handprint crafts (or at least I did). This simple craft involves using your child's handprint as the leaves or you can use their fingerprints.

4. Picture Frame with your Student in it

You can get inexpensive picture frames at your local dollar store. Pop in a school photo or one of your kiddo doing what they love. Or you can skip the frame and have your child make a frame. I loved receiving photos of my students.

5. Mason Jar with their Favorite Candy

You might have a Mason jar or other container lying around. Grab it and put the teacher's favorite candy in it (your child probably knows what it is!). Simple and sweet! Let your kiddo decorate the jar to put their own personal touch on it.

6. Plant or Flowers

Another sweet gesture is having your child pick out a plant or flowers for their teacher. You can take it a step further and buy a terracotta pot. Your child can decorate the pot and then you can add the plant to make it a one-of-a-kind gift

Every Gesture Counts

Even the smallest gestures can convey immense gratitude towards teachers and the hard work they put into shaping the future. From something as simple as buying them a cup of coffee to offering a heartfelt thank-you note, every action serves as a token of appreciation for their dedication and passion.

May is Mental Health Awareness Month

This observance is a time to raise awareness about the importance of mental wellbeing, educate the public, reduce stigma, and promote support for those affected by mental health conditions.

To support mental health awareness, engage in activities that promote well-being, reduce stress, and foster a sense of community. This can include activities like exercise, mindfulness practices, connecting with nature, expressive arts, and volunteering. For children, these activities can include utilizing playdough, making slime, playing musical instruments, enjoying hikes, etc.

By incorporating these and other stress reducing activities into your daily life or community, you can contribute to a more supportive and understanding of mental health.



Nectarine Smoothies

Submitted by Stella Baskin, Nutrition Coordinator



Prep Time 10 min + Freezing **Yield** 3 servings

Ingredients

- 3/4 cup lemon Greek yogurt
- 1/2 cup orange juice
- 2 tablespoons lime juice
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 2 cups crushed ice
- 2 medium nectarines or peaches, peeled, cubed and frozen

Directions

1. Place all ingredients in a blender; cover and process until blended.

Healthy

Peanut Butter Cookies

Submitted by Stella Baskin, Nutrition Coordinator



Prep Time 15 min **Cook Time** 15 min **Yield** 2 dozen

Ingredients

- 1 large egg, room temperature, beaten
- 1 cup creamy peanut butter
- 1/4 cup oat bran
- 1/4 cup maple syrup

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350°. In a large bowl, mix all ingredients. Roll level tablespoons into balls. Place on ungreased baking sheets; flatten with a fork.
2. Bake for 15 minutes. Remove to a wire rack to cool.



In 2021, then President Joe Biden signed into law the newest federal holiday in the United States. Although it has been observed in Texas and nearby states since 1866, Juneteenth commemorates the day that enslaved people in Galveston, Texas, finally heard the news of their liberation.

President Abraham Lincoln had signed the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, declaring that “all persons held as slaves” were henceforth free. (The proclamation actually freed enslaved people in much of the Confederacy, including Texas. It did

not free those enslaved in Union states or border states. The 13th Amendment, ratified on Dec. 18, 1865, abolished slavery throughout in the U.S.)

It took until the summer of 1865 for news of the proclamation, and Union troops, to arrive in Texas. Maj. Gen. Gordon Granger gave the tidings on June 19, to much rejoicing. This day quickly became an unofficial, then official, state holiday.

Though the holiday was immediately popular, the name *Juneteenth* wasn't settled on for decades. An 1888 El Paso newspaper called it a “jubilee,” which, since the 14th century has come to mean “exultant joy ... public rejoicing.” Originally, though, the jubilee was the culmination of the 50-year cycle described in Leviticus, a year of “emancipation and restoration,” as Merriam-Webster puts it, when enslaved people would be set free.

Other names for the holiday were quite formal. An 1898 Brenham, Texas, paper reported on the Manumission Anniversary, while other cities marked Emancipation Day.

Though all these names were used for the holiday in the past, *Juneteenth* is unique, invented by formerly enslaved Texans celebrating their newfound freedom. Happy Juneteenth!

Summer Learning Activities that Promote School Readiness for PreK & Kindergarten Families

For many families, summertime brings a mix of excitement and anxiety. While the promise of family time and outdoor fun is enticing, the sudden lack of structure can be overwhelming. It can be a lot to handle! You may want your children to enjoy summer, but you also worry about them falling behind academically. The good news is that no family is alone in this struggle, and there are ways to make learning a natural, enjoyable part of summer routines.

This article offers 7 easy, hands-on learning ideas designed for PreK and elementary-aged children. These activities aim to keep young minds engaged without adding stress to your already full plate. Whether you have a few minutes or a few hours, you'll find practical ways to incorporate learning into your summer days, helping your child retain knowledge while still having plenty of time for summer fun.

1. Find a Summer Reading Program

Children who read during the summer are more likely to continue building their learning skills. One fun way to encourage your child is with a summer reading challenge.

Read a book that makes you laugh Read a book to a pet or stuffed animal Write your own story and read it aloud

Another resource is your local library. Librarians have recommendations for readers for all ages and usually have fun activities, including reading challenges, planned for children during the summer. You can also start a summer reading log to keep track of your child's favorite books to revisit later.

2. Plan a Nature Scavenger Hunt or Other Outdoor Activities

Whether you're observing backyard birds, finding bugs, or going on a nature walk, there are all kinds of ways to learn about science while getting active. If you can get to a local trail, or even a state or national park, that can make for a great day trip.

If not, there are plenty of fun nature activities you can do in your own neighborhood. Use this outdoor scavenger hunt to get started, or make your own list with local sights. As your child completes the worksheet, they can practice identifying the written names of the items they spot—reinforcing reading and STEM skills together.



3. Practice Math and Reading Skills in Your Daily Routine

Every day is a new opportunity for children to practice what they learned last year in school. No change to your family routine is required! Instead, find ways to practice math and reading skills each day at home or on the go. If you see a sign at the grocery store, for example, you could ask your child what words or letters they recognize and sound them out together. Practicing math can be as simple as counting out groups of things while taking a walk, like flowers or clouds.

4. Learn New Vocabulary Words Together

Learning new words can help children to practice and grow their vocabulary. Place a new word on your refrigerator and review it for a week. See how often you and your child can use the word in a sentence as you go about your day.

You can also practice spelling a new sight word every week. Although your child may already know what the word means, learning to spell these commonly used words will build their literacy skills.

5. Play Games, Teach Math Skills

Board games make for perfect summer math activities on afternoons as well as on rainy days inside. Some classic board games, like Monopoly or Chutes and Ladders, help children learn number facts as they move tokens and count out their spaces on the board.

Want a challenging game you can play with your child? Chess is a great classic game that children and caregivers can learn to play together. Chess can have a positive impact on critical thinking skills, which are important for STEM subjects.

By incorporating these fun and educational activities into your summer plans, you can help your child stay school-ready for the fall and have a great time together as a family.