

Early Learning & Education PROGRAMS

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Mr. Alex has just finished reading books to a group of five-year-old children. Mr. Alex says, "Do you notice something different in the room?" Sarah responds, "The flower shop is gone!" Mr. Alex says, "You are right! I was thinking we could change our dramatic play area together. The flower shop was fun, but it is time for something new. Does anyone have ideas for what it can be next? We need two ideas, and then we can vote." Marta says, "Maybe it could be a grocery store." Then Sean adds, "I think we should make it a place that takes care of animals. We had to take my dog there." Mr. Alex then says, "Thank you for your ideas. Let's vote. If you want a grocery store, raise your hand; one, two, three. If you want a veterinary

office that takes care of animals, raise your hand; one, two, three, four, five. Which one had the most votes?" Timmy shouts, "The animal place!"

"Yes," says Mr. Alex, "a place that takes care of animals is called a veterinary, and the doctor at a veterinary is called a veterinarian or vet.

What will we need to make a veterinary office? You tell me, and I will write it down." "We need animals," says Sean. Mr. Alex replies, "We can use stuffed animals, and we can move Speedy's (pet tortoise) tank to that area." Timmy suggests, "We need doctor coats." The children continue to add ideas such as a sign, a clipboard to sign when you come in, chairs for waiting, leashes, pet cages, a gate so animals cannot



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RESOURCE AND REFERRAL HOTLINE

Our Resource and Referral (R&R) Hotline staff are available to assist child care providers and families. Child care providers can call to add their program to our referral database, update information about their business, learn about free professional development workshops, schedule a Resource Lending Library appointment to borrow toys and teaching materials, request child development resources, or learn about how the **Child Care Initiative Project (CCIP)** can assist with expanding their business.

Call the **R&R Hotline** at **(888) CHS-4KIDS** or **(888) 247-4543** Monday through Friday, between 9:00 a.m. and 3:30 p.m.

We look forward to helping you!



The Story of Me

Children can build social, emotional, language, and literacy skills by making books about themselves and their families. Books can be made by inserting pages into inexpensive photo albums or by placing them in sealable plastic bags. Use a hole-punch to make holes just below the seal of the bags and then use yarn or ribbon to lace them together. You can also use sturdy paper, posterboard, or cardboard as pages that are hole-punched and bound together with yarn. School-aged children can use three-ring binders as books.

Invite children to look in a mirror and draw a picture of themselves. Then they can also draw pictures of their family members and pets. Ask families to contribute photos their child can refer to while drawing and then glue or tape the photo next to the drawing. Prepare hole-punched pages with questions that require more than one word for an answer about their interests and preferences. Read the question out loud to children who are younger and help them write their answers under each question.

Children can also answer questions or prompts with drawings instead of words. For example, if the prompt at the top of the page is “Tell me about your favorite foods,” a child might draw a pizza, apples, and ice cream. Include questions or prompts that build emotional literacy, such as “Draw what it looks like when

you feel angry.” Prompts for school-aged children can be more complex, such as “Describe a time when you felt angry. What did you do or say?”

Provide blank hole-punched paper for drawing and journaling, as well as a variety of writing and drawing tools. Children can use their books to express their feelings, write about events at school, or write their own stories and poems. Respect children’s privacy by offering them a choice of storing their book in the writing area or a more inaccessible location, such as a cupboard.

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



Children and Oral Health

Child care providers can assist families with teaching their children habits that promote good oral health. When teeth or gums become infected or decayed, it can be painful to eat and may lead to other health concerns. Encourage families to take children to the dentist by their first birthday. If families do not have access to a dentist, they can call their local Resource and Referral (R&R) Program to learn about free or low-cost dental services. Phone numbers for R&R Programs can be found on the Child Care Aware website at www.childcareaware.org.

Encourage children to make healthy choices during meals. Read books about nutritious food for story time, such as *Eating the Alphabet* by Lois Ehlert, and serve water with healthy snacks. Allow children to participate in making simple meals so they develop an interest in nutrition. Children can start by washing vegetables, mixing a salad, or adding smoothie ingredients to a blender. Help children

transition away from using pacifiers when they are around eighteen months old so that their teeth and supporting jaw bones can develop correctly. If they struggle with letting go of pacifiers, try limiting their use to naps and bedtime and introducing alternatives for soothing themselves, such as holding a favorite toy.

If children have upcoming dental appointments, add books about visiting the dentist, such as *Just Going to the Dentist* by Mercer Mayer, to story time. Suggest children take a favorite stuffed animal to hold while they are there. The websites noted below have additional information you can share with families, including a video that shows children how to brush their teeth.

Source: Information for this article was acquired from <https://headstart.gov/browse/series/healthy-habits-happy-smiles> and <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/healthy.html>, which were accessed in August 2025.



Learning with Dramatic Play

get out, a table, and a scale. Mr. Alex tapes the list up on the wall and says, “Okay, this is a good start. Now let’s walk around the room and gather the things we already have.”

Together, the children and Mr. Alex move a table, chairs, stuffed animals, a clipboard with paper and pencils, a scale from the science corner, and Speedy into the veterinary office. Mr. Alex also has some free brochures about pets and pet care that were obtained from a local vet and pet store, as well as a pretend doctor kit that was in a cupboard. They use blocks and a piece of posterboard to make a gate, and they make a large sign on butcher paper. Mr. Alex also asks parents if they have any leashes and pet carriers they can borrow, and over the course of a week, the children finish creating their veterinary office.

Inviting children to decide what the dramatic play area should be and participate in setting it up creates a sense of community and builds cooperation skills. Children learn how to vote to settle a difference of opinion about something that affects an entire group, practice expressing their ideas, and consider the ideas of others. They also learn how to set goals, plan, and share responsibilities. As they play, they practice different roles, build communication skills, develop empathy by caring for the animals, and strengthen relationships. Through dramatic play, children practice using social skills and develop creativity, critical thinking, and emotional literacy.

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



PLAYING TOGETHER

Children develop social skills through their relationships and interactions with both their peers and adults. Dramatic play offers children the opportunity to interact with each other naturally through play. During dramatic play, children assume different roles and set their own rules. Caregivers can role model social skills such as turn-taking in conversations and manners by entering into children’s play as a participant. Consider the dramatic play you have observed in your program and reflect on the following questions.

1. Have you ever seen a child hesitate to join a group of children at play? What did you do to support them joining the other children?
2. What challenges have you encountered in supporting children’s dramatic play?
3. What social skills are you able to successfully role-model during dramatic play?
4. How do you make dramatic play accessible to all children, regardless of their abilities?

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

RECIPES

Fall in Love with Apples

Apples are in season during autumn, which means they are easy to find and usually less expensive. Invite children to help you make the following recipes.

Apple Crisp

- 2 Honeycrisp apples, peeled and sliced
- 1/3 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
- 1/3 cup old-fashioned rolled oats
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/4 cup butter or butter alternative
- 1/3 cup firmly packed brown sugar

Prepare the apples and place them at the bottom of a small casserole dish. In a bowl, mix the oats, sugar, flour, cinnamon, nutmeg, and butter until the mixture is crumbly. Use your hands or a fork to break up clumps. Sprinkle the mixture evenly over the apple slices and bake it for 30 minutes at 375 degrees.

Green Apple Pie Smoothie

- 1/2 frozen banana
- 1/4 cup organic rolled oats
- 1/2 cup milk or milk alternative
- 1 small apple, chopped
- 1/4 cup of Greek yogurt
- 1 cup ice
- 2 cups baby spinach or kale
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon

Add everything into a blender and blend until very smooth. Add extra ice or milk as needed. Serve cold.

Source: Recipes adapted from <https://www.kids-cooking-activities.com/apple-recipes.html> and <https://happykidskitchen.com/healthy-apple-recipes-to-cook-with-kids> in August 2025.



Songs about Me

Fingerplays and songs about how children feel and move their bodies develop self-awareness, build vocabulary, and encourage self-expression. Including movement with songs also develops their fine and large motor skills. Children are also developing math skills by hearing the rhyming words, patterns, and beats in songs.

You will notice that some of the following songs are to the tune of another familiar childhood song. This technique is referred to as “piggybacking” songs. You, or the children, can also create your own songs using this method. Encourage children’s creativity by asking them what words they would sing instead. Have fun with it! Use the following songs to get started.

Activity: Hello

Age group: Infants

What you need: You and your voice.

What you do: Place an infant on their back in front of you or hold them as you chant or sing the following rhyme to the tune of *Frère Jacques (Are You Sleeping?)*. “Hello (infant’s name), Hello (infant’s name), How are you? How are you? I can see you smiling; your eyes are brightly shining; I see you. I see you.” As you sing, point to your own smile and your eyes.

What they learn: Infants develop awareness of their name and the common greeting “Hello, how are you?” Hearing your voice and making eye contact with you also strengthens your relationship and builds the trust they need to feel safe and learn.

Source: Lyrics adapted from the traditional song *Frère Jacques*, also known as *Are You Sleeping?*

Activity: Monkey See, Monkey Do

Age group: Toddlers

What you need: You and your voice.

What you do: Invite toddlers to mimic your body movements by chanting the following rhyme. “Monkey see, monkey do, I can **wiggle**, how about you?” Replace the word “wiggle” with other movements such as hop, walk, clap, spin, or stretch.



What they learn: Toddlers develop body-awareness and self-control by moving their bodies in different ways. They also practice turn-taking as they wait for you to show them the movement first.

Source: Taken from the website www.prekinders.com/15-fabulous-fingerplays-and-facts August 2025

Activity: A Feelings Song

Age group: Preschool

What you need: You and your voice.

What you do: Gather children together and sing or chant this rhyme to the tune of *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*. Actions to perform while you sing are noted in parentheses. “I have feelings (point to yourself), you do too (point to someone else); let’s all sing about a few. I am happy (smile), I am sad (frown), I get scared (wrap your arms around yourself), I get mad (stomp your feet), I am proud of being me (hands on hips). That’s a feeling too you see. I have feelings (point to yourself), you do too (point to someone else); we just sang about a few.”

What they learn: Preschoolers learn vocabulary about emotions and develop self-regulation

Source: From the booklet *Rhythm & Rhyme: Activities for Early Childhood Mental Health* by Vista Village and available at www.vitalvillage.org/resources/document/ECMHVVN-Toolkit.pdf



Songs about Me

Activity: I Can

Age group: School-age

What you need: You, your voice, and a large space. You can also use jump ropes for children that are older and able to use a jump rope.

What you do: This rhyme involves movement, so make sure there is plenty of space. Older children who know how to play jump rope can sing this on their own while jumping rope. This is chanted to the tune of the traditional jump rope rhyme *Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear*. “I can, I can, turn around. I can, I can, touch the ground. I can, I can, jump so high. I can, I can touch the sky. I can, I can, wiggle my nose. I can, I can, touch my toes. I can, I can, nod my head. I can, I can, go to bed.”

What they learn: Children build muscles and spatial awareness while they practice following directions. If children use this as a jump rope rhyme, they are also building

coordination, balance, and cognitive function, as jumping rope requires both hemispheres of the brain to work together. If two children are turning the rope for another child, they are also learning to coordinate their movements.

Source: Lyrics adapted from the traditional rhyme *Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear*.



ABOUT CHS

For over 134 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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