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EARLY LEARNING PARENTS' PAGES

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DIVISION OF EARLY LEARNING

Warm Line Services Help Children Thrive

To support families and early learning providers whose children may have developmental disabilities, Florida's 30 early learning coalitions offer a toll-free warm line service that provides access to assistance and consultation about how children with disabilities and special health care needs are best served in the classroom.

In addition, Florida Early Steps provides statewide information and resources to parents or caregivers of children with diagnosed or suspected developmental delays or disabilities from birth to 3. Families may contact Florida Early Steps at 1-800-218-0001 to learn more.

The Florida Diagnostic & Learning Resources Systems (FDLRS) also provides diagnostic, instructional and technology support services for families or students with disabilities. To locate local services, contact the FDLRS Administration Office at 1-386-312-2265.

Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten Specialized Instructional Services (VPK SIS) educational program is an option for parents of 4-year-olds with special needs and is available outside the traditional VPK classroom setting. If your child has a current individual educational plan, or IEP, from your local school district for specialized instructional services, you can choose VPK SIS instead of traditional VPK school year or summer programs. For more information, contact your local [early learning coalition](#).



As a parent, you are your child's best first teacher, and the Child Care Resources and Referral Network is here to support you. Whether you need information on early learning programs, help finding child care or other family assistance, you can turn to the Child Care Resource and Referral Services at your local early learning coalition. They can help you find quality child care and connect you with community resources.



Annually, thousands participate in Children's Week Florida™ at the State Capitol during the legislative session to celebrate Florida's children.



Throughout the week of March 26-31, 2023, Children's Week Florida™ will host a variety of events. Children's Day will take place on Tuesday, March 28, and early learning partners will meet and share information with young children, families, teachers, students and advocates.

That same day will include a celebration of literacy in Storybook Village. In this annual event, children's tales will once again come to life through interactive story time with performances, music and celebrity readers, with the theme *Reach For the Stars*.

Reading Tips for Parents

The [Division of Early Learning](#) encourages you to take time this month to read aloud with your child. How you read with your child will vary at every age, but reading to your child is important at all ages.

- With infants and toddlers, read for a minimum of 15 minutes a day. As you read, point, touch and name the pictures.
- With preschoolers, pause and ask questions to engage your child with the pictures.
- Review the [Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards](#) by your child's age. These standards reflect the knowledge and skills that a child should know and be able to do at the end of an age-related timeframe.

[Just Read, Florida!](#) also has resources to help families as they read with their children. The [Reading Tips For Parents](#) webpage is a wonderful resource for parents of young children and will aid in the development of positive reading habits that families may use as their child grows and develops their own reading skills.

You Can Be a Teacher!

Looking for a job where you can be challenged, have fun and make a difference in the lives of young children? Think about becoming an early learning educator!

The most important development takes place in the early years of a child's life. Being an early learning educator is a hands-on experience where you will teach children through daily interactions and play. Share in your students' greatest achievements every day.

Check out the available resources on the Department of Children and Families' (DCF) website to get started.

- [Child Care Training and Credentialing Requirements](#)
- [Training and Registry](#)
- [Child Care Licensing](#)



Spring Into Nutrition

Healthy nutrition habits start with healthy food options and knowing your child's physical development. The Division of Early Learning offers [Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards](#) that can help families understand a child's growth during their first five years. Physical Development Feeding and Nutrition is an important developmental domain. Your child will begin to show awareness, respond to feeding or self-feeding with increasing efficiency and demonstrate increased interest in eating habits and making food choices. Making healthier food choices can positively affect your child's development.

Spring is a perfect time to visit your local Farmers' Market to talk with your child about selecting and identifying fruits and vegetables. It is also an opportunity to talk to your child about where and how fruits and vegetables are grown. For example, peaches and apples grow on trees, strawberries are grown on a plant, and carrots grow under the ground. You can also talk about how healthy eating starts with nutritious food choices.



You can visit [Fresh from Florida](#), which provides information about Florida-grown food products, farmers' markets and crops that are in season. Families can also find healthy recipes that use Florida native crops and food items. In addition, the Child Care Food Program (CCFP) offers healthy food choices for children in child care centers and afterschool programs. The CCFP also supports your child's learning environment with nutritious meals and to provide the best options available for the children who are served. To learn more about the CCFP, visit the [Florida Department of Health](#) website.



Head Start (HS) is a federally funded program that serves over 40,000 children and families in the state of Florida in over 800 locations. Early Head Start serves pregnant mothers to children three years of age, and Head Start serves children ages three to five and their families.

In addition to providing high-quality education services, HS is known for the comprehensive services it provides, including mental health, health and nutrition, inclusion and disabilities, and family engagement. Families who are experiencing homelessness, receive SNAP, TANF or SSI benefits, as well as children in foster care are eligible for HS services.

HS programs do not have a work or school requirement for parents and all services are free. In addition, diapers, wipes and formula are provided, as well as breakfast, lunch and snack to children participating in the HS program.

Contact the Division of Early Learning at 1-866-357-3239 or your local [early learning coalition](#) to locate the nearest HS program.

Florida VPK

Registration for the 2023-2024 year is open. To register your child for Voluntary Prekindergarten, simply visit the [Family Portal](#) to complete the application process.

Follow the steps below to complete the registration process:

1. Establish a user account.
 - New User - create an account with a personal email address.
 - Returning User - enter your user name and password.
2. Complete the application and submit required documents.
 - Proof of child's age - a copy of birth certificate or immunization records.
 - Proof of residency - a copy of your driver's license OR utility bill OR current signed lease.
3. Submit your application.



Parents can select from one of three program options available from private and public providers.

- **School-Year Program** – (540 Instructional Hours) Class sizes are not to exceed 11 students with a single lead instructor or up to 20 students with a lead instructor and an assistant.
- **Summer Program** – (300 Instructional Hours) Classes are not to exceed 12 students with a single lead instructor.
- **VPK Specialized Instructional Services Education Program** – Takes place outside a traditional classroom setting and is designed for 4-year-olds with special needs who have current individualized educational plans from local school districts.

Parents may also contact their local [early learning coalition](#) for additional information and assistance.



Now is the time to begin considering a summer camp or program for your child. Go to [Choosing a Safe Summer Camp | Florida DCF \(myflfamilies.com\)](#), to help you make a decision. Many camps offer open registration in March and April. Slots fill up quickly, so it's important to do your research and be prepared.

For more information on available summer camps in your area, contact your local [early learning coalition](#).

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