

The Heartbeat

EARLY LEARNING COALITION OF POLK COUNTY NEWSLETTER

Welcome to our January edition of the **Early Learning Coalition of Polk County newsletter!** As we step into a brand-new year, we're here to help your family start strong with trusted guidance, helpful resources, and caring support every step of the way.

This month's newsletter is packed with encouragement and practical tools, especially for families navigating childcare and early learning opportunities. Whether you're exploring quality childcare options, looking for answers about VPK, or wondering what support may be available for your child's early years, we're here to make the process easier and less overwhelming.

Thank you for letting us be a part of your family's journey. Let's make January a month of fresh starts, growing together, and building strong foundations for learning—one supportive connection at a time.

Warmly,

Your Early Learning Coalition Team



DAY OF CARING: CELEBRATING DR. KING'S DREAM

This month, in partnership with the **Florida Children's Museum**, the Early Learning Coalition hosted a resource table and read the book *I Am Enough* by Grace Byers. We were honored to celebrate Dr. King's dream at the **4th Annual MLK Day of Caring**, a child-focused event produced by the Florida Children's Museum and the **MLK Commission of Lakeland**. From live performances and hands-on activities to free admission, community resources, giveaways, and arts & crafts, the day truly brought children and families together to bridge communities. A big thank you to the Florida Children's Museum and the MLK Commission of Lakeland for an incredible event.

Click Here to Learn More about the Florida Children's Museum

[Learn More](#)



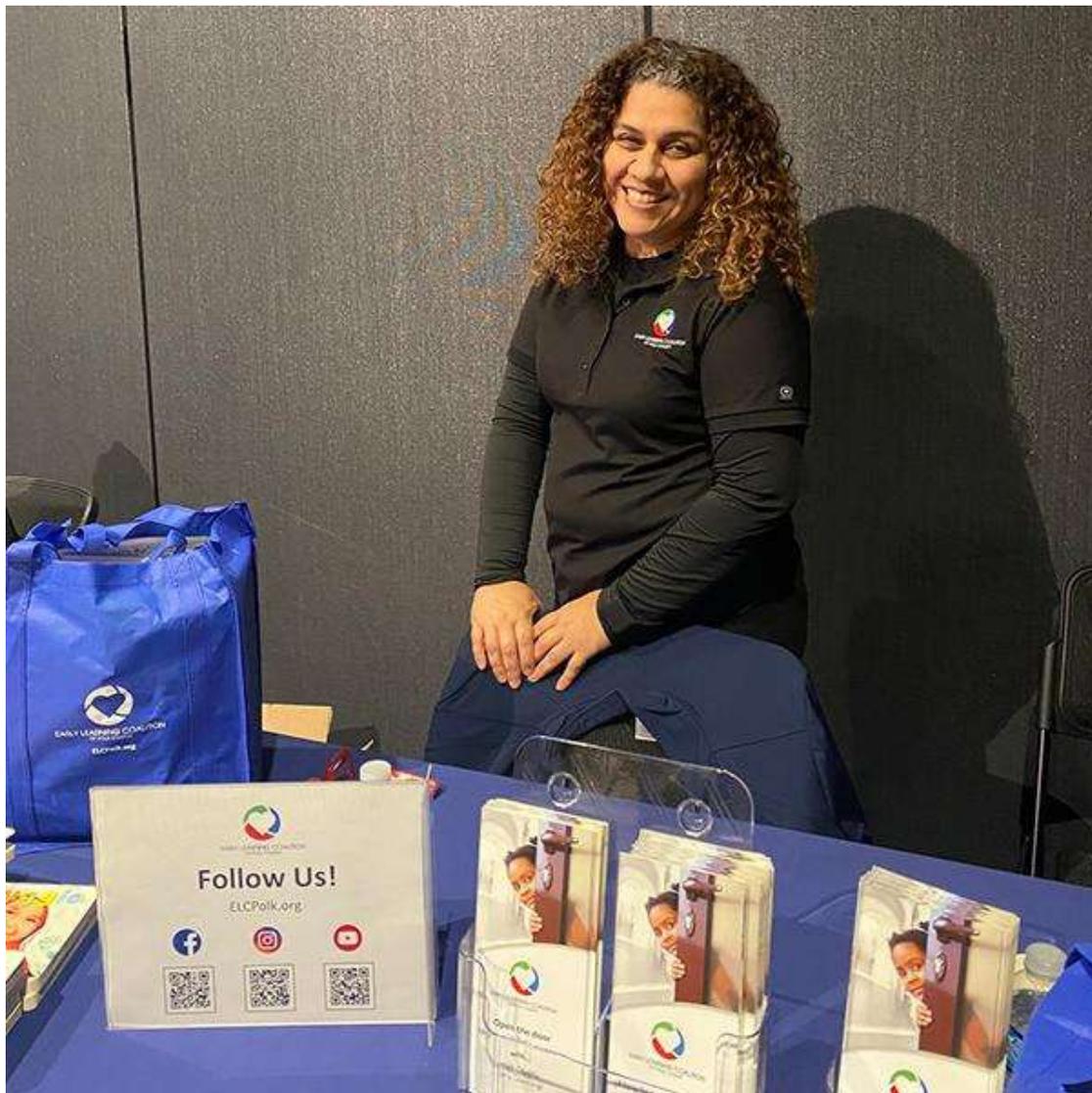


SHOWERED & EMPOWERED: COMMUNITY BABY SHOWER EVENT

The **ELC of Polk** was honored to participate in the Showered & Empowered Community Baby Shower, a heartwarming event provided by the **Carol Jenkins Barnett United Way Children's Resource Center**. The evening brought together expecting moms and families with babies under 6 weeks old for an uplifting night of support and celebration.

We loved connecting families to early learning support and sharing helpful resources. The evening was made even sweeter with amazing giveaways and an outpouring of community care.

Thank you to everyone who made this special night possible, together, we're building a stronger foundation for our youngest learners!



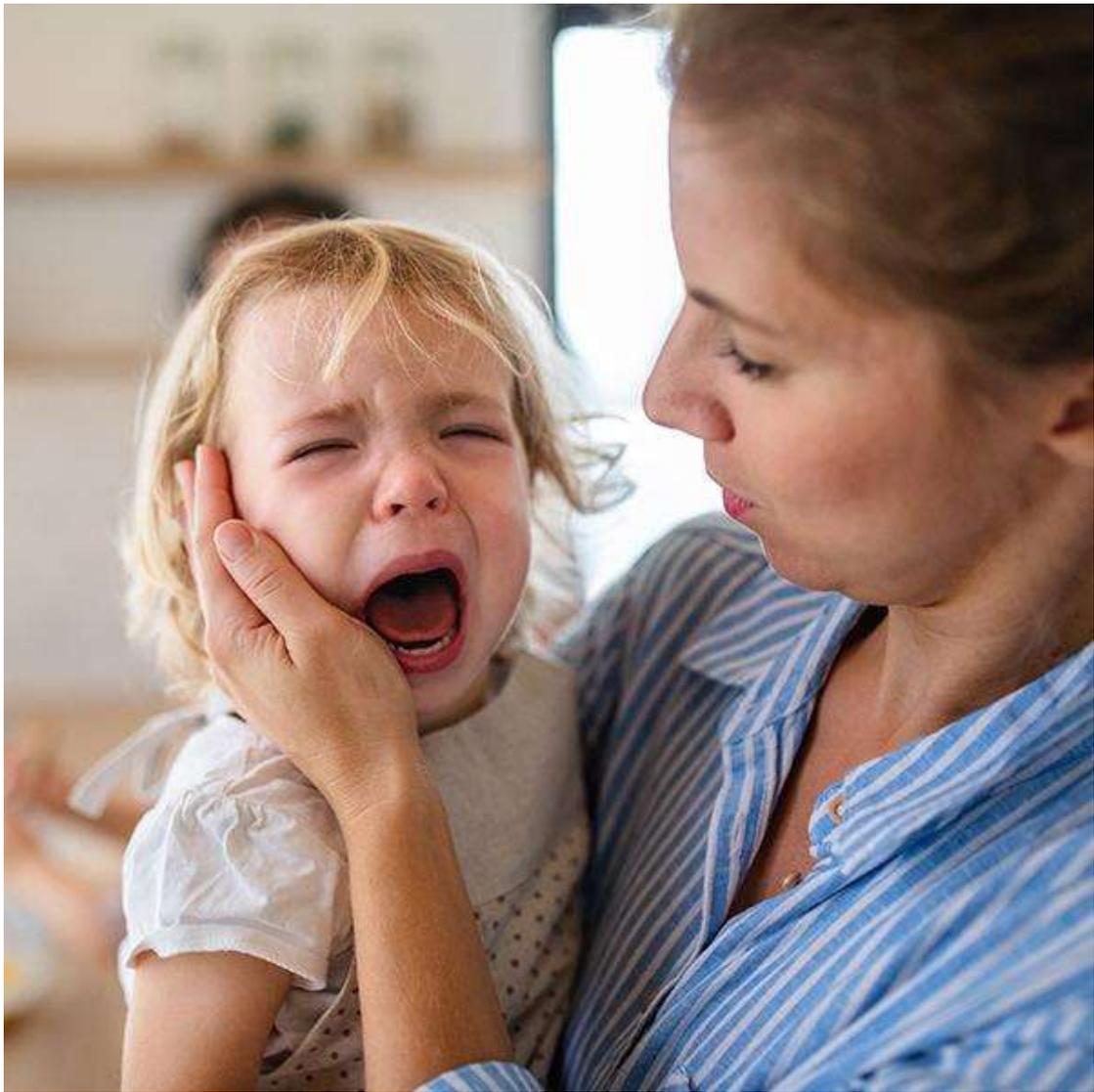
BIG FEELINGS + TANTRUMS

January can feel like a big transition month for young children after the excitement and schedule changes of the holidays. Many children transition to a new developmental stage, and their emotions show up louder. These feelings don't mean

you're doing anything wrong or that you should stop these big feelings; they mean teaching calm-down tools and routines that help children feel safe. A few small changes can make a big difference by providing predictable nighttime transitions, clear choices, and calm language, which can make your day feel a lot better.

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FAMILY INSIDER: RESOURCES



SCHOOL READINESS is an early learning program that helps working families and families attending school with childcare expenses while preparing children for school.

Choosing a childcare provider or an early education program for your child is one of the most important decisions you will make as a parent. We understand how important it is to you and your family and we want to ensure you have the information you need to make an informed decision through our Childcare Resource & Referral (CCR&R) program.

[Learn More](#)



VPK READY? LET'S GET YOU ENROLLED!

If your child will be 4 years old on or before September 1st, they will be ready to enter VPK for the 2026-2027 school year. The application window is now open! Apply for VPK using the link below to obtain your 2026-2027 VPK Certificate.

[Learn More](#)



Childcare Resource and Referrals (CCR&R)

What is CCR&R for Families? Childcare Resource & Referral (CCR&R) is a program focused on helping families find quality childcare that fits their individual needs, as well as providing referrals to other organizations that may be able to provide

additional assistance for anything from food and clothing to car seats and other child safety equipment.

[Learn More](#)



INCLUSION WARM LINE

Have you heard about our Inclusion Warm Line? Our inclusion support services provide technical assistance and training on topics that assist families, childcare providers, and community members working with children who may have unique or special needs. Call us at (863) 733-9080!

[Learn More](#)

FAMILY FUN FINDS



New Worlds Reading is Florida's free at-home literacy program to help eligible Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) through 5th-grade children in Florida strengthen literacy skills, build reading confidence, and foster a lifelong love of reading.

[Learn More](#)

CELEBRATE LITERACY WEEK, FLORIDA! 2026

The Division of Early Learning (DEL) is once again collaborating with the *Just Read Florida!* office, planning the eighteenth, annual statewide *Celebrate Literacy Week, Florida!* 2026 events scheduled for: **January 26 – 30, 2026**. This year, the theme is **Read, White and Blue: 250 Chapters of America!** With this theme in mind, this year's books are *Parade Colors* by Barbara Barbieri McGrath (infant/toddler) and *What is America?* By Michelle Medlock Adams (preschool).

Let's make reading feel like a fun, cozy, all-week celebration! Try dressing in red, white, and blue, building a "reading fort," or planning a daily story time at home. Let children pick the books that represent this year's theme—yes, even the same one again!



Click Here to see Theme Activities:

[Toddler Activities](#)

[Preschool Activities](#)

LITERACY EXTENSION: STORY EMPORIUM FROM PBS KIDS

As we celebrate Literacy Week families can add a little extra reading fun at home with Story Emporium from PBS KIDS. This playful, child-friendly activity encourages young children to explore characters, settings, and story details while building early literacy skills through imagination and play. It's a simple way to spark your child's learning with conversations, boosting vocabulary, and inspiring your child to create their own stories!

[Click Here To Play](#)



LEARNING & SCHOOL READINESS: 4 KINDERGARTEN READINESS SKILLS YOUR CHILD NEEDS - By: Highlights Editorial

Many families of school-age children say it feels like kindergarten has become “the new first grade,” with bigger expectations right from the start. That’s why the transition into kindergarten can feel like a major leap for both children and families. The good news is that with a little preparation, predictable routines, and plenty of encouragement, children can step into kindergarten with confidence.

Click Here to Learn More

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THE KINDNESS CORNER

As we close out the month of January, let's remember that kindness begins with us. Take time to talk with your child about what kindness means and invite them to illustrate their ideas.

Ask:

- **What is kindness?**
- **What does kindness look like?**
- **How can we be kind to others?**
- **How can we be kind to ourselves?**

Let's keep building a year rooted in kindness, starting with January and continuing with kindness toward ourselves every step of the way.



THE EARLY LEARNING COALITION OF POLK IS YOUR ONE-STOP RESOURCE

The Early Learning Coalition of Polk County is your one-stop resource for families! From Childcare Resources Referrals and VPK (Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten) information to Childcare Financial Assistance for eligible families, we're here to support you. Let's make this a strong start to the year for your family!

Want a quick overview? Check out our YouTube video on Childcare Financial Assistance for helpful family details.

Click Here to Learn More



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