


HOME & CLASSROOM

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Protecting Childhood

 BRIGHTSIDEUP

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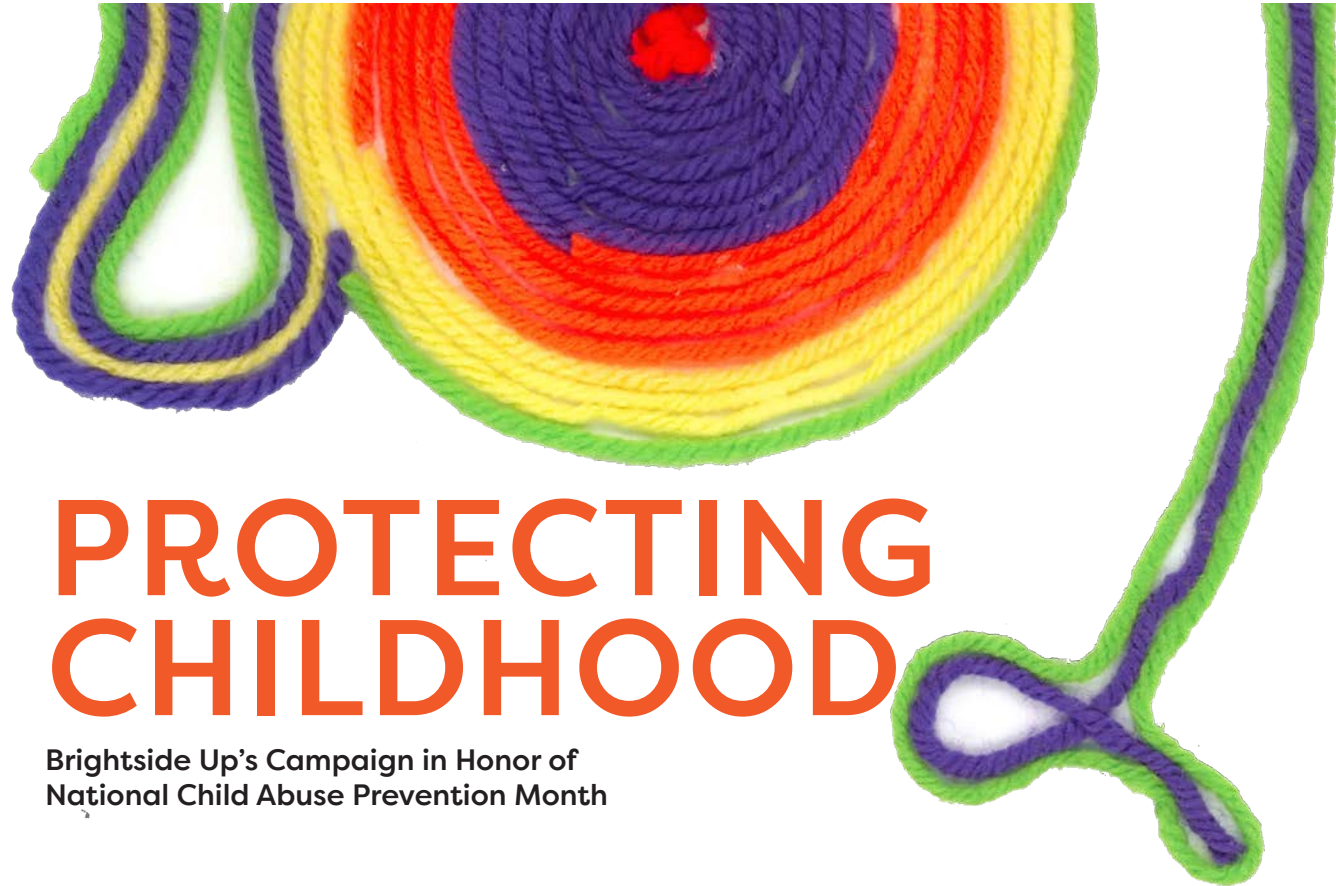
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PROTECTING CHILDHOOD

Brightside Up's Campaign in Honor of National Child Abuse Prevention Month

What does it truly mean to protect childhood? For some, it's about granting children the freedom to nurture their own ideas and explore the world on their terms. Others see it as a shield, safeguarding children from stress, trauma, and harm while they revel in the joys of play, mischief, and learning. As Dr. Ned Hallowell, a Child Psychiatrist and Author, puts it, "the desired outcome of childhood ought to be described by attitudes developed along the way—like optimism, enthusiasm, and hope—not by trophies, destinations, or degrees." (parentsleague.org/blog)

In our quest to preserve childhood innocence, we acknowledge the delicate balance between fostering understanding and shielding children from premature exposure to life's harsh realities. Our mission is not to stifle their curiosity or inhibit their growth but to create a protective bubble that gradually dissipates as they mature and become equipped to navigate life's complexities.

However, when this bubble is prematurely burst—whether through abuse or other adversities—childhood itself is at risk. As April marks Child Abuse Prevention Month, the Protecting Childhood Campaign serves as a reminder of our collective responsibility to safeguard the well-being of children. Together, let's raise awareness, empower communities, and champion the cause of protecting childhood.

This issue of Home and Classroom is dedicated to protecting childhood. Each article has been carefully selected to serve as a guide for protecting childhood in its own way. Many of the articles also extend into in depth conversations on this magazine's sister podcast of the same name. We will also be sharing ideas, inspiration and resources throughout the month of April on our Facebook page [wearebrightsideup](https://www.facebook.com/wearebrightsideup) and our Instagram page [homeandclassroom](https://www.instagram.com/homeandclassroom). Please join us and become a Protector of Childhood.

Seven Ways to Protect Childhood A Guide for Adults

1

FOSTER EXPLORATION AND DISCOVERY:

Encourage children to explore their interests and passions, allowing them the freedom to uncover what brings them joy and fulfillment.

2

EMBRACE UNPREDICTABILITY:

Let childhood unfold naturally, embracing the unpredictability of life's journey, which includes both surprises and triumphs.

3

BUILD A PROTECTIVE ENVIRONMENT:

Create a nurturing environment where children feel safe to play, dream, make mistakes, and learn without unnecessary pressure or interference.

4

RECONNECT WITH MEMORIES:

Take time to reconnect with your own childhood memories, gaining insights into the needs and experiences of children today.

5

PRIORITIZE INTERNAL DEVELOPMENT:

Shift focus from external achievements to nurturing internal qualities such as confidence, optimism, curiosity, resilience, and empathy.

6

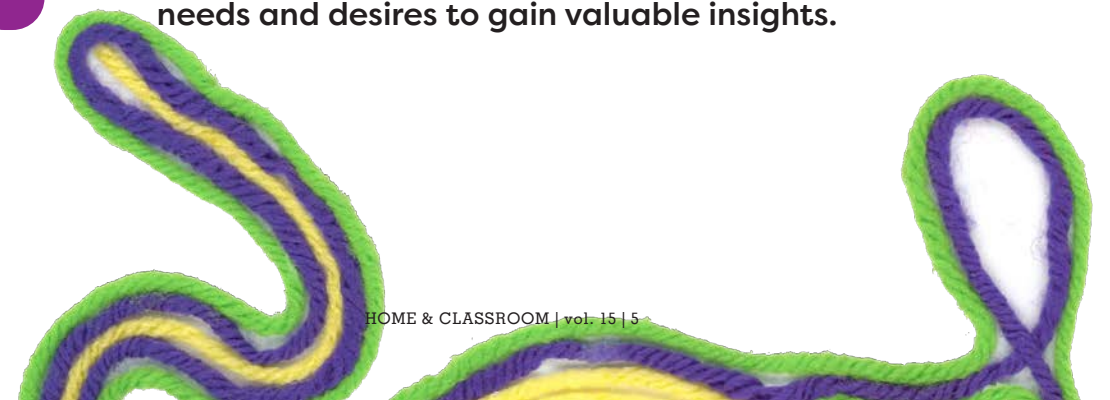
FOSTER A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT:

Cultivate a connected environment that is filled with hope and support, allowing children to grow into their authentic selves while receiving guidance and encouragement.

7

LEARN FROM CHILDREN:

Actively engage with children, listening to their perspectives, participating in their experiences, and understanding their needs and desires to gain valuable insights.



Separating Your Business and Personal Finances

by Kiersten Kennedy

Separating your business finances from your personal finances is crucial, particularly when it comes to filing taxes annually, and it could ultimately help you save money in the long run.

You can begin by opening a separate checking account with your local bank. Opt for opening the account where you usually conduct your regular banking, so you can access mobile app services that will facilitate transferring funds between your business and personal accounts effortlessly.

Upon opening a separate account, acquire a debit card and a set of checks for it to ensure you have the necessary resources to refrain from making purchases or paying bills for the business from your personal account. If you're not already using mobile banking, seek assistance from a bank representative to set up a mobile account.

Once you've established a business account, make all business-related purchases from this account. Even if you're using personal funds for a business purchase, you can easily transfer money using online banking or the mobile app on your phone. Avoid making business purchases from your personal account altogether. When you receive tuition payments, deposit the money into the business account before spending it. Our objective is to track how much money we're generating and spending each month, known as our cash flow in (the money we make) and our cash flow out (the cost to run our business).

Separating your accounts will provide insights into your business's performance and areas of opportunity to increase revenue and reduce costs. Failing to segregate busi-

ness expenses from personal ones leads to time-consuming sorting and prevents a clear understanding of your business's financial health. Are you turning a profit, or is your business draining money?

Reviewing your bank statement monthly helps identify opportunities to increase revenue and cut expenses. Add together your deposits and withdrawals, noting the totals at the bottom of the page. Did you earn more than you spent, or vice versa?

It's always preferable to have more money coming in than going out. Identifying areas for improvement in your business allows you to set financial goals to boost revenue. For instance, if you transferred five hundred dollars from your personal account to your business account, it could indicate insufficient earnings to cover costs and expenses for that month. Consider ways to increase your monthly income—are you maximizing capacity, charging competitive rates, or participating in relevant programs?

Emphasizing the importance of tracking your spending and purchases is crucial. If you're storing toys in unconventional places like kitchen cabinets or bathrooms yet continue purchasing them monthly, consider refraining from buying them the following month. If needed, opt for buying used toys instead of brand-new ones to save money.

Changing spending habits requires discipline, and forming new habits isn't always easy. However, stick with it—mastering this skill will provide a clear understanding of your business's cash flow and better financial control. Always retain your receipts as references or in case of audits or accountant requests.

A BRIEF ON NURSEMAID'S ELBOW

by Desiree Myers, RN CCHC

WHAT IS NURSEMAID'S ELBOW?

Nursemaid's elbow (also known as pulled elbow) is a common injury among toddlers and preschoolers. It occurs when the elbow ligament, a short band of flexible tissue connecting two bones and holding joints together, slips out of place and gets caught between the two bones in the elbow joint.

IS IT SERIOUS?

Not really. While Nursemaid's elbow is prevalent in toddlers and preschoolers, it is easily treated. Children with Nursemaid's elbow may experience arm, wrist, or elbow pain and may hold their arm straight or slightly bent while favoring the use of their other arm. Typically, there is no swelling, bruising, or physical deformity, which can make diagnosis challenging. If a medical professional cannot rule out a fracture or other injury based on history and physical examination, they may order an x-ray. Once diagnosed, treatment is usually straightforward. Sometimes the ligament may realign itself spontaneously. If not, a medical professional can perform a gentle movement called a reduction. This may cause some discomfort, but the child usually returns to normal within 15 minutes.

HOW DOES IT HAPPEN?

In children, the elbow ligament is still loose, making it prone to slipping out of place. Nursemaid's elbow typically occurs when children are lifted by the arm during play, swung around by the hands, or pulled by the hand to prevent falls or running away. It can also happen if a child rolls over on their arm while playing or sleeping. Once the ligament tightens, the injury becomes much less common but can still occur up to age 7.

CAN IT BE PREVENTED?

Absolutely! The best way to prevent Nursemaid's elbow is to avoid pulling, tugging, or swinging a child by the arms or hands. While this may not prevent it entirely, as it can also occur during play or sleep, it significantly reduces the chances of it happening.

HOW DOES IT AFFECT CHILD CARE?

Nursemaid's elbow can occur anywhere, including in child care settings. It's essential to remember that if this happens in child care, it should be considered a serious incident. Therefore, an incident report should be filed, and OCFS should be notified. Educating all staff on how to prevent Nursemaid's elbow can help decrease its incidence in child care settings.





Image by Rudy and Peter Skitterians from Pixabay

IN CHILD CARE SETTINGS

By DIANA BENDER-CARBUCCIA

A couple of years ago, I picked up my younger cousin from pre-school, and on our drive, we discussed her day. She expressed her desire to become a doctor, only to be met with a classmate's assertion that only boys could pursue that career. Her demeanor changed, and I asked her what she thought about that. She responded, "I can be anything, right?" Reflecting on this conversation and her questioning tone, I often wonder how gender stereotypes shape our interactions as a society and the messages children receive.

As educators, we strive to support children's development by understanding their world, and one significant influence on their experiences is gender stereotypes. In your interactions with children, have you noticed the impact of gender stereotypes?

Firstly, it's essential to grasp the concept of gender. According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), gender is a social construct that dictates societal and cultural expectations for behavior based on assigned sexes. Children typically begin to understand gender roles or norms around the age of two, learning expectations, behaviors, and preferences based on gender binaries.

Now, imagine a classroom where children freely explore toys and activities based on their individual preferences rather than societal norms. Would they try new things, expand their interests, and flourish socially and emotionally?

Encouraging such exploration supports children's development and mental well-being. Play is fundamental to learning and understanding the world. NAEYC emphasizes our role as educators in creating a safe space for children to develop their identities and challenge gender stereotypes.

Here are some strategies to foster a supportive and gender-inclusive environment:

- Provide activities and materials that encourage open-ended play that allows children to explore beyond traditional gender roles.
- Use inclusive phrases when addressing children or the classroom. Try phrases like this "Time for everyone to clean up," or "Line up here if your favorite animal is a cow," instead of "Boys line up here" or "Girls over here."
- Compliment children on their individual characteristics or skills. Try something like this "You were so kind when you helped your friend up from their fall" in place of a compliments that reinforce gender stereotypes like "what a pretty dress you are wearing today."
- Gently question and expand children's thinking. If a child says, "Only boys can do this!" Ask the children "Why can't everyone do this?" or "All people can do this." Allow children to ask questions and have a conversation with them.

By implementing these approaches, we can create child care environments where all children feel respected, understood, and affirmed for who they are.



Scan the QR code or visit
<https://tinyurl.com/4ruztuz5> to learn more

RESOURCES:
Feeney, S., Freeman, N. K., & Schaffer, K. (2019). Focus On Ethics: Gender Expression and Identity | NAEYC. Retrieved from Naeyc.org website: <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/nov2019/gender-expression-identity>
Gender Justice in Early Childhood. (2017). Gender in early childhood V1 [Fact sheet]. Retrieved from www.gender-justiceinearlychildhood.com

We are proud to present our FREE Mandated Reporter Training as part of our Protecting Childhood Campaign in honor of National Child Abuse Prevention Month. At the heart of our mission lies a deep commitment to protecting childhood in all its forms. As child care providers, your role extends far beyond simply caring for children; you are also defenders of their safety and well-being. Together, let's create a world where every child can thrive in safety and security.

Register today!

MANDATED REPORTER



It is the role of anyone working directly with children to know and identify when a call must be made to report child abuse. In New York State, everyone working at a licensed/registered child care program is a mandated reporter. Prepare yourself for your role as a mandated reporter if you observe the characteristics of child abuse and maltreatment. Know when and how to make the call to the Central Registrar.

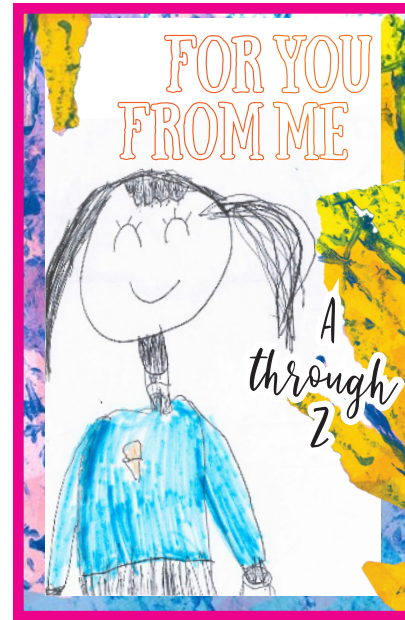
OCFS: 6, 8, 9
CBK: 3, 5
HOURS: 2.5, CEU: 0.25

INFORMANTES OBLIGATORIOS



Es función de cualquier persona que trabaje directamente con niños saber e identificar cuándo se debe realizar una llamada para denunciar el abuso infantil. En el estado de Nueva York, todas las personas que trabajan en un programa de cuidado infantil registrado/con licencia son informantes obligatorios. Prepárese para su papel de denunciante obligatorio si observa las características del abuso y maltrato infantil. Sepa cuándo y cómo realizar la llamada al Registrador Central.

OCFS: 6, 8, 9
CBK: 3, 5
HOURS: 2.5, CEU: 0.25



Introducing "For You From Me A through Z" A Resource for Mental Well-being



In December 2023, Brightside Up proudly published "For You from Me A through Z." At its core, this guide is designed to offer guidance and support to adults navigating the intricacies of mental health consultation in a familiar and accessible style.

Serving as a roadmap, the book empowers individuals to prioritize their mental well-being by providing clarity on what to expect throughout the consultation process. A key objective of the book is to destigmatize mental health consultation and cultivate greater awareness and understanding within communities.

Through clear, accessible language and contributions from mental health professionals, "For You from Me A through Z" seeks to inspire proactive steps towards mental health prioritization. The launch event served as a testament to the collaborative spirit behind the project, bringing together individuals united in their commitment to mental well-being.

Attendees had the opportunity to engage with the authors, explore the book's contents, and celebrate its potential impact on the community. Looking ahead, Brightside Up remains dedicated to promoting mental health awareness and providing support to individuals on their journey to improved well-being.

As "For You from Me A through Z" reaches readers, Brightside Up hopes you will find it to be a valuable resource, offering guidance, support, and encouragement. Copies of "For You From Me A through Z" are still available! Contact Brightside Up today to request yours at 518-426-7181.



Together We Grow: Cultivating Connections in Family and Group Family Care by Nora O'Hanlon

When working in child care full-time, by the end of the day, providers are often left feeling desperate for some adult conversation. In center-based programs, co-teachers can chat during the children's nap time or catch up with one another in the break room. But for in-home providers, who often work by themselves, that sweet release of chatting with another fully formed human can be much harder to come by. Discussing work with your family and friends can be helpful, but if they aren't familiar with children or child care, you may not get the attuned and supportive responses that you're looking for. Who else will understand the struggles of potty training three children at once? Who else will share in your deep appreciation for Velcro sneakers? And who can you go to when the regulations and licensors aren't making any sense?

A few ambitious providers from Saratoga County have found a solution. It started when Laura Rysedorph (Owner/Provider at Tiny Talk Daycare) connected via Facebook with Michelle Sleicher (Owner/Provider at Tender Hearts Childcare) and Carla Seeley (Owner/Provider at ABC Daycare). Being new to owning and operating a New York State licensed child care facility, Laura had questions like: How do these state regulations apply to my program? What should be included in my contracts and handbooks? And What should I expect when my licensor pops in for a visit? Michelle and Carla were able to provide an element of mentoring that Laura found invaluable and is often hard to come by in this sometimes-isolating field.

The three have made a habit of getting together bi-monthly (every other month)

to share ideas, experiences, struggles, and successes. Laura reported that the group has supported her understanding of a variety of child care-centric topics from organizing paperwork to planning curriculum to making the most of resources from New York's Quality Stars program. They even share resources and information from live training events when not everyone is able to attend. The gatherings serve as a metaphorical break room for these providers to vent, brainstorm, and sustain themselves as high-quality early childhood educators.

If you're an in-home child care provider living in Saratoga or the surrounding counties, and you're interested in joining this support group, you can reach out to Laura via email for more information at laurarysedorph@gmail.com. If you're an in-home provider who lives outside of the Saratoga area, you can reach out to Brightside Up for resources and supports for your program.



seeking sensory

RUGS, MATS, AND BLANKETS FOR INFANT EXPLORATION

Our quest for sensory experiences in early childhood programs has led us to discover a simple yet profound solution: looking down. In many Family/Group Family Child Care Programs and Child Care Centers, we observed teachers purposefully placing textured rugs, blankets, and soft mats on the floor to facilitate safe and enriching infant exploration.

Once infants have been tended to with soothing, feeding, resting, and meaningful interaction, they are ready for independent exploration. This is their time to discover their body movements, listen to the voices around them, observe and learn from patterns and routines, and utilize their sense of touch to understand objects and their properties.

At Mrs. Marva's Child Care Academy, we witnessed a three-month-old infant being transitioned from a swing to a gray, high-pile throw rug. As she stretched her arms and legs wide, repeatedly pulling them back in, it was evident that the freedom of movement delighted her. We speculated on whether the soft, high-pile rug encouraged these movements and how it felt against her skin.

Older infants also showed interest in the soft material and engaged in play

with it. We discussed the softness of the rug, how it felt to touch, and how the texture felt when we rubbed it against our cheeks. Their fingers delved into the high-pile, and they gently grazed their cheeks along the surface. Terms like "tickles" and "gentle touch" were exchanged. Soothing songs like "Good Night Baby" enhanced the play, creating a sensory and social learning experience for multiple infants.

The throw rug served as a natural visual guide, ensuring the safety of the youngest infant from the active feet of walking infants. With adult guidance, older infants learned to crawl up to their friends instead of walking onto the mat. The rule of "careful crawls" on the gray rug, rather than walking feet, set the expectation that the spot was for calm sensory exploration, ensuring the safety of infants on the mat.

This exploration can manifest in various forms, including bumpy mats, squishy mats, prickly mats, soft blankets, scratchy blankets, blankets with ribbons and tags, and rugs of diverse textures and designs. Clearly, infant caregivers in our area are also Seeking Sensory, as they have discovered these fantastic materials.

by Kathleen Harland



If you're an infant-toddler teacher with captivating sensory play experiences to share, send an email to homeandclassroom@brightsideup.org and you could be featured!

BUILDING BABY'S BRAIN - VROOM!

By Mary Miranda, Family Educator

When my son Vinny was eight months old, my mother-in-law sent me a baby flash card program. She was convinced this type of stimulation was necessary to ensure that he had a good head start on learning and would be successful in school. Besides, her sister's grandchild was in a flashcard learning program. Heaven forbid Vinny be left behind! While I was intrigued by the concept of maximizing Vinny's opportunities for learning, I was also extremely skeptical. The program required you to have a five-minute session with your child four times a day. It seemed like an excessively structured program for an infant and Vinny was only eight months old, he didn't do anything for five minutes straight! I was also terribly busy, working part-time and taking college classes, and I was concerned about the time investment.

My husband, Pete, was busy working full-time to earn his PhD in chemistry; however, he liked the idea of being proactive about brain development and felt there was no harm in trying the flash cards. I agreed to try for a couple of days to see if Vinny enjoyed the activity and also if it would be too difficult to manage from a time perspective. We decided I would do the morning sessions, Pete would take the evening sessions, and we would only do the middle sessions on weekends because Vinny was in child care during the week.

The first morning session went ... okay. Vinny wasn't pleased that I cut short our normal morning routine of singing about his

amazing body parts while I changed his diaper and dressed him for the day. He looked perplexed when I strapped him into the indoor baby seat on the floor instead of taking him out to the car to drive to child care. The program's instructions emphasized using the seat in order to help the baby concentrate and avoid distractions. He did not enjoy the confinement and started whining and kicking his feet. I felt strapping him into a seat amounted to forced participation, but since I had agreed to try the program, I gave Vinny a card to hold to distract him. He calmed

“ THAT MEANS THAT EVERY MOMENT OF EVERY DAY IS A POTENTIAL BRAIN BUILDING MOMENT - EVEN ORDINARY DAILY ROUTINES SUCH AS DIAPER CHANGING, MEALTIMES, BATHING, AND PREPARING FOR BEDTIME.

down and chewed on it as he watched me show him the cards. I cheerfully identified the pictures “with great excitement” as per the program instructions. I had decided to only use five cards per session, and we made it through the stack three times before he showed signs of boredom. Three cycles came out to be about forty-five seconds. That seemed more reasonable to me considering Vinny's age than the five minutes dictated by the program.

Pete was not going to be home in time for Vinny's evening session because he had an experiment running that needed to finish. I did the session, and it went as it had in the morning. I sacrificed another flashcard, and we completed three cycles. He didn't seem to particularly like the session, but neither did he complain. After flashcards came bath time. Vinny LOVED bath time. We always played all kinds of games - peekaboo with the squeaky toys, ‘what's that body part?’ followed by loads of tickles, bath water fill and dump, and we took turns blowing raspberries. Pete unexpectedly came home in the middle of bath time and immediately wanted to take his turn at doing a flashcard session. He scooped Vinny up and Vinny screamed because he had not finished enjoying the bath. Pete dressed him, played with him for a bit to distract him from his annoyance, and then brought him out for the session. As soon as Vinny saw the chair, he started arching his body backwards and making cranky noises. I put the chair away and let Vinny sit in my lap while Pete read the cards. We sacrificed another flashcard for Vinny to chew, but still only made it through two cycles before Vinny wanted to get down. I set him free and we all read a bedtime story before placing him in his crib for the night.

The next morning Pete was going to the lab late since he had worked late the night before. He wanted to try the cards again. He had set his alarm for 15 minutes earlier so that none of Vinny's fun routines would be short changed, thinking that this had been the problem the night before. Vinny was his usual cheerful self through all his morning activities; however, as soon as he saw the seat and the cards he started to yell. I put him down and he crawled away from us very, very quickly. Pete and I just looked at each other and laughed. So much for the great flash card experiment. Pete took the cards and flicked

them around the room one by one so that Vinny could enjoy crawling after them.

Vinny quite clearly felt that the flash card program was developmentally inappropriate!



But our hearts were in the right place. My mother-in-law, Pete, and I all shared the same common goal that most parents and caregivers of children share – to provide our children with the opportunities necessary to maximize their development and reach their full potential. Yet it's not unusual for parents to worry that they are not doing enough to help build their young children's brains. “The early years are the learning years” is a mantra they may have heard many times, making them aware of the critical nature of a child's early experiences in determining successful future outcomes; however, a parent may not feel they know enough about brain science or have the ‘teaching skills’ necessary to effectively build their child's brain power. This is why flash card

programs and other similar products can be very appealing to parents and caregivers.

Parents may feel these types of programs are the best answer because they are developed by 'experts' who make 'scientific' promises about maximizing a child's development. A quick search on the internet reveals dozens of programs for parents to purchase that claim to boost brain development in young children. These programs tend to be expensive, time consuming, and are often not based on what brain science tells us are the best ways for infants and young children to learn. So, what's a parent to do?

Fortunately, there is a global program funded and supported by the Bezos Family Foundation for parents of young children (birth through age 5) called Vroom. Its goal is to help parents and caregivers of young children understand the science of early brain development and to empower and support them in their critical role as children's first teachers. The Bezos Family Foundation wants parents to appreciate themselves as their child's teacher, and to understand that they already have all the skills they need to build their babies' brains, because a young child's brain develops best within the context of the type of loving reciprocal relationship that their parents are already providing for them.

Through the Vroom program, parents will become aware of the massive amounts of brain building activities they engage in with their young children naturally throughout the day. If you recall, Vinny loved all the activities that my husband and I did with him each day during normal life routines: kissing and naming body parts during diaper changing, reading books at bedtime, playing peekaboo at bath time. Parents often discount these activities as not being 'real learning'. In actuality, it is the best kind of learning because it takes

place during meaningful life experiences. Vroom helps parents understand the value and importance of these wonderful daily interactions between themselves and their children and helps parents build on them to increase the brain boosting value.

The Vroom.org website provides resources and materials to parents and caregivers that give clear and easily understood explanations about the science of early brain development. Children's brains are hard-wired from birth to take in every piece of information from every interaction and every instance of sensory stimulation in their environment. This information is processed and used to begin the formation of connections between the nerve cells in their brain. That means that every moment of every day is a potential brain building moment – even ordinary daily routines such as diaper changing, mealtimes, bathing, and preparing for bedtime.

Daily household chores are also ripe with opportunities for brain building according to Vroom. Involving children in activities like sorting laundry, tidying up clutter, and gardening outside form brain connections that lead to the development of the social, physi



cal, cognitive, and emotional skills that will be so important for children's future success in school and in life. Even running around town taking care of errands and appointments like doctor visits and grocery shopping provide so many opportunities for engaging in brain building experiences.

The beauty of the Vroom system is that it recognizes the extremely busy nature of the lives of today's parents and caregivers of young children and takes into consideration the fact that many families must live within the constraints of a sensible budget. Vroom developed an amazing free app that parents can install on their phones. It provides a free daily activity via text for a parent and child to enjoy together. These activities are called Vroom Tips, and have no significant time investment for parents because they take advantage of the learning opportunities that exist in everyday routines and events. They also are budget conscious because the activities either require no materials, or require materials that are easily available in the average home. Vroom tips are not a game to play on the phone with the child. The tip consists of directions to the parent for engaging with their child in a fun, hands-on activity.

There are also hundreds more that a parent can access, divided into topics, to help them take advantage of the brain building opportunities in every moment of every day. Washing the laundry? Download an activity. Going to the doctor's office? Download an activity. Getting ready for bed? Download another activity. After completing the activity, parents can read a simple "Brainy Background" description that clearly explains all the amazing skill and brain building development that happened in their child's brain during this fun activity.

My son Vinny is almost 40 years old now, yet I can recall his peals of laughter during bath

time as if it were yesterday. Flashcard and DVD brain booster programs may be aesthetically pleasing and impress parents with their claims to create baby geniuses, but Vinny never squealed with excitement when we were flash-carding. He hated it, and the last thing we want is to teach our children to hate learning. Vroom provides parents with the tools and encouragement they need to develop their children's brains while simultaneously having fun and strengthening the parent-child relationship. Now THAT's real learning!

Think Vroom sounds great? To learn more about Vroom and its resources for parents and caregivers, visit their website at <https://www.vroom.org>.

To install their app on your phone, just visit your favorite app store and search for Daily Vroom. Remember, it's free!

it's

time for a

RECHANGING THE

by Jenny Edwards



While traveling to various child care programs throughout my work week, I often rely on the GPS on my phone. I have a habit of conversing with the GPS, and our interactions typically unfold like this:

GPS lady: ***“In one thousand feet, turn right.”***

Me: ***“What is one thousand feet? How far is that? Where am I turning?”***

GPS lady: ***“In six hundred feet, turn right.”***

Me: ***“Who on Earth knows what six hundred feet looks like! HOW FAR IS SIX HUNDRED FEET, LADY?”***

GPS Lady: ***“Turn right.”***

Me: ***“What!!!!???”***

GPS lady: ***“Rerouting.”***

Clearly, from the above vignette, which happens weekly, one can see that I have no ability to gauge distance in terms of feet while driving. It’s utterly foreign to me. Is one thousand feet akin to a city block? What does that even look like in rural areas where there are no blocks? My husband once attempted to help me understand. “Just think of football field lengths,” he said. But that wasn’t helpful; I had to look up the length of a football field (360 feet), and even then, I couldn’t visualize it. Arbitrary lengths in feet are too abstract for me. I need meaningful, concrete directions such as, “After the Dunkin, turn right. In one block, merge into the left lane because, in three blocks, at the light, you will be turning left.”

As a middle-aged adult, I still struggle with some arbitrary concepts. Now, imagine if your brain wasn’t yet at the developmental level to

understand abstract concepts. What if, every day, you were asked numerous questions about the same abstract concept? It would likely feel akin to my confused state while attempting to grasp distance in terms of feet.

Interestingly, many of us repeat something similar every day in our early childhood classrooms by conducting traditional, whole-group calendar time. Young children under the age of six lack the developmental capabilities to firmly grasp the passage of time as traditionally measured by a calendar. The calendar itself is a highly abstract and symbolic representation

of days, weeks, and months. Consider how we introduce abstract symbols like numbers. We use picture clues, count concrete objects, and visually represent numbers in a concrete manner, such as counting all our friends while standing in a line. But what do we use to

“
If children are frequently expected to perform tasks beyond their understanding, they may lose confidence in their intellectual abilities, which could negatively impact their future learning.
”

represent concepts like yesterday, today, and tomorrow? These terms, along with the days of the week and months of the year, remain floating in a realm of abstract terms in the minds of young children. Even if they recite today’s date perfectly, is it meaningful? Do they truly understand its significance? One preschool teacher tasked their student teacher with discovering if the children understood the calendar. After three years of daily calendar recitations in the program, not a single five-year-old could articulate the day of the week, the current month, or the date. They had no understanding of any elements of calendar time on their own; only when reciting as a class were they able to produce correct answers. True education and learning occur when individuals acquire new knowledge by making meaningful connections to what they already know. Calendar recitation, in contrast, is mere memorization without any deeper understanding or significance. While some may argue that children need to know this, they do so when their minds are developmentally ready for such abstract concepts. Studies suggest they can fully comprehend the traditional calendar and its representations between the ages of 6 and 11, depending on the child’s development. These children will engage in calendar activities daily from kindergarten up to third grade, aligning with their developmental readiness.

So, what now? As educators of young children, we must be mindful of what constitutes developmentally appropriate practice and avoid tasks that are too abstract for them to grasp. If children are frequently expected to perform tasks beyond their understanding, they may lose confidence in their intellectual abilities, which could negatively impact their future learning. The remainder of this article will propose two alternatives to traditional classroom calendar time. One alternative will focus on ways to record the passage of time in meaningful, concrete ways that young children can understand. The other alternative will suggest meaningful activities to replace calendar time.

Young children, under the age of six, are beginning to grasp certain ways of passing time within the context of their daily lives.

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Children learn best when activities are hands-on and relate to their world.
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They are starting to understand concepts like later, before, and after, yet they still struggle with judging distances or lengths of time. Providers can help develop these budding concepts in a couple of ways.

The first method involves using an interactive daily visual schedule. This schedule should include picture cues, as most children cannot read at this age. In my classroom, I used a clothespin with a paper arrow glued onto it. I would then move the clip to indicate where we were in the day. This visual representation of terms like before, after, and later proved incredibly helpful. For instance, I would move the clip to lunchtime and ask, “Children, look at our schedule. We are at lunch. What did we do right before lunch? What are we going to do right after lunch? How many things do we need to do before we go home later?”

Another idea is for children to record the passage of time on a large desk calendar at the end of the day or on a roll of paper, such as those used for painting on easels. If you opt for the paper roll, simply draw vertical lines to delineate the separation of days. This recording occurs at the end of the day, with children suggesting what should be recorded. For example, if they found apples near the apple tree during a walk, you could draw an apple tree. If they learned that apples begin with the letter A, a child could write A on the paper. If they decided that finding five straight sticks on the playground was significant, that’s what gets recorded. Adding captions to drawings ensures they remain comprehensible in the future. You can also do a quick recap each day before recording. “Do you remember that five days ago, we recorded the firetruck

because one passed the playground with flashing lights that day? Let's count how many days back that was." Programs that have tried this method report high levels of engagement among children, unlike the drudgery associated with traditional calendar time. Now, during center time, children go to their "calendar" and discuss their recordings. One teacher even reported that children have wonderful conversations about their recorded events. This approach creates a meaningful connection to the passage of time for young children.

So, if you agree with the above and decide to try recording the day's events instead of a traditional calendar, you'll have more time for morning circle. Now, what will you do with it? Remember, most whole-group activities should be limited to under 20 minutes (15 minutes for younger ones), as this aligns with their attention span at this age. This small window is ideal for a couple of music and movement activities, introducing new themes or activities, or sharing a short, interactive story. Another option is to provide concrete math experiences such as patterns and counting using real materials like unit cubes, table blocks, or pattern blocks. Children learn best when activities are hands-on and relate to their world. It's also an excellent opportunity for community problem-solving. For instance, if some children aren't getting a chance to play at the sensory table during center time, you could address this issue during morning circle and ask the children how they might solve it. This gives them agency in their little community and fosters problem-solving skills.

Embrace your young learners, document all the wonderful things you do together, and relish your age-appropriate morning circle time. You'll love this change, and I'll be here, navigating city blocks, rerouting again and again.

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POSSIBLE SIDEBARS

Questions to ask when recording your day

- What was a special part of our day?
- Did anything new happen?
- What excited you today?
- What would you like to remember about our day?
- Would that be something you would like to draw on the Calendar?
- How would we draw that?
- What should we draw to show that on our calendar?

Things to do Instead of Calendar

- Music and movement
- Instruments and playing with rhythm
- Introducing a new theme or activity
- Concrete math activity with real materials
- Story time
- Fingerplays
- Letter Yoga
- Easy Science Experiments
- Question of the day and graphing the answers
- Community problem solving

SCAN TO WIN
A COPY OF 'VERY GOOD HATS' AND
YOU'LL ALSO RECEIVE A TIP CARD,
ACTIVITY, AND A DEMO VISIT FROM
BRIGHTSIDE UP! THE WINNER WILL
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Rocky Pond Books (January 10, 2023)

**Very Good Hats by Emma Straub
and Illustrated by Blanca Gomez**

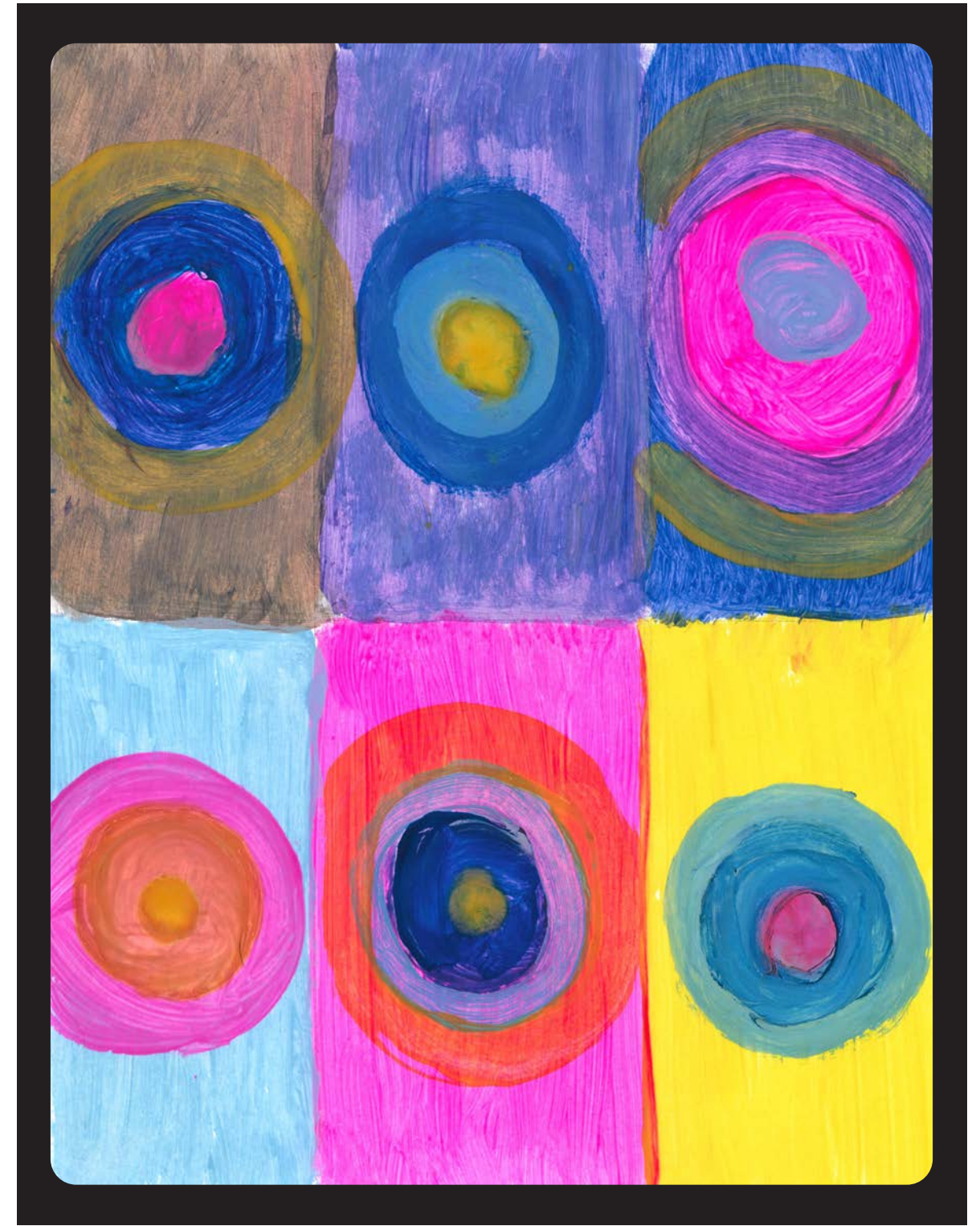
What comes to mind when you think of a hat? A fedora? A bucket hat or a baseball cap? How about pajama pants, bubbles, or pudding cups?

In this thoughtful and poetic read-aloud, you and your child can discover the truth: That anything can be a hat so long as you believe it is. Similar to the concept in the classic story *A House is a House for Me* by Mary Ann Hoberman, this book suggests that everything is just a hat for something else. On each brightly colored and intentionally detailed page, readers will learn how easily everyday items can be transformed into a unique and fashionable piece of headwear.

As you turn each page, encourage your child to point out the hats they see and tell you which one is their favorite. Ask which hats they might like to wear. Extend their engagement by pointing out the smaller details within the pages, like the man who's lost his hat to the wind or the miniature hats on each woodland creature.

Consider wrapping up your story time with some creative play of your own. Present your child with a variety of toys and safe household items and watch their imagination come to life. Notice your child's interests and share in their sense of wonder as they discover all the hats that had been hiding around your home.

Bright Reads
by Nora O'Hanlon



FAMILY ENGAGEMENT PERSPECTIVES

the experience of a
mother & teacher

by Heather Sweet

As a teacher, I was passionate about connecting with families to better meet the needs of their children. When I became a mom, family engagement deeply changed for me. It was important to stay connected to our family child care provider to support my eight week old daughter's day while we were apart. To leave my eight week old for the first time was the hardest day of my life, but my family child care provider made me feel at ease. The relationship she built with me didn't just start on the first day of care. It was also the support she lent while I was expecting and searching for the right child care provider. She was warm and accepting of me on the phone and made time for me to come see her program. The experience of being on the receiving end of care opened my eyes and began to shape my perspective from the teacher side.

At every program and for each individual family, family engagement can look different. The main thing is that we, as the professional in the early care field, take the responsibility of initiating the connection with families and continuously offer them various opportunities for engagement. The NYAEYC code of ethical conduct states it best, "Families are of primary importance in the children's development. Because the family and the early childhood practitioner have a common interest in the child's well-being, we acknowledge a primary responsibility to bring about communication, cooperation, and collaboration between the home and the early childhood program in ways that enhance the child's development."

THREE IDEAS TO GROW FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN YOUR PROGRAM

1

VALUE AND NURTURE THE RELATIONSHIPS

- The child's family is their first teacher. Ask them about their dreams, hopes and traditions.
- Notice and validate family-child interactions. "Wow, did you see how they smiled as soon as they saw you walk into the room?"
- Each day, share positive developmental observations about their children.

2

RESPECT AND HOLD FAMILIES IN HIGH REGARD

- Take the time to get to know each family's culture and language. Seek their input to incorporate the home language into the program.
- Honor and respect all family structures.
- Support families' parenting styles. Engage in conversations about parenting choices and ways to support this in program.

3

SUPPORT AND PARTNER WITH FAMILIES

- Highlight children's developmental progress.
- Make connections to the child's learning process and ask about their observations at home.
- Create opportunities for families to share their culture at program events.

Spotlight DOTTIE



Empowering Child Care through Passion and Quality: Dottie's Story by Lisa Stoler, Quality Improvement Specialist

conferences, and forged connections with fellow child care providers. These interactions have fostered a supportive community where providers can share experiences and offer mutual support.

Navigating the roles of a business owner and child care provider can be daunting, but Dottie understands the importance of professionalism in her role. QUALITYstarsNY has played a pivotal role in bolstering her confidence and decision-making skills, empowering her to navigate the complexities of her profession with assurance.

One of the most enjoyable aspects of her involvement with QUALITYstarsNY has been the transformation of her play space. Witnessing the children engage with the new environment and materials has brought her immense joy. Dottie firmly believes in the power of play as a fundamental tool for children's learning and development.

In realizing her dream, Dottie exemplifies the transformative impact of passion, dedication, and quality in the field of child care. Through her commitment to excellence and continuous improvement, she not only enriches the lives of the children in her care but also strengthens the fabric of her community.

Dottie's Home Day Care and Preschool came into existence in 2020 when Dottie decided to pursue her passion and establish an in-home child care and preschool center. Her journey began during her teenage years while working as a Sabbath School Teacher at her local church, where she discovered her calling. Over time, she continued her career in various child care centers in the Capital District, nurturing her vision. When the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic arose, Dottie saw an opportunity to assist families in her community by launching her own program.

What Dottie cherishes most about running her own program is the autonomy it provides. She relishes the freedom of being her own boss and curating daily activities for the children. Among her favorite activities is circle time, where she engages with the children, delving into their emotions, reading stories, and singing songs.

For over a year, Dottie has been an active participant in QUALITYstarsNY, a program that has significantly benefited her program. Through QUALITYstarsNY, she has implemented new policies and procedures, attended various training sessions and

Spotlight JULIANNA

From Student to Teacher: Julianna's Story by Brittney Faulisi

From Julianna Peek's earliest memories, she enjoyed playing teacher and lending knowledge to her stuffed animals, treating them as real students. During these playful teaching sessions, she would often mimic the actions and words of her child care provider. Peek said, "I loved creating little tests and assignments for my 'students' and writing on a whiteboard while delivering lessons to my stuffed class. It became evident to me that teaching came naturally, and I found great pleasure in guiding and learning alongside children."

Julianna is currently pursuing a degree in Elementary Education with a concentration in Chemistry at the State University of Oswego. While at Oswego, she joined the intramural volleyball team and a book club. Julianna shared with us that the university's courses have adequately prepared her to connect with students and foster a positive and organized classroom environment. Peek said, "I gained valuable experience through over 60 hours of observation and involvement in public school districts, with more to come in the upcoming fall semester."

Lil Lambs, originally a Group Family Child Care run out of the provider's home, is the child care and after-school care where Julianna attended from infancy through elementary school. Over time, Lil Lambs evolved into a private Christian early childhood education program, led by the owner Connie Reynolds. From its humble beginnings with 16 students in her home, Lil Lambs has grown to accommodate a capacity of 84 students as a Child Care Center.

When asked why she chose to pursue a job at Lil Lambs, Peek said, "To me, there is no better place to teach than where I was once taught." She has been an employee at Lil Lambs for more than five years, working in various capacities, including in the infant, toddler, and preschool rooms. During the school year, Julianna is a student teacher in the Kindergarten classroom.



Now, she is thrilled to share that she has secured a position as the Summer Camp Lead Teacher, a role that she deeply appreciates.

We asked Julianna to share with us any projects that she is currently working on with the students. Here is what she said:

"My motivation to teach stems entirely from my love for kids and my passion for education. Science integration is a priority for me. In fact, at the end of the school year, I created a booklet called "Summer Science with Miss Peek" filled with science experiments and projects for students and their families to enjoy doing over the summer break." [She is also using her booklet to plan lessons for her summer program students where they do various engaging experiments in the classroom.]

She went on to say, "Science education extends far beyond the confines of textbooks, engaging in hands-on experiments allows students the opportunity to foster their creativity and explore through trial and error. This approach empowers them to think innovatively and discover the wonders of science in a memorable way."

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