

Early Learning & Education PROGRAMS

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Teaching the Value of Community

Our world is home to many diverse people. Depending on where you live, you may encounter people who speak a different language than your own, and who may have different traditions, opinions, abilities, and life circumstances than your own. By exposing children to diverse cultures and helping them learn how to value themselves and others, children can grow to become compassionate, tolerant, thoughtful, and active members of their communities.

Educators can support children in learning the value of being part of a community by encouraging friendships and fostering their development of social skills, emotional literacy, empathy, and tolerance. Empathy allows us to understand another person's

emotions and perspective and allows us to be more open and compassionate towards people who are different from us.

Promoting emotional literacy and acceptance of diversity helps children learn about themselves, shapes their perceptions of the world around them, and promotes empathy. Include practice in identifying and managing emotions into your daily routine.

See our article *Relaxation Station* in this newsletter for ideas. The reading area can include books that depict different cultures, abilities, and non-stereotypical gender roles. Add materials such as clothing, food, dolls, and puppets to dramatic play that represent diverse cultures. Children can explore social roles and



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ENGAGING PARENTS

Create a welcoming atmosphere for parents and encourage them to participate in their child's development and learning. When educators and parents communicate and work together as a team, it strengthens relationships between families and educators while increasing learning experiences for children.

Parents can participate in their child's learning by sharing information about their child's interests or abilities, and by working with providers to support children's specific needs. This can include practicing fine motor skills by cutting with scissors or developing self-regulation by working on deep breathing exercises together. How do you welcome and include parents in your program?



Relaxation Station

Creating a station where children can relax provides them with a place to go when they want to explore emotions or need time to rest and reset. Consider the ages, abilities, and needs of the children in your program as you design a relaxation station. Children can also offer input by sharing what helps them feel calm and relaxed. Start by setting aside a space equipped with pillows and blankets.

Each day, introduce a new tool during circle time and allow children to place it in the relaxation station. For example, you may read books about emotions the first day and ask each child to take a book to the relaxation station book box. This will help children feel ownership of the space and foster interest in using it. The following are suggestions of what you can introduce during the first week:

- **Monday:** Books about emotions, such as *The Way I Feel* by Janan Cain.
- **Tuesday:** Stress balls, sponges, or playdough that can be squeezed to relieve feelings of anxiety, anger, or frustration.
- **Wednesday:** Dice, spinners, or timers to use for sharing and taking turns.
- **Thursday:** Pictures of emotions or photographs of the children acting out emotions on cards for matching, or made into flip books or posters.
- **Friday:** Tools to encourage deep breathing such as a turtle puppet that goes into his shell to breathe, and bubbles or pinwheels for blowing.

You can also include a safety mirror children can use to practice their facial expressions, photo albums with pictures of children with their families, stuffed animals or puppets for acting out feelings, instrumental music or nature sounds, ocean bottles or mind jars, and a white board or notebooks for journaling or drawing about feelings.

Invite parents to explore the relaxation station too and demonstrate techniques they can practice at home with their child such as deep breathing. Ask parents to share which techniques work best at home and encourage them to make suggestions of other materials to add to the relaxation station.



Health and Wellness Policies

Establishing a comprehensive *Health and Wellness Policy* for your program is an important step in preventing the spread of illness. The policy should include information about when a child should stay home, what is needed for the child's return, and a description of your wellness practices and procedures.

Include a list of symptoms in your policy that may indicate when a child is too ill to participate in your program such as: a fever of 100° or more, rashes, unusual bowel movements or urine, vomiting, lethargy, earache, loss of appetite, flu-like symptoms, or significant behavior changes. For a detailed list of symptoms and information about contagious illnesses, please refer to the brochure *When Is Your Child Too Ill To Go To Child Care?* by Children's Home Society of California which is available on our website at <http://www.chs-ca.org>.

Children should stay home until they are fever-free for twenty-four hours without fever-reducing medicine or until

illness improves. For infectious illnesses, a doctor's note should be required before returning. Include information about what you do to maintain a healthy environment for families. Explain your procedures for cleaning, disinfecting, and sanitizing surfaces and toys, how frequently soft toys and bedding is washed, and how food is handled.

Show parents how important good health is by conducting morning health screenings of children when they arrive. Ask parents how their child slept and ate while you visually check for any signs of illness. Review the policy verbally with parents before the child enters your program so that you can answer any questions they may have and guide them in developing a plan for alternate care. Establishing a health and wellness policy, teaching children proper hygiene, and maintaining a clean environment will help keep everyone healthy.



Teaching the Value of Community

learn to nurture others by caring for baby dolls or preparing meals for each other through dramatic play.

Adults can also build a foundation for developing empathy by setting an example of how to speak, listen, and interact with others. Modeling a helpful attitude, treating people with courtesy and respect, showing appreciation for uniqueness, and using democratic practices like class meetings and voting on decisions can help support children as they practice how to see other points of view, consider the community as a whole, and experience having their own voice heard.

Support school age children in the practice of identifying the emotions of others. They can play games where one child makes a face or gesture, and the other guesses the emotion. Play “what if” games to help children practice perspective taking. For example, “What if you could not understand the language everyone around you was speaking?”

Try using the book *Stand In My Shoes: Kids Learning about Empathy* by Bob Sornson, Ph.D. to start discussions about empathy and teach children to practice self-compassion. Learning to be kind and tolerant of themselves can help them practice compassion and empathy towards others.

Support children in practicing self-compassion by helping them develop reasonable expectations for themselves. Statements like, “This may not work perfectly the first time you try it, but with practice you will get better” let children know that it is okay to be imperfect and make mistakes. Encourage children to recognize their own talents, keep journals where they can record their thoughts and feelings, practice deep breathing, and spend time each day doing something that helps them feel at peace or happy.

Children who have a strong sense of who they are and practice self-compassion will be prepared to form healthy relationships throughout their lives, demonstrate empathy, and value all the members of their community. Educators have the privilege of teaching children that every voice deserves to be heard and that every person is worthy of respect, acceptance, and compassion.

REFLECTING ON SOCIAL SKILLS

A child’s ability to express himself, exchange information with others, work collaboratively, and form strong friendships is important to life-long success. You can provide children with opportunities to explore social roles, learn how to interact positively with each other, and manage strong emotions in a healthy way. Take a walk around your environment and evaluate the materials you have available for social development. Include materials that meet the particular social needs and interests of each child and support their efforts to form friendships. As you evaluate your environment, reflect on the following questions:

- What kinds of social skills have you modeled for children?
- How can you help a child who has trouble entering a group already at play?
- What things do you do to help children manage the strong emotions that are often part of friendships?

Source: *California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volume I* by the California Department of Education CDE (Sacramento, 2010).



RECIPES

Strawberry Treats

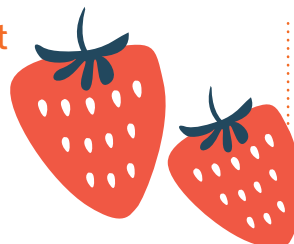
Strawberries are in season during the summer months and they are a healthy snack for children of all ages. Loaded with vitamin C and antioxidants, strawberries are believed to help lower the risk of heart disease and some cancers, as well as to help regulate blood sugar. Children can help prepare these simple and sweet strawberry treats.

Strawberry Frozen Yogurt

Ingredients

- 4 cups fresh or frozen strawberries
- 3 tablespoons honey
- 1/2 cup plain Greek yogurt
- 1 tablespoon lime juice

Put all of the ingredients in a blender and blend until smooth. If you use frozen strawberries, your ice cream can be eaten immediately. If you use fresh strawberries, you may need to add extra liquid. If you use fresh berries or want a more solid consistency, pour the mixture into a container and freeze it until the desired consistency is reached. Serve with your choice of fresh berries on top.



Strawberry Salsa

Ingredients

- 1 lb. fresh strawberries, chopped
- 2 whole kiwis, peeled and chopped
- 1/2 lime, juiced

Wash and chop the fruit. Mix it together in a bowl and add the lime juice. If it needs a little sweetness you can add a teaspoon of honey. Serve with graham crackers or pita chips. Eat the salsa within 24 hours.



Source: Recipes adapted from <http://blog.feelgreatin8.com> in April 2020.

Creative Explorations

Art is a wonderful way for children of all ages to express their individuality, engage in a sensory experience, and develop self-esteem. Use art to introduce new vocabulary related to math and science by discussing patterns, shapes, sizes, and cause and effect. Remember that the process is more important to learning than the product.

Title: Sit Down Paint Dancing

Age group: Infants

What you need: Large paper, tape, dish tub with non-toxic paint, dish tub of soapy water, and old towels.

What you do: Tape the paper to the floor in front of you and set the paint tub next to it. Support the infant in your lap as you dip her feet in the paint tub and “dance” her feet on the paper.

What they learn: Infants learn they can feel with their feet as well as their hands. They engage in a new sensory experience that demonstrates cause and effect, strengthens their large muscles, and creates a work of art.

Source: *First Art for Toddlers and Twos: Open-Ended Art Experiences* by MaryAnn F. Kohl, Renee Ramsey, and Dana Bowman (Gryphon House, 2012).

Title: First Rubbings

Age group: Toddlers

What you need: Masking tape, large objects to rub (plastic toys, leaves, pieces of cardboard, yarn, wrinkled foil, wire cooling rack, etc.), chalk, oil pastels, dark-colored crayon stubs or old markers (blue, purple, and magenta work well) and white or butcher paper.

What you do: Secure items to be rubbed on a tabletop by putting loops of tape under each item. This prevents items from slipping or tearing the paper. Wrap items like the wire rack in paper to protect fingers. Show children the items and then place a large piece of white paper on top of them. Invite them to use the writing materials to rub across the top of the paper. Talk to them about how the items underneath create patterns when rubbed.



What they learn: Children practice fine motor skills, experiment with art materials in a creative way, investigate new patterns, and hypothesize about how the patterns were created.

Source: *First Art for Toddlers and Twos: Open-Ended Art Experiences* by MaryAnn F. Kohl, Renee Ramsey, and Dana Bowman (Gryphon House, 2012).

Title: String Art

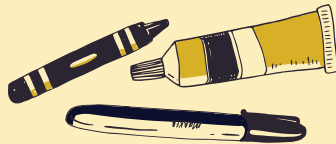
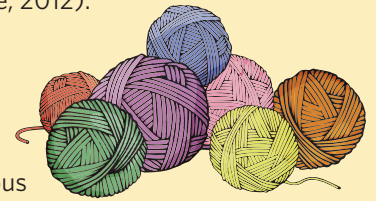
Age group: Preschool

What you need: Various colors of yarn, diluted white glue (diluted with water), waxed paper, shallow dishes, and newspapers.

What you do: Spread newspaper on top of a table to protect it. Pour enough glue into each dish so that the bottom of each dish is covered. Give each child a long piece of string and a sheet of waxed paper. Invite children to dip the string into a dish of glue and form a design on the waxed paper with their yarn. When the yarn dries, peel it off of the waxed paper. The yarn will be stiff and retain the shapes the children created.

What they learn: Children have the opportunity to create three-dimensional art. Children also utilize materials in a new way and discuss the scientific changes to the yarn such as how it became stiff and why it could be peeled away from the waxed paper.

Source: *1-2-3 Art: Open-Ended Art Activities for Working with Young Children* by Jean Warren (Totline Publications, 1985).



Creative Explorations

Title: Still Life Painting

Age group: School Age

What you need: Flowers, vase, white paper, pencil, non-toxic paints, and paint brushes.

What you do: Ask children to arrange flowers in a vase and place it on a table where it can be observed. Invite children to sketch the flowers with a pencil on their paper. Children should then select three colors to work with. The colors black and white can be used for shading or accents. Children can mix and match the three colors to form different shades. Explain that still life painting is an art form that illustrates commonplace objects. Visit the library or go online to learn about Vincent Van Gogh and show children his painting called Sunflowers, which is an example of still life art.

What they learn: Children learn to create a two-dimensional representation of a three-dimensional object, express themselves creatively, and explore still life painting.

Encourage children to find other commonplace items that inspire them to draw or paint.

Source: Adapted from <https://www.education.com/activity/article/analagous-color-creation/> in April 2020.



ABOUT CHS

For over 129 years, Children's Home Society of California (CHS) has adapted to the changing needs of children and families. Since 1891, CHS has worked diligently to protect our community's children and strengthen their families through diverse programs and services.

At CHS, we view a child not in isolation, but in the context of each family's health, stability, and resources. We believe that families are fundamentally strong and resilient. The mission of CHS is to reach out to children and families at risk with a range of services to ensure every child the opportunity to develop within a safe, healthy, and secure environment.

Therefore, CHS provides a variety of services to children and families in California and nationwide, working to improve their quality of life by offering vital information, education and resource services, and child care assistance.

CHS also serves as an expert resource for child care providers, other social service agencies, and government agencies at the local, state, and national level. To learn more about CHS and resources available to you, please visit our website at www.chs-ca.org.

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