



Happy New Year! 2026

Parents' Pages

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New Year, New Healthy Habits

The new year is an opportunity to start fresh and build healthy habits together as a family. One fun way to do this is sitting down together to talk about what to focus on this year – like reading, bedtime routines or eating healthier. When your child participates in choosing goals, they feel proud and are more excited to follow through and make them part of their daily routine.

Try Reading Every Night

Reading helps your child grow their vocabulary, thinking skills and imagination. But it does more than that. When you read with your child, it builds a stronger bond between you and your child and they begin to associate books with comfort, love and happiness. This can help them enjoy reading more and want to read on their own as they get older.

Make Sleep a Priority

Getting enough sleep is very important for children because their bodies and brains are still growing. Newborns require 14-17 hours throughout the day, while school-age children need 9-12 hours each night. A good night's sleep helps children stay focused, handle their feelings, fight off sickness and develop properly. Set a regular bedtime based on when they need to wake up. Create a calming bedtime routine like taking a warm bath, reading a story and turning off screens at least 30 minutes before bed to make falling asleep easier.

Talk About Healthy Eating

Have a conversation with your child about the kinds of food that helps them grow strong and stay healthy. Explain that foods like fruits, vegetables, protein and dairy help their brains and bodies work better. Make a fun goal to try a new healthy recipe each week and plan meals together. Teaching your child about good food choices now helps them make smart decisions in the future.

Setting goals as a family will teach your child the value of responsibility, effort and teamwork. Keep the goals simple, fun and realistic. Most of all, celebrate progress no matter how small!

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Happy 20th Birthday, VPK!

The Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) program starts Florida's 4-year-olds on an early path to learning and educational success. Read about a successful center director who helped launch a VPK program 20 years ago and is still working hard today.

Deborah Darst, Director, KinderCare in Indian Harbor

Ms. Darst began her career in early childhood education in 1992 and joined KinderCare in Indian Harbour Beach in 1994. She holds both a Florida Child Care Professional Certification and a Director's Credential. With over three decades of experience, she is dedicated to providing a nurturing environment where children can learn, grow and feel celebrated.



"We were so thrilled to implement the VPK program in 2005. We heard nothing but good things from a similar style program in Georgia. Of course, VPK just kept getting better each year! I remember we were thrilled to have two teachers in the classroom during our first VPK class in 2005. A few weeks ago, I saw a previous student from VPK all grown up and now they are enrolling their own child at KinderCare. It really is special to see it all come full circle." - Deborah Darst



Join the Celebration!

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.fl doe.org.

Building Resiliency in Early Childhood: A Strong Start for Life

Developing resilience early sets the stage for success in school, relationships and life. The Florida Department of Education prioritizes building resiliency for Florida's children and families by implementing [Resiliency Florida](#), a first-of-its-kind approach to help children develop essential skills like grit, perseverance and problem-solving.

What Is Resilience?

For young children, it means learning to:

- Build positive relationships
- Develop self-awareness and self-regulation
- Make responsible decisions

These skills are part of the [Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards](#).



Tips to Build Resilience

- Use words, pictures and stories to help your child name emotions.
- Play games like "Make a Face" and have your child describe the emotion and how to handle it.
- Use kind words and routines.
- Demonstrate and encourage teamwork.

Resources

- [Hope Florida Resources](#) – connects parents to helpful options for their family.
- [Build Resiliency Reading List](#) – lists books for kids about resiliency.
- [CPALMS Resiliency Toolkit](#) – supports the development of resilience.

Celebrate Literacy Week, Florida!

January 26-30, 2026

Celebrate Literacy Week, Florida! is coming up January 26-30, 2026! This year's theme, "Read, Write and Blue: Celebrating 250 Chapters of America," honors the nation's rich literary and historical heritage as we mark 250 years of American stories and voices.

This statewide initiative, led by the Florida Department of Education, aims to raise awareness about the importance of reading and inspire students and families to make literacy a joyful part of everyday life.

Families play a vital role in nurturing a love for reading from the very beginning. Here are simple and fun ways to celebrate literacy at home:

Create a Cozy Reading Space

Set up a small corner with pillows, books and soft lighting to make reading feel special.



Connect Books to Real Life

Read stories about American landmarks, traditions or historical figures, then explore these topics through crafts or local outings.

Let Your Child Choose

Empower your child by letting them pick books that match their interests, even if it is the same one over and over!



Celebrate Progress

Keep a reading chart or sticker board to celebrate each book read together.

Suggested Reading

- Parade Colors by Barbara Barbieri McGrath (infant/toddler)
- What Is America by Michelle Medlock Adams (preschool)

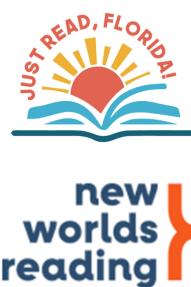
Resources

[Just Read, Florida!](#)

Offers reading tips and book lists for families.

[New Worlds Reading Initiative](#)

Free books and literacy support for eligible families.



How to Get More Involved in Your Child's Education

Engagement between a family and their child's educational teams is a vital component to a child's academic and social success. Your participation can help establish an open line of communication about your child's needs and ensure your child is getting consistent support from all the adults in their life.

Below are suggestions for how you can be an active participant in your child's learning and development at school:

- Schedule a time with your child's teacher to discuss their learning progress and see how you can help ensure you are encouraging learning gains at home.



- Make sure you keep your child's provider up to date on any trends you are noticing with your child, such as likes and dislikes, to make sure everyone is on the same page.
- Ask your learning provider about how you can get involved in the program or classroom activities.



- Consider joining the parent-teacher association (PTA) at your child's school if they have one.

Snowflake Science: Introduction to Patterns and Observation

Cold weather may keep us inside, but it provides a perfect opportunity for indoor arts and crafts with your child. The following snowflake activities provide not only a creative outlet but also a chance for your child to observe the patterns and shapes that will appear throughout their artwork. These activities will lead to both fun memories and decorations around the house!

Crayon Resistant Snowflakes: This activity needs a piece of paper, a white crayon, blue watercolor and a paintbrush. Have your child draw a snowflake on the paper with the white crayon. Make sure they press firmly to create thick lines. Next, have them paint over it with different shades of blue watercolor. The crayon will resist the paint, revealing the snowflake that your child drew.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day

This month we celebrate Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on Monday, January 19, 2026, to remember his life and legacy. Here are two suggested books to read with your child: *Happy Birthday, Martin Luther King* by Jean Marzollo and *Good Night, Martin Luther King Jr.* by Adam Gamble.

All In for Early Learning Day

Join families, educators and community leaders across Florida on January 26, 2026, to celebrate the importance of early learning! All In for Early Learning Day shines a spotlight on Florida's youngest learners and the people who help them grow.

This statewide day of action is your chance to get involved in local events and celebrations that raise awareness of how early learning builds Florida's future.

[Sign up today!](#) The Children's Movement of Florida will connect you with coordinators in your area as events are announced.

Children's Week Florida™ February 22-27, 2026

This week-long event, held at the Florida Capitol, begins with Hanging of the Hands inside the Capitol Rotunda on Sunday, February 22.

Children's Day, February 24, is a day of engaging activities, including a complimentary breakfast and lunch with stories brought to life in Storybook Village. Learn more at <https://childrensweek.org/>.

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