

Early Learning & Education PROGRAMS

What's Inside

Learning through Dramatic Play 2

Childhood Obesity 3

Building Social Skills 4

Strawberry Spinach Salad 4

Summer Learning 5

Developing Self-Regulation

Self-regulation is the ability to control impulses and behavior, focus, identify emotions, and respond appropriately to people and situations. There are two different aspects to self-regulation. When children learn to identify and manage their emotions, they are practicing emotional self-regulation. Learning to do something because it is needed, such as waiting in line or taking a turn, is known as cognitive self-regulation. Self-regulation is shaped by life experiences, relationships, and knowledge learned from infancy through adulthood.

Support infants and toddlers through positive interactions, consistent routines, labeling emotions, and role-modeling. For example, when an infant cries, your response creates a

learning experience. If you approach the infant, smile, gently stroke their arm, and say in a pleasant voice, "I hear you crying, and I'm here to help," then the infant learns to wait and trust that help will come. Help toddlers learn to

control their own bodies by using music to signal stopping and going. Explain that toddlers can dance when they hear music, but need to stop, or freeze, when the music stops.

Help preschoolers by building emotional literacy, practicing strategies for coping with emotions, role-modeling strategies

for resolving conflicts, and teaching children how to pause and relax. Reading books like *The Way I Feel* by Janan Cain and *The Way I Act* by Steve Metzger promotes emotional literacy. When children can

continued on page 4

SELF-REGULATION BOOKS

Look for these children's books that discuss self-regulation skills at your local public library.

- *Breathing is my Superpower* by Alicia Ortego (also available in Spanish)
- *Find Your Calm* by Gabi Garcia (also available in Spanish)
- *Listening to My Body* by Gabi Garcia (also available in Spanish)
- *Patience is my Superpower* by Alicia Ortego
- *Remy the Rhino Learns Patience* by Andy McGuire
- *Stop! Breathe! and Think!* by Nesrine Ahmad Sleiman
- *The Calm Down Jar* by Jennifer Jones
- *The Wolf Who Learned Self-Control* by Orianne Lallemand
- *Waiting is Not Easy* by Mo Willems
- *What Should Danny Do?* by Adir Levy and Ganit Levy



Learning through Dramatic Play

Dramatic play is a valuable tool for developing social and emotional skills. Through dramatic play, children are able to develop and share stories with their peers and caregivers. When children are engaged in imaginative play they are creating stories, assigning each other roles to play, organizing props, and deciding how those props will be used. This requires children to practice communicating their ideas, negotiate, and solve minor conflicts.

Setting up the dramatic play area as a home invites children to revisit personal stories, such as cooking dinner or talking on the phone. Transforming the dramatic play area into a different space each month provides children with opportunities to explore other social roles and careers. For example, in October, you may create a farmer's market with fall vegetables and fruits.

One way to transform a dramatic play area quickly is to create prop boxes. Make a list of themes children may be interested in, and collect items that can be used as props. For example, you can collect take-out menus, utensils, pretend money, a calculator, empty food boxes, tea tins, and an open/closed sign for a restaurant prop box. Then, create prop boxes for each theme idea on your list. Some possible themes include a hospital, post office, toy store, library, animal hospital, fire station, grocery store, gym, space station, coffee shop, flower shop, or farm.

Prop boxes make it easy to set up dramatic play anywhere. You might choose to keep it setup as a home inside, and create a different themed dramatic play area in a separate part of the room, or set up an area outside. Children may also decide that the blocks, cars, or plastic animals could add to their play, and they may carry them into another area of the room. Be flexible and allow children to explore and utilize familiar objects in new and innovative ways. Dramatic play is a fun way for children to learn, so make sure you set the stage for play every day.



Childhood Obesity

Childhood obesity, or being severely overweight, can impact both children's physical and mental health. Obesity is considered to be a chronic disease because of the impact it can have on the body. Left untreated, it can create or worsen other health conditions such as diabetes, high cholesterol, or high blood pressure. It can also lead to health concerns that are not as easy to see, such as inflamed internal organs or a poor immune system. Doctors use a body-mass index (BMI) to check for excess weight. BMI is a calculation that uses a child's height, weight, sex, and age to determine whether or not their weight is at a healthy level.

In February 2023, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) published new guidelines for pediatricians treating childhood obesity. The guidelines focus on treatments that involve the whole family and consider the many elements that contribute toward obesity, such as family genetics, poor nutrition, and lack of physical activity. These factors can be even more challenging when families

do not have access to nutritious food, lack access to an outdoor play space such as a backyard or neighborhood park, or live in areas where it may not be safe for children to play outside.

Early educators can support children in maintaining a healthy weight by offering access to healthy meals and snacks, providing children with opportunities to play safely outside, and connecting families to resources that can help them live a healthy lifestyle. Local Resource and Referral (R&R) agencies can provide information about local food programs, nutrition, and healthy exercise. Visit www.chs-ca.org to contact your local R&R Program for more information or support in finding local resources.

Source: The website <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/obesity/Pages/childhood-obesity-a-complex-disease.aspx> was referenced in April 2023.



Developing Self-Regulation

identify emotions, it is easier to talk about emotions and how to cope with them. Teach children breathing exercises and explain that this is a way to pause and let our brains and bodies cool down so we can think more clearly. Guide children in talking and working through conflicts with others.

School-age children can play games like freeze tag, Simon Says, and Red Light, Green Light to develop self-control. Playing board games and working on group projects over time (for a week or more) also teaches children how to wait, take turns, pause, and reflect. School-age children need to develop the ability to understand and follow common rules like waiting in line, taking turns, and waiting for others. It is also important for them to develop and monitor rules they create themselves during imaginative play or while creating their own games outside. Finally, school-age children need to learn to delay something they want to do in order to complete something they need to do, such as finishing their homework before they play with friends.

Provide children with visual self-regulation reminders, such as a large poster with images that remind them to take deep breaths or resolve conflicts. Children who are learning to write could use pretend glasses to proof-read their work before turning it in. Tools like dice, different lengths of straws for “drawing straws,” or timers can be used to help children decide who goes first or how long a turn will last. Equipping children with the tools to build emotional literacy and opportunities to develop self-regulation skills will promote lifelong success.

Sources:
California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volume 1 by the California Department of Education (Sacramento, 2010).

Bodrova, Elena and Leong, Deborah J., “Developing Self-Regulation in Kindergarten: Can We Keep all the Crickets in the Basket?” *Young Children* Vol. 63, No. 2, (March 2008): 56-58.

BUILDING SOCIAL SKILLS

Children develop social skills by interacting with others. Educators can support children by offering daily opportunities to explore social roles through dramatic play, learn how to interact positively with others, and manage emotions in a healthy way. Take a walk around your program and evaluate the materials you have available for building social development. How often do you use those materials when you interact with the children? How often do you change your dramatic play area?

Offer children a variety of activities to explore. Change materials to meet each child’s particular social needs and interests and support their efforts to form friendships. As you reflect on how to support developing social skills, consider the following questions:

- What kinds of social skills have children learned by seeing them role-modeled?
- What are your most difficult challenges when you try to support children during their dramatic play?

Source: *California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volume 1* by the California Department of Education (Sacramento, 2010).

Strawberry Spinach Salad

Children can help prepare this healthy and refreshing summertime salad.

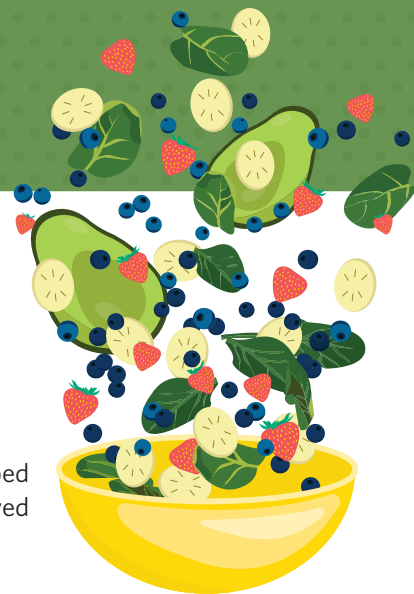
Ingredients

- 6 ounces (8 cups) baby spinach
- 1 cup strawberries, sliced
- 1 cup cucumber, sliced into half-moons
- 1 cup garbanzo beans (if canned, rinse)
- 2 ounces feta cheese, crumbled
- 3 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 1/2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
- 1 teaspoon yellow onion, finely chopped
- 1 teaspoon fresh thyme, stems removed and chopped
- Salt and black pepper to taste

Directions

Rinse the spinach leaves, pat or spin them dry, and place them in the refrigerator to chill. Combine the strawberries, cucumbers, and beans in a medium bowl and set it aside in the refrigerator. Make the dressing by adding oil, vinegar, onion, thyme leaves, salt, and pepper to a jar or dressing container. Cover and shake the mixture thoroughly until it is emulsified, or whisk the ingredients in a medium bowl. Pour 1/4 of the dressing over the beans, cucumber, and strawberries, folding until they are coated. Remove the spinach from the refrigerator, season it with salt and pepper (this helps the dressing coat the greens), add the remaining dressing, and mix it thoroughly. Add the bean mixture and crumbled feta cheese, then toss gently and serve.

Source: Recipe adapted from <https://about.kaiserpermanente.org/health-and-wellness/recipes/spring-spinach-salad> in April 2023.



Summer Learning

The following activities offer children the opportunity to learn through play and can be done outdoors in the warm summer weather.

Activity: Water Explorations

Age group: Infants

What you need: A shallow tub of water (just enough water to wet sponges) and a variety of non-toxic soft sponges in different shapes and sizes. Remember to supervise water activities closely.

What you do: Take infants outside to a grassy area, or use tumbling mats for a soft surface. Lay infants on the grass or mats. The tub of water needs to be next to the adult at all times. Place the sponges in the tub to get them wet and squeeze out most of the excess water. Invite infants to squeeze sponges over their toes and legs while you squeeze sponges over the infant's tummy, legs, feet, and hands.

What they learn: Infants experience the sensation of water and feel how the sun dries the water on their skin. Introduce new vocabulary such as: wet, cold, splash, splat, drip, squeeze, etc. This is a great activity for muscle development and coordination.

Activity: Musical Drawing

Age group: Toddlers

What you need: A large piece of white butcher paper, a variety of crayons, markers, pencils or non-toxic pastels, a speaker or radio for music, and different types of music to play.

What you do: Tape the butcher paper to a tabletop and remove the chairs from around the table. Place the drawing materials around the table. Explain to the children that when you play the music, they can draw what the music sounds like, or how it makes them feel. Encourage them to use broad strokes that follow the tempo of the music and create abstract art (shapes, strokes, and colors that do not need to be of anything specific). When you stop the music, the children stop drawing and walk around the table until you start a new song. Continue for as long as the children are interested, or until the paper is full of drawings.

What they learn: Children learn to follow directions, improve listening comprehension, practice self-expression, improve motor skills, engage in self-regulation, and build math skills (beat patterns) while creating a cooperative piece of abstract art.

Source: Adapted from <http://www.aplaceofourown.org> in April 2023.

Activity: Habitat Map

Age group: Preschool

What you need: Cardboard, popsicle sticks, chenille stems, paper towel rolls, old buttons, cotton balls, construction paper, glue, markers, and kid-safe scissors.

What you do: Talk to children about the different kinds of homes people live in while they help you set up the materials. Give each child a piece of cardboard. The cardboard will be the base of their 3-dimensional aerial Habitat Map. Ask each child to think about home and create a representation of what their favorite room looks like using the materials at hand. After they are done, give each child the opportunity to share their Habitat Map and talk about their home. Older children can extend the activity by creating a map of their neighborhood or school.

What they learn: Children learn to create a representation of something familiar and see it in a new way. They also improve language skills by talking about different types of homes or places in their neighborhood. Introduce vocabulary such as: apartments, townhomes, single story, two stories, etc.

Source: Adapted from <http://www.aplaceofourown.org> in April 2023.



Summer Learning

Activity: Wood Sculptures

Age group: School Age

What you need: Sturdy piece of cardboard or plywood, scrap pieces of wood, glue, collage materials, paint, and paintbrushes.

What you do: Give each child a piece of wood or sturdy cardboard to use as a platform for their project. Explain that this is something they will work on for several days. Invite children to glue scrap wood pieces together to create a sculpture. The next day set out the paint and paintbrushes. On the third day, set out the collage materials and glue. Allow children to add to their sculpture each day from the materials provided until they feel their work is done. Create an exhibit and invite children to showcase their work.

What they learn: Children experience different art mediums while learning to work on a project over a period of time. As a result,

they improve time management and planning skills, build fine motor skills, and express themselves creatively.

Source: Adapted from <http://www.aplaceofourown.org> in April 2023.



ABOUT CHS

For over 130 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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