

Ideas for **Family Fun**



Early Childhood Family Education

Building Blocks for Family & School Success

ECFE.info



Early Childhood Family Education

An interactive, educational program for all Minnesota families with children between the ages of birth to kindergarten

Creates a circle of support for families — friends, family, school and community

A wonderful place for young children and their parents to learn and play together

Offered in all school districts throughout Minnesota

Recognizes that parents are a child's first and most important teachers

Offers parents hands-on learning experiences that will nourish a lifetime of teachable moments with their children

**ECFE is for
families
like yours!**



Learning Begins at Birth!

If an infant, toddler or preschooler is interested and involved in an activity — and having fun — he or she is learning. So treasure these early days of playing and cuddling with your little one — it is exactly what your child needs to grow and learn.



Compelling evidence exists that early arts experience has an impact on all aspects of a child's learning and development. Art and music are essential in expanding the horizons of children.

Art & Music

● All Ages (Birth–5 years) ● Toddlers (1–2 year olds) ● Preschoolers (3–5 year olds)

● Using large sheets of paper, paint to music. Observe how the pictures change between Country, Rock & Roll, Opera & Jazz.

● Keep a variety of materials, such as wrapping paper scraps, fabric, ribbon, or packing peanuts to make collages.

● Use glue sticks, a small glue bottle, or Q-tips dipped in small amounts of glue. Make the collages on paper plates, cardboard or heavy paper.

● Color with different items, markers, crayons, chalk.

● Make your own dot-to-dots. Randomly put dots on a piece of paper. Draw the lines any way to connect the marks.

● Go outside with a bucket of water and large paintbrush. Paint the sidewalk, fence, toys.

● Cut an apple or potato in half or into a shape. Dip the shape into paint and press on paper.



● Make a coffee can or oatmeal box drum and let your child beat it with a wooden or plastic spoon.

● Make a kazoo out of an empty toilet paper roll. Put a square of wax paper over one end and secure with a rubber band. Show your child how to put his mouth against the open end of the kazoo and hum.

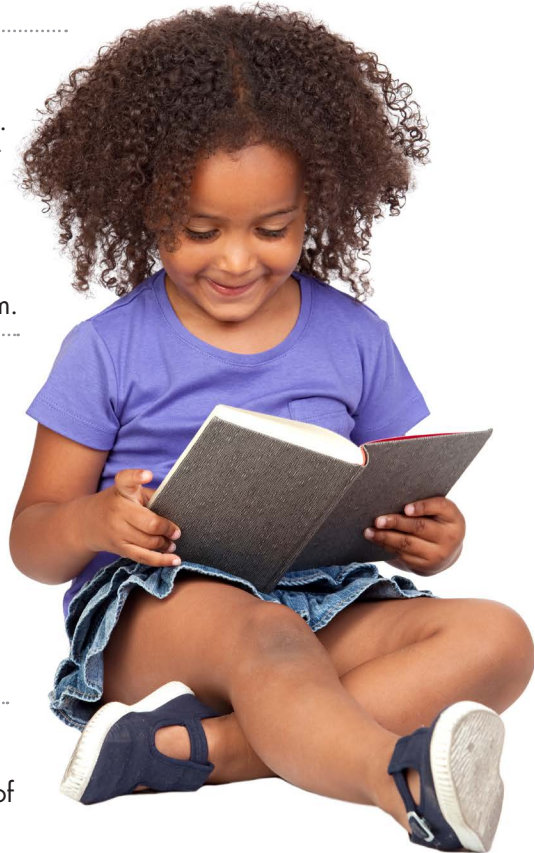
● Have your children walk slowly around the room using music to set the pace. Call out a movement such as forward, backward, sideways, little steps, giant steps, like an elephant, etc., and have them respond as quickly as possible.

Literacy

Reading is FUNdamental! A child's journey towards literacy involves learning to speak, listen, read, understand, watch, draw and write. Growing minds need lots of nourishment and books are excellent brain food. Make reading time a treasured time for bonding with your child.

● All Ages (Birth–5 years) ● Toddlers (1–2 year olds) ● Preschoolers (3–5 year olds)

- Read books together from birth. Children love reading the same book over and over again. They learn through the repetition.
- Use rhymes whenever you can, such as “snug as a bug in a rug.”
- Sing nursery rhymes. They teach language, rhyme, repetition & rhythm.
- Play “I Spy” using colors. “I spy with my little eye, something that is green.”
- Choose the letter of the day. Make a game of finding or talking about things that begin with that letter.
- Go to the library together and get them a library card as soon as possible. Set aside a special place for children to keep their books.
- Young children love predictable, patterned and alphabet books. Ask questions about the pictures. Use your finger to guide the child's eye from left to right across the page and from top to bottom.
- Use “environmental print.” This is the print of everyday life. It is a natural way for children to learn that print carries meaning. Children understand that the bulls-eye means Target, or the golden arches means McDonalds or the white letters in a red, octagonal sign means “Stop.”
- Give the opportunity to use letters in different forms, magnetic, puzzles, blocks.
- Cut out or draw pictures of basic household items — chair, bed, tv, door. Then write the names on separate pieces of paper. Ask child to match.





● Puppets are fascinating to young children. They know puppets are not alive, yet they often listen to them and talk to them as if they were real.

● Let your child see you read. Have older children read to younger ones.

● Not all reading takes place in a book. Take advantage of spur of the moment opportunities to read (signs, labels, etc.).

● ● Ask "what if" questions. "What would happen if we didn't shovel the snow?" or "What if that butterfly lands on your nose?"

● ● Scribbling across the paper sparks a young child's interest in the writing process. Keep drawing materials nearby.

● ● Squirt a pile of foam shaving cream (or whipped cream) on the table and get ready for some writing fun. Roll up your child's sleeves and practice writing the letters of his name in the cream, using his fingers.

● ● Cut up several drinking straws and use the pieces to form letters.

● ● Try "shape throwing." Cut out large cardboard shapes and spread them out on the floor. When you call out a shape, your toddler should try to throw a bean bag onto that shape. In addition to shape recognition, this activity helps children with the hand-eye coordination they need for writing.

● When coloring, try giving your child finger crayons, broken or short pieces of crayons. This will help promote a proper grasp so that they cannot "fist" (improper grasp) the crayons easily.

● Put up a string like a clothesline. Write the alphabet on clothespins (write vowels and other frequently used letters on more than one). Have your child spell out her name or other words using the clothespins on the clothesline.

● Trace letters and numbers on license plates with little fingers or make crayon rubbings of them.

Get Active

Movement is essential to learning. It builds and anchors connections in a child's developing brain. Movement brings the child into contact with objects and people in the world. Contact with the world stimulates the child's development.

● All Ages (Birth–5 years) ● Toddlers (1–2 year olds) ● Preschoolers (3–5 year olds)

●● Use hula hoops. Try them the regular way, or place them on the floor and have children hop in and out of them.

●● Create an indoor bowling game with empty plastic bottles. Fill them with dried beans if you need to add some weight. Use a soft ball to knock down bottles.

● Place large pieces of bubble wrap on the floor. Watch the fun when they touch it or try to pop the bubbles by stepping on it.

● Dance. Use scarves. Play the "Freeze" game by stopping the music unexpectedly.

●● Tape a line or place a rope on the flooring or on the ground. Make it a balance beam or a road for cars & trucks.

● Choose a color of the day. Go for a walk to find things that are the special color.

● Create an obstacle course. Lay out boxes to crawl through, stools to step over, pillows to jump on top of, low tables to slither under. Describe what your child is doing as she goes through the course. This helps her understand these concepts.

●● Hide small objects in the sandbox for your preschoolers to find as they scoop and play. Let them dig for treasures. Try using an old kitchen colander to sift through the sand.

●● Being told it is OK to jump in puddles will bring squeals of delight. Go out together dressed in rain gear and stomp in the puddles.

●● Using a hammer and nail, poke holes in a large plastic bottle (such as a milk jug). When you are outside, fill the bottle with water and let your child sprinkle the grass, flowers and driveway. It's sure to be a hit!



Dramatic play is a good way for boys and girls to role play, understand other's perspectives, problem solve, develop and foster imagination skills, story-tell, socialize, build self-confidence, develop empathy and much more.

Dramatic Play

● *All Ages (Birth–5 years)* ● *Toddlers (1–2 year olds)* ● *Preschoolers (3–5 year olds)*

● ● Make a rainy day box with the following ideas:

Garden Box — Potting soil, seed packets, small watering can, plastic garden tools, gardening gloves

Art Box — Markers, crayons, water color paints, scissors, colored pencils, stencils, ruler, construction paper, fingerpaint, fingerpaint paper

Cooking Box — Mixing bowl, measuring spoons, measuring cups, rolling pins, whisk, spatula, cookie cutters, empty plastic spice jars, recipes, apron

Water/Bath Box — Plastic funnels, eye droppers, turkey baster, spray bottle, plastic sea animals, measuring cups, sink or float items, dolls to bathe, cars/trucks to wash

Playdough Box — Plastic knives, popsicle sticks, rolling pin, play microwave, small plates, cookie cutters, birthday candles

Outdoor Play Box — Jump rope, balls, bean bags, sidewalk chalk, paintbrushes and pails for water painting, squirt bottles

Grocery Store Box — Recycle empty food boxes and plastic jars, coupons, play money, cash register, shopping cart



Restaurant Box — Tablecloth, play food, order pad, menus, cloth napkins

Camping Box — Tent, wood for campfire, metal dishes, compass, flashlight, sleeping bags, binoculars

Dress-Up Box — In an old suitcase, store old clothes, hats, shoes, costumes, plastic jewelry. Let your children see what they can become.

Math & Science

Early childhood is a great time for children to become interested in counting, geometry, patterning, measuring, estimating and sorting. The most powerful math activities are often “hidden” inside the natural play of toddlers and preschoolers.

● *All Ages (Birth–5 years)* ● *Toddlers (1–2 year olds)* ● *Preschoolers (3–5 year olds)*

● Make patterns with different colored items, such as pieces of fruit, colored cereal leaves or paper shapes.

● Count everything around you....the number of people waiting in line, the steps down the hall, the red cars you see, the stuffed animals on the bed, or the trees at grandma’s house.

● Look for different shapes around the house. The bedroom door is a rectangle, a milk cap is a circle, a bathroom tile is a square.

● Write the numbers one through five on separate pieces of paper. Have your child place that number of objects near the number.

● Play Egg Carton Shake. Using an empty egg carton, write the numbers 1-10 in each section. Place a button or small object in the carton, close the lid & shake it. Open the lid. The child looks for the button and identifies the number. Clap that number of times.

● Let your child help you measure ingredients as you cook.

● Have your preschooler tell you the directions to their favorite store or neighborhood park.

● Measure two tree trunks using a piece of yarn. Which one is bigger?

● Use an egg carton for a rock collection.

● Build with blocks. See how tall he can build a tower and then, of course, watch him knock it down.



Young children learn by using their senses. Even infants explore and discover by touching and mouthing objects, hearing voices and music, and seeing the colorful, fascinating world around them.

Sensory

● All Ages (Birth–5 years) ● Toddlers (1–2 year olds) ● Preschoolers (3–5 year olds)

● ● Create a sensory tub. Fill a large box or plastic tub with safe, sensory items such as: sand, cotton balls or pompoms, shredded paper, packing peanuts, water or fresh snow, Easter grass, Popsicle sticks (*Note: If your child still puts everything in his or her mouth, be very mindful of what you put in the tub.*)

● Use empty containers and plastic utensils to scoop, pour, measure. Hide different small items in the tub.

● ● Fill a sturdy Ziploc bag with hair gel from a thrift store. Seal shut. Tape edges together. Squish the hair gel through the bag.

● ● Shaving Cream Car wash:
Put shaving cream in a tub.
Fill another tub with water.
Use small cars or other objects in the shaving cream.
Wash off in the water.



● ● Fill a small container with warm water. Put different items in the water. Observe which items sink and which float.



● ● Throw magnetic letters into a bin and have your child look for the letters to spell his or her name.

● Involve the feet too! Bury feet in a sensory tub and let them explore too. If your child has tactile issues, please be aware that the feet are usually more sensitive than the hands, so take it slow if you need to.

● Explore ice cubes. Watch them melt into water.

● Have fun with playdough. See recipe in the Fine Motor section on the next page.

Fine Motor

Fine motor skills involve small muscle movements that are usually coordinated with the eyes. Functions such as writing, cutting, grasping small objects and fastening clothing are examples.

● All Ages (Birth–5 years) ● Toddlers (1–2 year olds) ● Preschoolers (3–5 year olds)

- ● Use long shoelaces to thread big wooden beads, empty spoons, hair curlers, large uncooked pasta, or even empty toilet paper rolls. Tie one of the objects being threaded to the end of the lace to prevent the rest from slipping off.
- ● Make your own puzzles. Paste your child's favorite picture onto heavy cardboard, and then cut it in to a few simple pieces.
- Encourage your child to turn the pages of a book himself.
- ● Play with spray bottles, clothespins, salad tongs and tweezers to develop the "open-shut" hand movements needed for using scissors.
- Toddlers begin to use both hands to play. Let your child carry empty plastic bowls, or two large oranges, so that they use two hands at once. This helps increase bilateral hand use and strength.
- ● Playdough is a great way to increase your child's hand and finger strength. Help your child pinch, squeeze, poke and roll the dough.

Homemade Playdough Recipe:

- 5 cups flour
- 1 cup salt
- 6 Tbsp. oil
- 2 Tbsp. cream of tartar
- 3.5 cups boiling water
- 2 pkgs. unsweetened Kool-Aid



Bring water, salt and Kool-Aid to a boil. Gradually add to the dry mixture of flour and cream of tartar. Stir. Add oil and stir. Use hands to thoroughly blend the flour and liquids. Store in a zip-lock style bag. The playdough will last 3-4 weeks in the refrigerator.

Make everyday a special time for you and your children by planning activities that the family can do together. Try to not let busy schedules and other responsibilities get in the way. Your children are young for only a little while!

Family Fun

● All Ages (Birth–5 years) ● Toddlers (1–2 year olds) ● Preschoolers (3–5 year olds)

● Forts, tents, and cardboard cottages - Young children love any kind of playhouse. Put pillows and books inside to encourage reading.

● You may hate junk mail but your child loves it. Give a pile of unwanted mail to kids to play with. Teach them how to drop it into the slot of an imaginary mailbox (a tissue box or a shoe box with a slot).

● Create conversation cards:
If you could be any color, what color would you be?
When I grow up (no matter your age), I want to be....
What animal would you like to be and why?
The best thing that happened to me today is....



● Have an indoor picnic. Put a tablecloth on the floor and eat there.

● Make a family activity jar. Have everyone put their favorite ideas into the jar. When you need an activity, pull one from the jar.

● Make homemade butter or homemade ice cream. Enjoy the yummy treats together.

● Have a "backwards" day. Eat dinner for breakfast. Wear clothes inside out, backwards, or wear clothes for the opposite season.

● Play together the games you grew up with - "I Spy", "Simon Says", "Red Light-Green Light", "Drop the Clothespin in a Bottle".

● Using chalk, draw a target on outdoor pavement. Soak some sponges in a bucket of water and toss them into the center of the target. Take turns to see who hits the bull's-eye first!



Being a parent is demanding, challenging and rewarding work. It's important to know how your child grows and develops, so you can focus on your child's needs. Find trusted parent information online, 24/7 at

MNParentsKnow.info

help me

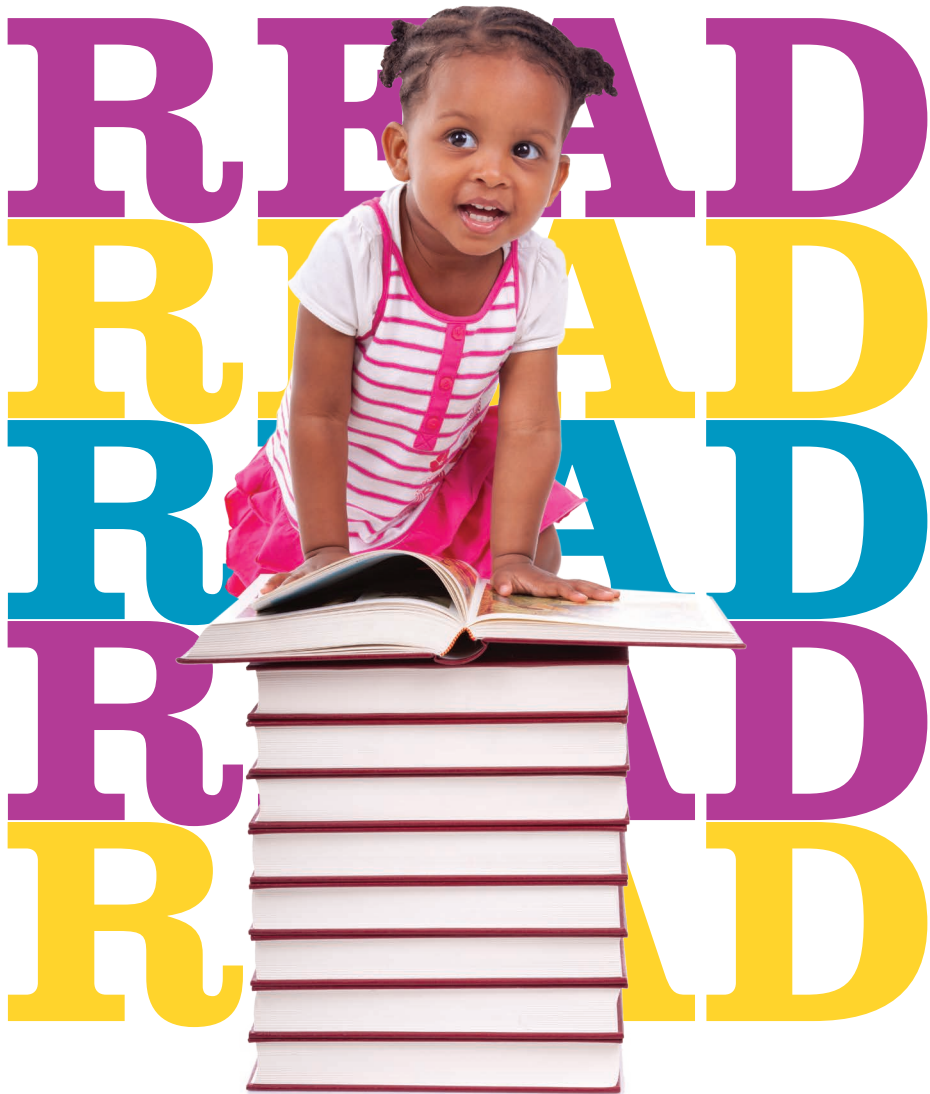


Minnesota's Early Intervention System

While all young children grow and change at their own rate, some boys and girls experience delays in their development. Special health conditions may affect a child's development. Accessing early intervention services as early as possible will ensure the best outcomes for these children. If you have developmental concerns about your child talk to your health care provider or call

1-866-693-GROW (4769)

HelpMeGrowMN.org



This booklet is brought to you through a collaboration between ECFE Coordinated Outreach, Minnesota College Savings Plan, and Minnesota Parent. For more information, please visit:



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