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## NEWSLETTER 2026

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Newsletter for Niagara County Child Care Providers, Parents & Child Advocates



The first five years of a child's life are more crucial than we often realize. Infants and toddlers are not just learning basic skills; they are also developing social skills, building relationships, and mastering things like potty training.

A baby's brain starts as a blank canvas, shaped by our words, actions, and play. How we engage with them can impact their developmental milestones. Every small moment counts. Also, all children are not the same. Children hit milestones at their own pace.

Toddlers need a safe and loving environment, consistent routines, responsive interactions, opportunities for exploration and play, clear boundaries, positive reinforcement, and language stimulation to support their development in all areas, including physical, cognitive, social, and emotional skills.

School-aged children can use support from adults in many ways, including love, guidance, and help with social skills. Spending time reassuring and guiding your child will allow them the freedom to grow.

Children absorb everything, whether through our actions or inaction. Interacting with them is vital for their growth into confident, well-rounded individuals. We may no longer remember our early years, but every experience shapes who we become. Your actions are important.

## Niagara Community Action

### **Board of Directors:**

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**Legally Exempt:** Debbie Perricelli,  
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**Business Specialist:** Donna Striffler

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### **Mission Statement:**

Niagara Community Action Program, Inc. is a countywide agency dedicated to reducing poverty in a collaborative effort by initiating and conducting programs of self-sufficiency. Our ultimate goal is to empower individuals and families to reach their fullest potential.

### **Office Closings:**

December 24<sup>th</sup> & 25<sup>th</sup>  
January 1<sup>st</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>  
February 16<sup>th</sup>

### **Contact Information:**

Community Child Care  
Clearinghouse of Niagara  
1521 Main Street  
Niagara Falls, NY 14305

**Phone:** 716-285-8572

**Toll Free:** 1-800-701-4KID (4543)

**Fax:** 716-285-9693

**E-mail:** [ccrniagara@niagaracap.org](mailto:ccrniagara@niagaracap.org)

**Web:** [www.childcareofniagara.com](http://www.childcareofniagara.com)

**FB:** <https://www.facebook.com/CC/>

## **Resources for Child Care Providers**

Help is available to provide support to all child care programs that need assistance with issues that may arise in their child care program. We may also have quality initiative grants for eligible licensed and registered child care programs.

We're here to help if you have a curriculum which isn't working for you, a disgruntled parent or a screaming child. We know these are just a sample of the issues you may face as a child care provider. We will come into your program to observe and assess. We then will help you by providing technical support, training and create a quality improvement plan. For more information about this service, please contact,

Chrissy Parfinski @ [cparfinski@niagaracap.org](mailto:cparfinski@niagaracap.org)

Or Call

716-285-8572 ext.120

Our referral counselor will be working with parents who need assistance in locating a registered or licensed child care program. In addition, she will work with providers to ensure that all information regarding child care vacancies is up to date in the referral database.

If you receive a *Provider Update Form* in the mail, please complete it and return it as soon as possible. As you may know, available child care slots are few and, in some areas, non-existent. If you have openings, please keep our office informed. A voice message which is available for calls after hours or e-mail is sufficient.

**Contact us at: 716-285-8572 ext. 109**

Or

**Send an email to [ccrniagara@niagaracap.org](mailto:ccrniagara@niagaracap.org)**

## **What is Legally-Exempt Child Care?**

Legally-Exempt Child Care is an option for families. The New York State Office of Children and Family Services, Division of Child Care Services allows parents/caretakers to hire individuals to care for their child(ren). This is known as legally-exempt child care. A legally-exempt child care provider is not required to be licensed or registered to provide child care. Families eligible for the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) can choose this type of care, however, the legally-exempt provider/program must enroll with an enrollment agency in order to be paid. A legally-exempt child care provider can be someone that the parent/caretaker is familiar with like a friend, a neighbor, family member, or someone else known to the family. Care can be provided in the child(ren)'s home, the provider's home, or in another residence.

### **HOW TO APPLY TO BE A LEGALLY EXEMPT PROVIDER?**

A family who is eligible for the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) can say that they want to use a legally-exempt provider. They will be given an enrollment packet which must be completed by the family as well as the provider. The enrollment forms are then returned to the Enrollment Agency (EA) which starts the enrollment process.

### **WHAT DOES AN ENROLLMENT AGENCY DO?**

A New York State contracted Enrollment Agency (EA) can help a prospective provider enroll to provide legally-exempt child care. They can provide technical assistance, eligibility and share information about the regulatory requirements that must be met to be enrolled.

For more information, contact your local Department of Social Services.



## **Your Outside Play Area: A Message from the Registrars**

Spring has sprung and the children in your care are excited to go outside to play and enjoy the warmer weather. Before heading to your approved outside play area, though, ensure it meets regulatory compliance requirements. In addition, review your modalities regulations for safety, section 5 and supervision, section 8, for yourself and with your staff. Most serious injuries occur during gross motor activities, particularly on playgrounds.

- Ensure all the areas used for outside play are free from trash and debris,
- Remove tree branches, limb and vegetation overgrowth and fill holes. Remove any dangerous or hazardous items.
- Thoroughly clean and disinfect equipment and materials including riding toys and playhouses to remove dirt, mold and mildew.
- Check playground surfacing. For solid surfacing, such as padding, is there any damage or deterioration, such as holes or cracks? For loose-fill surfacing, does it need to be raked or refilled, so it is evenly distributed and thick enough to meet safety standards?
- Are there large puddles that are built up in places or does the play area frequently flood? If so, fill to eliminate water retention.
- Do you have safety mats under high-traffic equipment? High-traffic areas often include slides, swings, and swingers. If you don't have safety mats, consider adding these to reduce surfacing maintenance. If you do have safety mats, are there signs of damage or crumbling?
- Inspect all playground equipment, including your slides, barriers, accesses, and overhead climbers. Check if they have broken parts, breakage, or wear. If there are indications of these issues, it is time to repair or replace these parts. Clatter bridges frequently need brackets, links and spacers replaced.
- Inspect playground decking. Playground decking is the platform on your playgrounds, such as walkways, transitions, or bridges. Check these structures for any sharp or rusted edges, rotting, or other signs of wear and tear. Is there any hardware across your entire playground that needs tightening or replacement? Make sure to thoroughly check all hardware, including screws, chains, attachment parts, etc., for anything that may need attention.

Assessing your approved outdoor play area and supervision strategies regularly prevents injuries and helps maintain regulatory compliance. If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact your registrar or licenser. Check the links below as OCFS has resources available concerning play area safety.

<https://ocfs.ny.gov/programs/childcare/protective-surfacing.php>

<https://ocfs.ny.gov/programs/childcare/playground-safety.php>

<https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/publications/Pub5199.pdf>

The Community Childcare Clearinghouse of Niagara also offers training related to outdoor safety and supervision. Contact the Clearinghouse at 716-285-8572 for more information.



## Empire State Family Child Care Collaborative



Empowering Providers • Boosting Financial Health • Supporting Wellness



### What You Get as a Member:

- ✚ Free One-Year Brightwheel License
- ✚ Business Coaching
- ✚ Health Benefits – Telemedicine/Health Insurance Navigator
- ✚ Child Care Resource Center (CCRC) Help
- ✚ Tools to Grow Your Business & Reduce Admin Time



### What You Can Achieve:

- ✚ All Office of Children and Family Service (OCFS) Documents in One Place
- ✚ Lower Business Expenses
- ✚ More Time Back in Your Day-Less Paperwork
- ✚ Increased Retirement Savings
- ✚ Confidence in Managing Finances



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or licensed group family day care in  
good standing with OCFS?

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CONTACT US

Chrissy Parfinski  
Email: [cparfinski@niagaracap.org](mailto:cparfinski@niagaracap.org)  
Phone: (716) 285-8572 ext. 120

## **The Importance of Following OCFS Regulations (Donna)**

New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) regulations are designed to protect the health, safety, and well-being of every child in care. These rules outline specific standards for supervision, staff qualifications, training, ratios, environments, and emergency procedures. When we follow OCFS regulations, we ensure that our program operates legally, ethically, and with the highest level of quality.

Compliance is not just about avoiding citations, it's about creating a safe, consistent, and nurturing environment where children can thrive, and families can trust our care. Every staff member plays an important role in upholding these standards every day through active supervision, accurate recordkeeping, proper ratios, and adherence to policies and procedures. Following OCFS regulations demonstrates professionalism, accountability, and a shared commitment to excellence in early childhood education.

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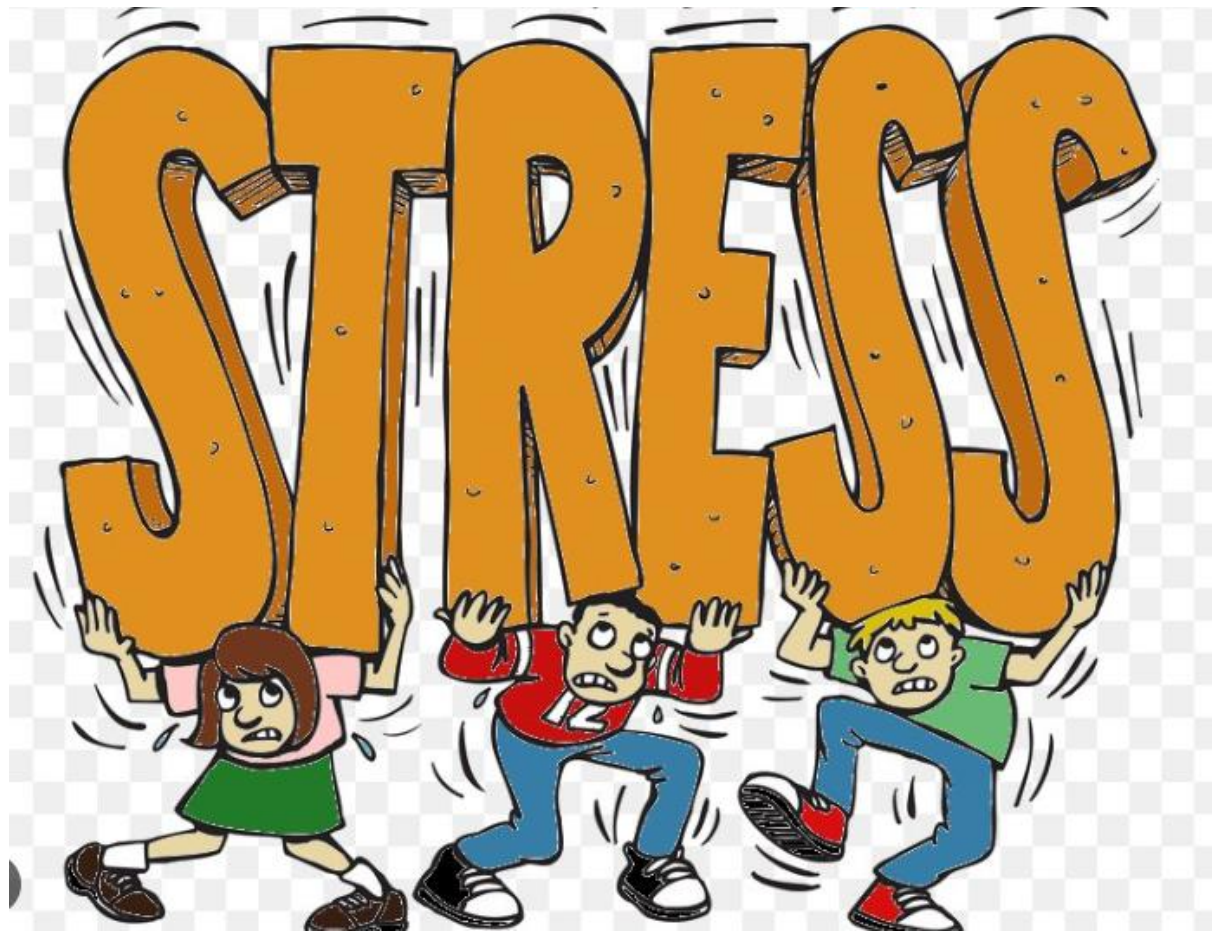


## **Required Paperwork for NYS OCFS Compliance (Donna)**

Accurate and up-to-date paperwork is essential to meet New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) regulations. Every form—whether it's enrollment, attendance, medical, staff training, or emergency contact information—serves an important purpose in protecting children's health and safety. Proper documentation ensures that the program remains in compliance, supports clear communication with families, and provides accountability during inspections or emergencies. Completing and maintaining all required paperwork on time is not only a regulatory responsibility, but also a professional commitment to quality care and the well-being of every child in our program.

## Managing Stress and Anxiety in School-Age Children (Donna)

School-age children experience stress and anxiety for many reasons—changes in routine, academic pressure, social challenges, or even family transitions. As caregivers and educators, it's important to recognize the signs early: changes in mood, withdrawal, stomachaches, or difficulty concentrating. By creating calm, predictable environments and encouraging open communication, we help children feel safe and supported. Simple strategies like breathing exercises, outdoor play, creative art activities, and positive encouragement can make a big difference. When children learn healthy ways to manage stress, they build lifelong coping skills that strengthen their emotional resilience and overall well-being



## **Activity: “The Human Knot” (Donna)**

**Source:** [We Are Teachers – Team-Building Games and Activities for Kids](#)

### **How It Works:**

Children stand in a circle, reach across to grab two different hands, and then work together to untangle themselves without letting go. The only way to succeed is through communication, patience, problem-solving, and teamwork.

### **Why It’s Effective:**

This activity encourages children to talk through challenges, respect each other’s ideas, and work cooperatively toward a shared goal. It builds trust and strengthens group bonds while promoting laughter and a sense of accomplishment.

### **Why Team Building Amongst Peers Is Important**

Team building helps children learn essential social and emotional skills that support success both inside and outside the classroom. When children collaborate, they develop empathy, patience, communication, and problem-solving abilities. Working together also builds confidence and a sense of belonging—showing children that everyone’s ideas and efforts matter. In childcare settings, these experiences create a positive classroom culture where children support one another, resolve conflicts peacefully, and feel proud to be part of a team.



# HOW TO TALK TO TEENS



## The Value of Parent-Child Communication

Effective parent-child communication during adolescence builds mutual trust, understanding, and respect. This kind of foundation allows adolescents to navigate the challenges of identity formation, peer pressure, and emotional turbulence with the safety net of parental support and guidance.

## Active Listening

Active listening involves being fully present in a conversation. This includes concentration, tracking, empathy, and response. Parents who practice active listening are able to better recognize cues and attend to the needs of their teenager.

For true active listening, **eliminate distractions** (devices, work, tasks).

## Resistance

A hallmark of adolescence is increased independence and newfound reliance on peers. In many ways, parent-child communication will change, but it should still be a consistent component of the family relationship.

## Question Prompts

- Talk about a time you lied.
- When do you feel the most confident?
- When do you feel the most insecure?
- What would a realistic “perfect day” look like?
- Talk about a time you cheated. Would you make the same choice again?
- Talk about the last time you cried.
- Talk about the last time you laughed.
- Talk about the last time you lost your temper.
- What do you wish you had more of?
- Talk about a time you felt left out.
- Talk about a time you felt included.
- Who is someone you respect?
- If you could go anywhere, where would you go?
- What is something you appreciate?

## Considerations

- **Communication Style:** As kids grow up, the way we communicate with them needs to grow up too. Reciprocal conversation and active listening require all participants of a conversation to respectfully contribute, pay attention, and consider perspectives.
- **Content:** Ask open-ended questions and be willing to genuinely answer the questions asked of you! Reserve judgement and try talking points, conversation cards, or games to get things rolling.
- **Collaboration:** The best way to communicate with teens is to collaborate with them. *I want us to connect more often, can we set aside 10 minutes each day to catch up?* Make it special by eliminating distractions (phones, work, siblings) and incorporating a pleasant routine like taking a walk, brewing a pot of tea, or splitting a snack.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

# EASTER WORD SEARCH

F J V O Z Y R N Z R S A R E U  
G W B Y O X K V P A B N C X Z  
G G N Z B S Y U T V A J C E T  
E F M Y M Z I G H U S M E N D  
Q N O D M X A K B Y K M J K O  
J Y K G I C T C K D E D S L Q  
Y E D O W U J Q L Y T J O B C  
G A L A P C Z E I O Y E G G S  
T O D L S K C I H C N K R O B  
F R O N Y D X N M D N U J O W  
L N E Y U B Y A Y S U H N G I  
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B U L W Y H N A F S E N O T D  
H F D Y H A Z A N T M J C E T  
K K E C C O N D S S O O H L A



**BASKET**  
**BONNET**  
**BUNNY**  
**CANDY**  
**CHICKS**  
**EGGS**  
**JELLYBEANS**  
**LILY**  
**SUNDAY**



## **Daylight Saving Time: What It Means for Infants & Toddlers**

By: Stephanie T Long | Infant Toddler Specialist

### **Daylight Saving Time: What It Means for Infants & Toddlers**

Young children depend on predictable routines to feel safe and regulated. When the clocks change, their internal body clocks don't automatically adjust. As a result, infants and toddlers may wake earlier or later than usual, show changes in appetite, have trouble falling or staying asleep, take shorter or disrupted naps, and experience more fussiness, clinginess, or big emotions. Even a one-hour shift can feel like a big change for little ones.

### **Working With the Change**

The most helpful approach is flexibility paired with familiar routines. Try to keep daily activities such as meals, naps, playtime, and bedtime consistent, even if the timing feels slightly off at first. Watch your child's cues rather than the clock, and offer extra comfort, connection, and patience. Temporary changes in sleep or behavior are a normal part of adjustment, not a setback. Staying in communication between home and care settings can also help children feel supported. Most children adjust within about 3–7 days.

### **Preparing Ahead of Time**

Making small changes before the time shift can ease the transition. Starting a few days ahead, gradually move bedtime, naps, and meals by 10–15 minutes each day. Support your child's natural rhythms by getting plenty of morning sunlight and dimming lights in the evening. Keeping a familiar bedtime routine, such as a bath, story time, songs, or even intentional cuddle time, can help signal that it's time to rest. During the day, promoting active play can support better sleep, while avoiding late naps or overstimulating activities close to bedtime.

## Gradual "Spring Forward" Plan for a 2-Nap Schedule

	Wake	Wake Window	Nap 1	Wake Window	Nap 2	Wake Window	Bedtime
<b>Typical Schedule</b>	7:00 am	3 hours	10:00 - 11:30 am	3 hours	2:30 - 4:00 pm	4 hours	8:00 pm
<b>Tuesday</b>	6:50 am	3 hours	9:50 - 11:20 am	3 hours	2:20 - 3:50 pm	4 hours	7:50 pm
<b>Wednesday</b>	6:40 am	3 hours	9:40 - 11:10 am	3 hours	2:10 - 3:40 pm	4 hours	7:40 pm
<b>Thursday</b>	6:30 am	3 hours	9:30 - 11:00 am	3 hours	2:00 - 3:30 pm	4 hours	7:30 pm
<b>Friday</b>	6:20 am	3 hours	9:20 - 10:50 am	3 hours	1:50 - 3:20 pm	4 hours	7:20 pm
<b>Saturday</b>	6:10 am	3 hours	9:10 - 10:40 am	3 hours	1:40 - 3:10 pm	4 hours	7:10 pm
<b>Sunday</b> (after time change)	7:00 am (new time)	3 hours	10:00 - 11:30 am (new time)	3 hours	2:30 - 4:00 pm (new time)	4 hours	8:00 pm (new time)

**Keep in mind:** This is just an example of how a day could play out, and you should NOT try and follow it exactly. Instead, know that you'll adjust your day based on your baby's nap lengths, hunger cues, and sleepy cues.

## How Time Change Affects Children's Sleep and Behavior

The seasonal time change can be an adjustment for children, preschoolers through school-age. Since young children depend on predictable routines, even a one-hour shift can temporarily affect both sleep patterns and behavior.

### **Following a time change, children may experience:**

- Increased irritability, moodiness, or emotional outbursts or tearfulness
- Difficulty following directions, managing frustration or transitioning between activities
- Shorter attention spans and decreased impulse control
- Increased fatigue, which can lead to challenging behaviors or withdrawn behaviors

These behavioral changes are often linked to disrupted sleep and changes in children's internal body clocks. These are normal responses as children's bodies adjust to the new schedule.

### **What adults may notice:**

- More frequent tantrums or frustration
- Trouble with peer interactions or sharing
- Increased need for reassurance or adult support
- Regression in skills such as listening, independence, or self-regulation

### **Classroom Strategies:**

During the week following a time change, teachers can support children by:

- Keeping daily schedules and routines as consistent as possible
- Allowing extra time for transitions and providing advance warnings
- Offering calm, quiet activities during high-fatigue times of day
- Using visual schedules and clear, simple directions
- Building in movement breaks and outdoor play when possible
- Providing positive reinforcement and emotional reassurance
- Responding to challenging behaviors with patience and flexibility

### **How families and caregivers can help:**

- Gradually adjust bedtime and wake-up times by 10–15 minutes before
- Keep daily routines consistent, especially around meals, naps, and bedtime
- Encourage outdoor play and exposure to natural light
- Provide extra rest opportunities and calm transitions
- Offer extra patience, reassurance, and clear expectations

Most children return to their typical routines and behaviors within a week. It is important to support your children's well-being during this transition.

## Finding The Why Behind Children's Behaviors: Grief

Grief is something that children feel deeply, but you might not understand their behaviors or know how to help them process. We think of grief as being a reaction to death, but for children it can be more than that. It can be triggered by things we may not equate to Grief:

a parent being incarcerated

a parent on a long trip away from home

A sibling going off to college

A teacher no longer being in their classroom

A loved one in the hospital for a long period of time

Children have difficulty understanding time and become anxious wondering if that person will come back. This is especially true if a loved one or a pet has died, they can become increasingly attached to loved ones and fearing it might happen to someone they love.

When caring for children between 0-5, We need to try and understand the “Why” of disruptive behaviors or severe attachment issues, which can make drop offs or staff changes difficult. Here are some more information and ideas for handling grief with children 0-5 years old.





# Grief By Age



## GRIEF BY AGE: 0 – 2

Babies and toddlers don't understand the concept of death, but they do notice changes and absences of people in their environment. They may feel abandonment if an attachment figure is missing. They will also observe the distress of others around them.

### COMMON REACTIONS

- Increased crying and irritability
- Clinginess
- Looking for the person who has died
- Stranger anxiety
- Decreased interest in play or food
- Regression in previously reached milestones

### WAYS TO SUPPORT

- Keep babies and toddlers as close to the family as possible to maintain attachment development
- Hold and cuddle often
- Maintain routines
- Speak calmly to them
- Provide comfort objects

## GRIEF BY AGE: 3 – 4

Preschoolers do not understand that death is permanent. They may become curious about death.. This age group has active 'magical thinking' where they may think the person can become alive again or that they did something to make the person die. Preschoolers are very concrete; it is important to use accurate words such as 'died,' not 'lost.' Preschoolers can feel insecure and frightened when things change. They benefit from reassurance that they will be kept safe and be looked after.

### COMMON REACTIONS

- Crying, clinginess, tantrums, irritability
- Lack of responsiveness and withdrawal
- Changes in eating and sleeping patterns
- Loss of interest in play
- Temporary regression

### WAYS TO SUPPORT

- Answer questions honestly
- Keep routines
- Talk about who is looking after them and keeping them safe
- Support them with touch and words
- Keep close to familiar adults
- Honestly explain death as a part of life
- Read children's books together about death and grief
- Use words that describe feelings
- Encourage creative play and exercise as an outlet for thoughts and feelings
- Include them in the funeral
- Share and discuss memories

# Reasons Kids Need Routines and Schedules



## Provides stability

Kids feel safe when they know what to expect.



## Reduces anxiety

Predictability helps kids feel calm.



## Encourages better sleep

Consistent bedtime routines improve sleep quality.



## Teaches time management

Kids learn how to plan their day.



## Boosts confidence

Kids feel accomplished when they follow routines.



## Builds healthy habits

Repetition helps kids learn good behaviors.



## Improves focus

Structured time helps kids concentrate better.



## Helps with transitions

Routines make it easier to switch between activities.



## Prepares them for school

Schedules mimic classroom structure.



## Reduces power struggles

Clear expectations mean fewer arguments.



## Prevents meltdowns

Predictable schedules reduce overwhelm.



## Encourages creativity

Structured downtime sparks imagination.



## Supports emotional regulation

Predictable routines help kids manage emotions.



## Sets them up for success

Routines build life skills for the future.



## Teaches discipline

Kids learn the value of consistency.



## Supports physical health

Scheduled meals and exercise keep kids active.



## Limits screen time

Scheduled activities reduce mindless scrolling.

# Conscious Discipline

## Ages 3–5

Conscious Discipline is a social-emotional learning approach that helps children develop self-control, emotional intelligence, and strong relationships. Instead of focusing only on punishment or rewards, it teaches skills that help children manage their emotions and behavior in healthy ways. It also teaches young children how to understand their feelings, calm their bodies, and get along with others. It focuses on helping children feel safe, loved, and connected so they can learn and grow.

### Core Beliefs

- Children need to feel **safe, connected, and valued** to learn.
- Behavior is a form of communication.
- Adults model the emotional skills they want children to learn.

### The 7 Skills of Conscious Discipline

1. **Composure** – Staying calm, even in stressful moments
2. **Encouragement** – Focusing on effort and growth
3. **Assertiveness** – Setting clear, respectful limits
4. **Choices** – Empowering children with appropriate options
5. **Empathy** – Understanding the feelings of others
6. **Positive Intent** – Seeing behavior as a need, not defiance
7. **Consequences** – Teaching responsibility, not punishment

### Big Ideas for Young Children:

- Feelings are okay.
- Grown-ups help keep children safe.
- Calm bodies help our brains learn.

### What Conscious Discipline Looks Like in Preschool:

- Teachers stay calm and use kind voices.
- Children are taught how to breathe and relax when upset.
- Classrooms use routines and pictures to help children feel secure.

- Children are given simple choices (e.g., “Do you want the red crayon or blue crayon?”).

**Skills Children Learn:**

- Naming feelings (happy, sad, mad, scared)
- Calming their bodies with breathing
- Taking turns and sharing
- Using words instead of hitting or yelling

**Benefits for 3–5 Year Olds:**

- Fewer tantrums
- Stronger teacher-child relationships
- Better social skills
- Increased confidence and independence

**Benefits for School Age children**

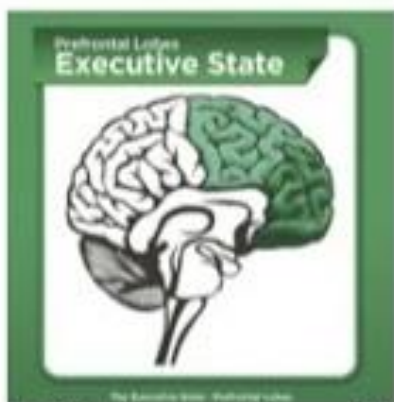
- Improves classroom behavior
- Builds emotional regulation skills
- Strengthens student-teacher relationships
- Creating a respectful and supportive learning environment

**In Simple Words:**

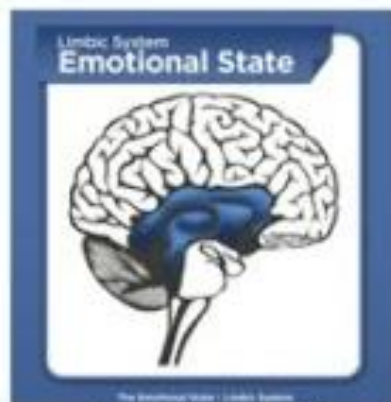
Conscious Discipline helps children learn how to calm down, use their words, and feel safe.

**Want More Information:**

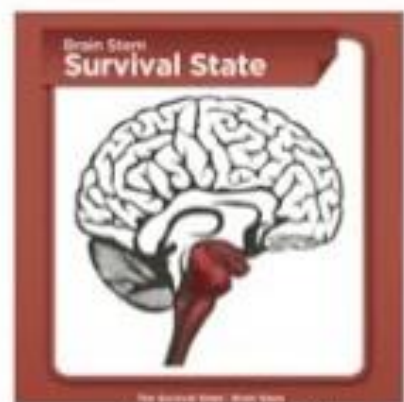
Call Community Child Care Clearinghouse (716)285-8572 ext. 120.



**What can I learn?**



**Am I loved?**



**Am I safe?**

## Conscious Discipline Activities

Activity	“Balloon Belly Breathing”	“Safe Place Breathing Circle”
<b>Age Group</b>	3–5 years	Elementary–Middle School
<b>Time</b>	5–10 minutes	10–15 minutes
<b>Materials</b>	-A small stuffed animal or hands on belly -Quiet space	-A quiet space -Paper and crayons/markers (optional)
<b>Steps</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Set the Tone (Safety):</b> Have children sit or lie down comfortably. Say: <i>“We are going to help our bodies feel calm and safe.”</i></li> <li>2. <b>Hands on Belly:</b> Ask children to put their hands or a stuffed animal on their belly.</li> <li>3. <b>Breathe Together:</b> Say: <i>“Breathe in and make your belly big like a balloon.”</i> <i>“Breathe out and let the balloon get small.”</i></li> <li>4. <b>Repeat:</b> Do 3–5 slow breaths together.</li> <li>5. <b>Check In:</b> Ask simple questions like: <i>“Does your body feel calm or wiggly?”</i></li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Create Safety:</b> Have students sit in a circle. Say: <i>“This is a safe place where we can calm our bodies and help our brains think.”</i></li> <li>2. <b>Name the Feeling:</b> Ask students to think of a feeling they’ve had today (happy, frustrated, nervous, excited).</li> <li>3. <b>Breathing Practice:</b> Guide them through 3–5 slow breaths (inhale through the nose, exhale through the mouth). You can say: <i>“Smell the flower... blow out the candle.”</i></li> <li>4. <b>Reflection:</b> Students may draw or quietly think about how their body feels after breathing.</li> <li>5. <b>Connection:</b> End by reminding them: <i>“We all have big feelings, and we can help ourselves feel calm and safe.”</i></li> </ol>
<b>Why This Works</b>	This activity teaches self-regulation, body awareness, and calming strategies, which are key parts of Conscious Discipline for young children.	This activity builds self-regulation, emotional awareness, and a sense of safety, which are key principles of Conscious Discipline.

## **Why ASQ Matters in 2026 | Supporting Development Together at Home and in Early Learning Programs**

by Stephanie Long, Infant Toddler Specialist

When we think about child development, we often picture milestones like first words, first steps, or starting school. But development doesn't happen all at once — it unfolds gradually through everyday moments, routines, and relationships. That's where Ages & Stages Questionnaires (ASQ) come in. As we move into 2026, ASQ continues to be an important tool for families and providers to partner together, understand development, and support children early — both at home and in childcare settings.

### What Is ASQ?

ASQ is a developmental and social-emotional screening tool designed for children from birth to age 5. What makes ASQ unique is that it is completed by parents and caregivers — the people who know the child best.

Rather than testing children, ASQ helps adults:

- Learn what skills are typical at each age
- Notice strengths and emerging skills
- Identify areas where extra support may help

ASQ looks at development across areas such as:

- Communication
- Gross and fine motor skills
- Problem-solving
- Personal-social and social-emotional development

### Why ASQ Is Important for Families

- Builds Understanding and Confidence:

ASQ helps families learn what development can look like at different ages. Many parents say, "I didn't realize that was a milestone!" ASQ turns everyday behaviors into learning moments and reassures families that questions are normal.

- Encourages Meaningful Observation at Home

ASQ invites families to slow down and notice how their child communicates, plays, moves, and connects. These observations often happen during daily routines like mealtimes, bath time, or play on the floor.

- Supports Early Help - Without Labels

ASQ screenings are not a diagnostic tool. Think of it as a conversation starter. When concerns are identified early, families and care providers can be connected to support sooner - often preventing bigger challenges later.

- Why ASQ Is Helpful for Providers

ASQ centers family voice. When providers and families review results together, it builds trust and shared understanding. They can work towards shifting conversations from “what’s wrong” to “how can we support this child together?”

#### Local Support: Help Me Grow Western New York

Families and providers in Western New York don’t have to navigate this process alone. Help Me Grow WNY is the local Help Me Grow chapter that supports families with developmental screening and connections to community resources.

#### Help Me Grow WNY Can Help With:

- Free ASQ developmental screenings for children ages 0–5
- Guidance, understanding screening results
- Connections to Early Intervention, preschool services, and community supports
- Parenting resources and developmental information

#### Help me Grow contact info:

Phone/Text: (716) 760-GROW (4769) | available Monday–Friday, 9 am-4 pm

Email: [info@hmgwny.org](mailto:info@hmgwny.org)

Address: 217 East Delavan Ave., Buffalo, NY 14208

#### Dev Milestone Articles for IT:

<https://agesandstages.com/developmental-milestones-articles/developmental-milestones-for-infants/>

<https://agesandstages.com/developmental-milestones-articles/developmental-milestones-for-toddlers/>

# TALK or DO CHALLENGES

<b>TALK:</b> What is one of your worst fears?	<b>TALK:</b> What is one of your best memories?	<b>DO:</b> Give a compliment to the person on your right.	<b>DO:</b> Take 3 mindful breaths.
<b>TALK:</b> What is something that cheers you up?	<b>TALK:</b> What is something you wish you were better at?	<b>DO:</b> A yoga pose that the person on your left chooses.	<b>DO:</b> 10 jumping jacks.
<b>TALK:</b> Who is a fictional character you wish you could befriend? Why?	<b>TALK:</b> Would you rather live by the ocean, mountains, desert, or forest? Why?	<b>DO:</b> Find something in the room that sparks joy.	<b>DO:</b> Make your best dolphin noise.
<b>TALK:</b> Tell about a time you felt left out.	<b>TALK:</b> What is something you are looking forward to about growing up?	<b>DO:</b> A 10 second jig.	<b>DO:</b> Draw a self-portrait using your non-dominant hand.

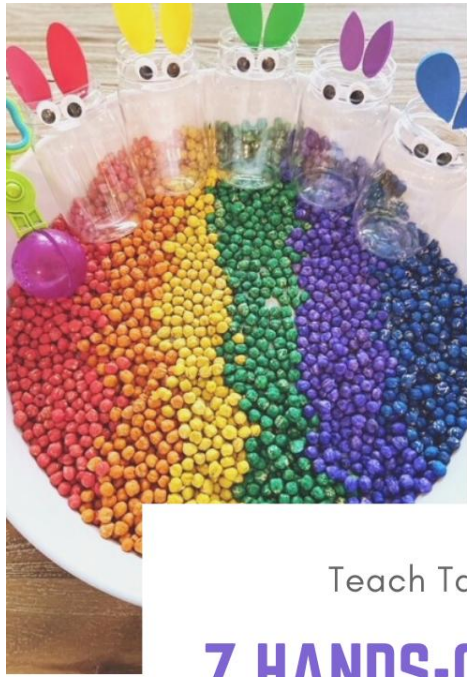


Toilet paper roll bunnies, [Check out 25+ Easter Crafts For Kids](#) courtesy of The Best Ideas For Kids.



Click here for craft: [cotton ball bunny cards](#)

# EASTER ACTIVITIES FOR TODDLERS AND PRESCHOOLERS



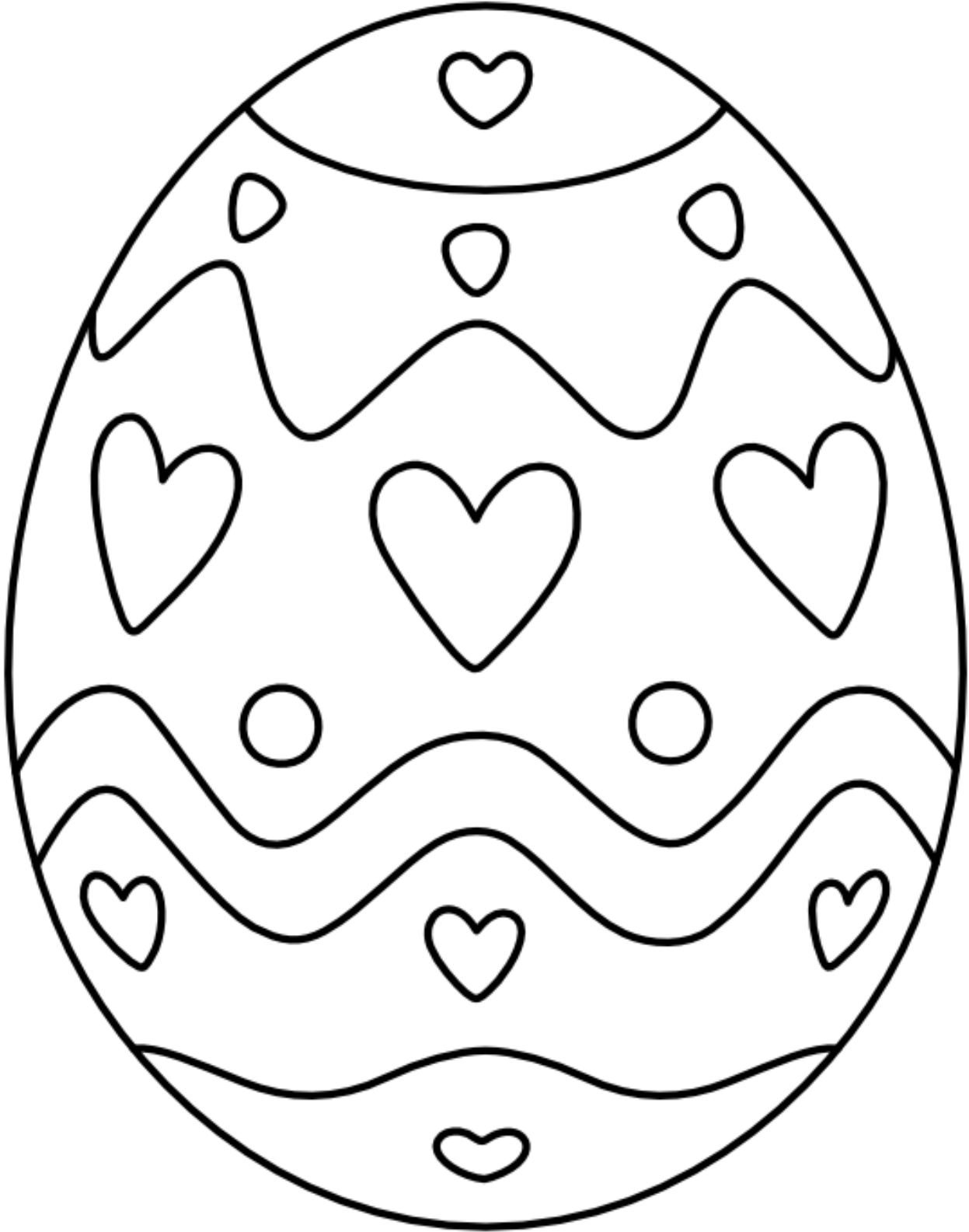
Teach Talk Inspire

## 7 HANDS-ON EASTER ACTIVITY IDEAS

For Toddlers and Preschoolers



<https://teachtalkinspire.com/2021/04/easter-activities-for-toddlers-and-preschoolers.html>





# Spring Scavenger Hunt

Directions - Cross out & color in each outdoor item you find!

- |                          |   |                 |                          |  |                |
|--------------------------|---|-----------------|--------------------------|--|----------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> |    | Dandelion       | <input type="checkbox"/> |    | Mud Puddle     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> |    | Bird            | <input type="checkbox"/> |    | Bee            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> |    | Butterfly       | <input type="checkbox"/> |    | Worm           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> |  | Stump           | <input type="checkbox"/> |   | Evergreen Tree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> |  | Feather         | <input type="checkbox"/> |  | Twig           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> |  | Ant             | <input type="checkbox"/> |  | Clover         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> |  | Nest            | <input type="checkbox"/> |  | Mossy Rock     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> |  | Rainbow         | <input type="checkbox"/> |  | Spider         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> |  | Blooming Flower | <input type="checkbox"/> |  | Mushroom       |

# Earth Day Awareness in Classrooms

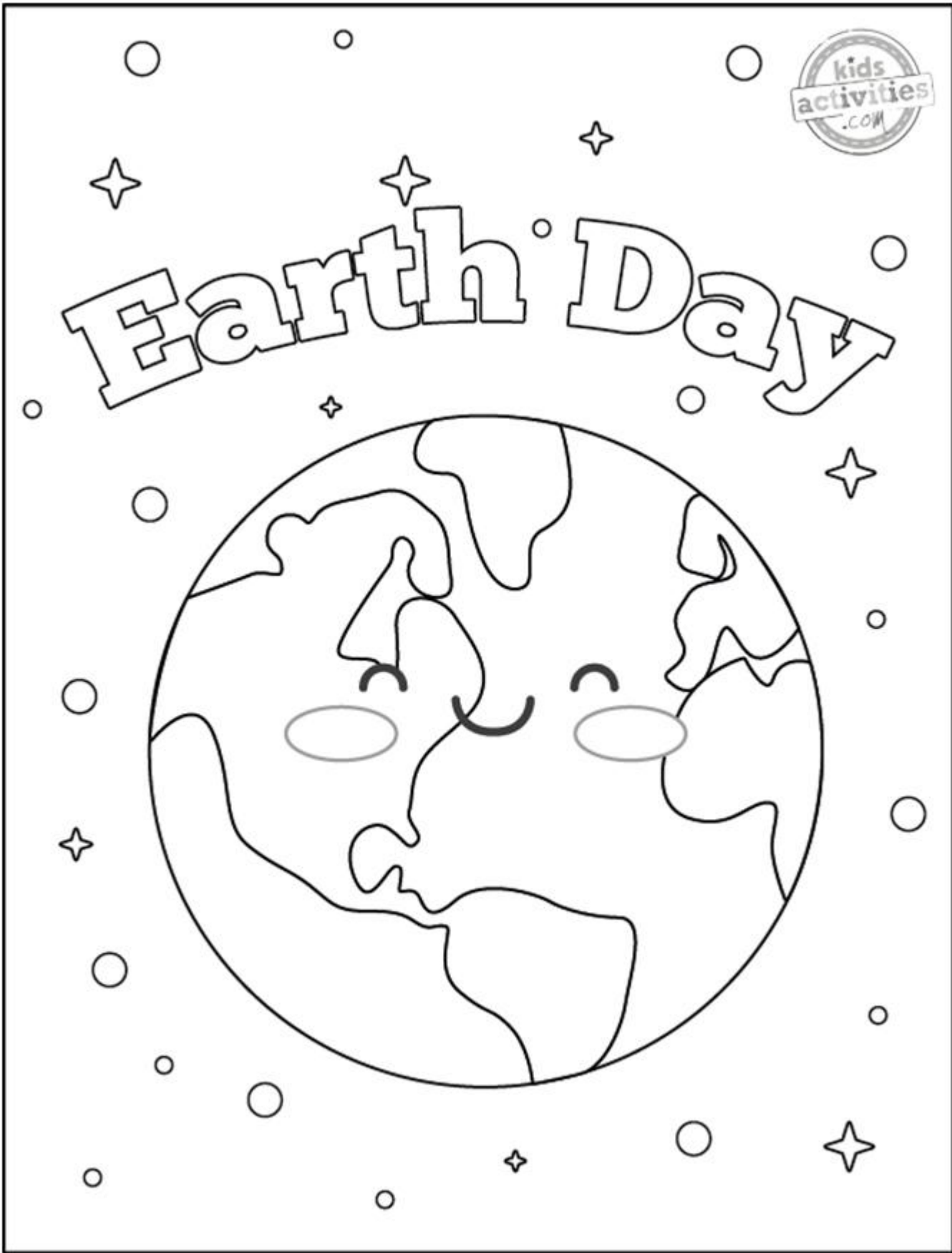
Many schools around the world incorporate Earth Day into their curriculum to raise awareness about environmental issues and inspire action among students. Teachers use this opportunity to educate students about the importance of protecting the planet and encourage them to take simple steps to make a difference.

Activities such as nature walks, recycling projects, and tree planting are common ways schools celebrate Earth Day and instill a sense of environmental responsibility in students.





# Earth Day



# Earth Day Dirt Pudding with Worms

- [Instant Chocolate Pudding](#)
- Milk
- Whipped Cream (optional)
- Oreos
- [Gummy Worms](#)
- [Clear Plastic Cups](#)

## HOW TO MAKE DIRT PUDDING WITH WORMS:

1. Follow the instructions on the box to prepare the chocolate pudding.
2. Combine the chocolate pudding with a scoop of whipped cream, depending how light you want the dirt. (This is optional!)
3. Next, crush about 10-15 Oreo cookies in a plastic bag.
4. Start layering the chocolate pudding and Oreos in a clear plastic cup. Save some of the Oreos for the top layer of “dirt”.
5. Finally, add the gummy worms on top!



# Cheerios Birdfeeder

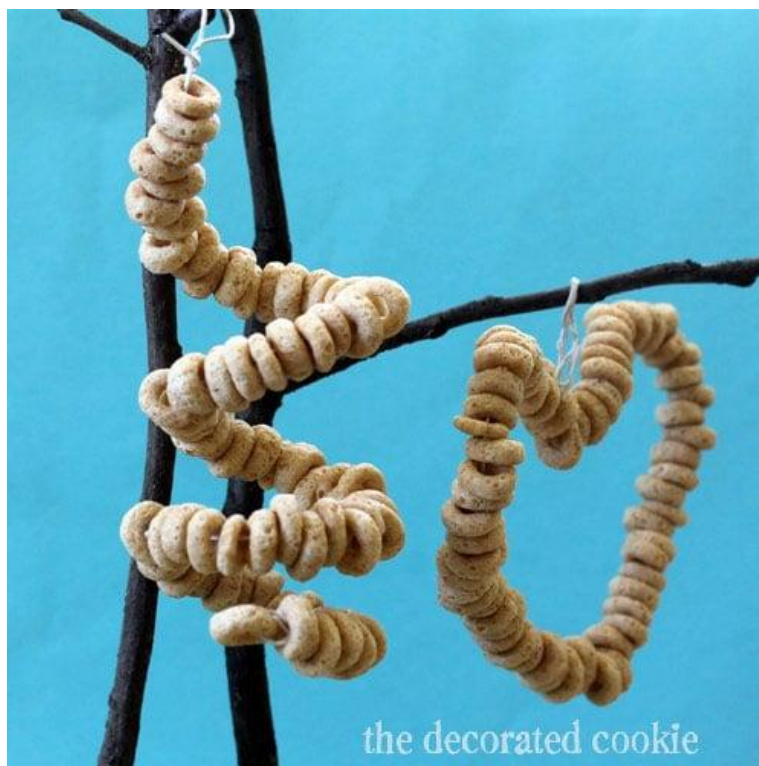
To make Cheerios birdfeeders...

## You will need:

- Cheerios
- pipe cleaners (younger kids)
- floral wire (older kids)
- [instructions printable](#)

**Older kids:** To make a heart, thread Cheerios on a piece of floral wire, leaving about three inches on each end. Twist the wire ends together to form a circle. Make sure to twist the wire right at the end of the Cheerios so the Cheerios aren't loose on the wire. Twist a loop with the wire ends. Bend the Cheerios on the wire into a heart shape. Thread yarn through the loop to hang to a tree. To make a spiral, thread a Cheerio on a piece of floral wire and wrap the end of the wire around to secure the Cheerio. Thread more Cheerios to fill the wire, leaving a couple inches at the top. Twist the wire at the top to secure the cheerios and make a loop. Bend the cheerio wire around the paper tube to make a spiral. Thread yarn through the loop to hang to a tree. Or bend the wire into any shape you like.

**Younger kids:** Make a loop at one end of the pipe cleaner, and twist to secure. Thread the pipe cleaner with cheerios. Loop and twist the other end to secure. Thread a piece of yarn through the loop and hang from a tree.

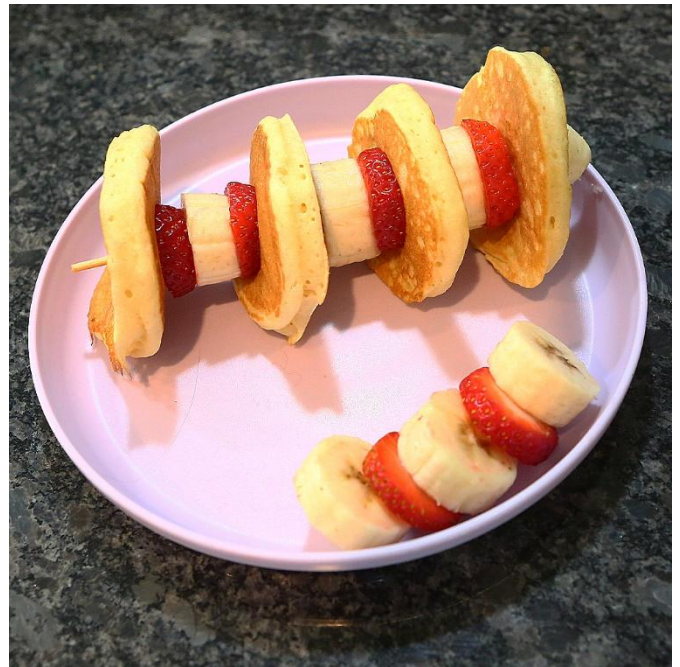


# Breakfast on a Stick

Breakfast/Snack

## Ingredients

- 1 cup 100% whole wheat pancake mix
- 1 cup 1% or non-fat unflavored milk
- 1 large egg
- 4 bananas, sliced in rounds
- 2 cups of strawberries cut in rounds
- 8 dull wooden skewers



## Directions

1. Prepare 32 mini pancakes according to the instructions on the pancake mix box. Each mini pancake is 1 tbsp of pancake batter cooked.
2. Place 1/2 banana, 1/4 cup strawberries, 4 mini pancakes, and 1 skewer on a plate.
3. Using the skewer, slide on a pancake, banana round and strawberry round in an alternating pattern. Repeat until all pancakes are stacked on the stick. Some of the fruit may not fit on the skewer, so leave any remaining fruit on the plate.
4. Repeat assembly on 7 more plates.

One serving provides 1/2 oz eq grains and 1/2 cup fruit.



# Oscar's Bodacious Broccoli Bites

Lunch/Supper

## Ingredients

- 2 cups broccoli, trimmed
- 2 large eggs
- 1/2 cup ground or Panko breadcrumbs
- 1/2 cup cheddar or Parmesan cheese
- Salt and pepper to taste



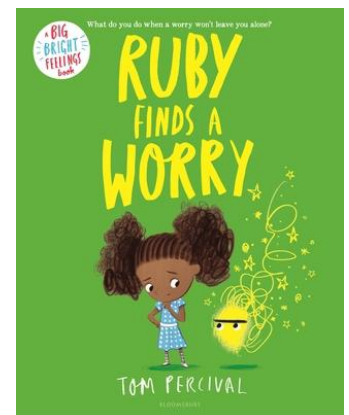
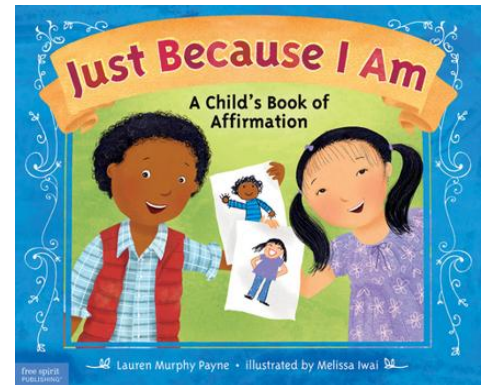
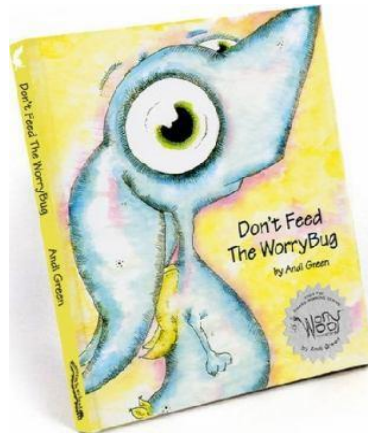
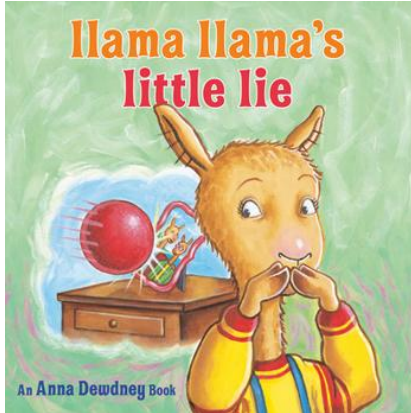
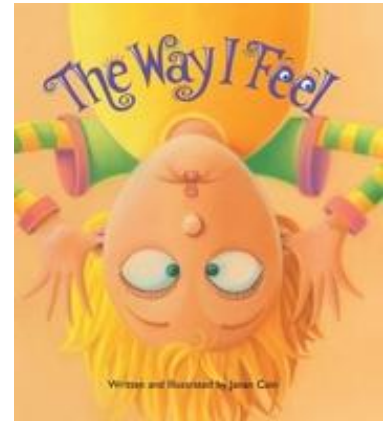
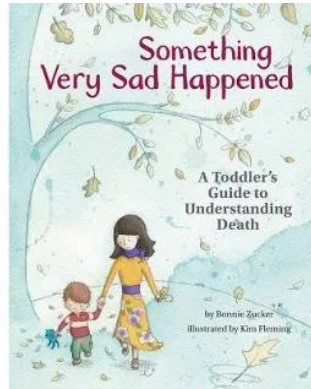
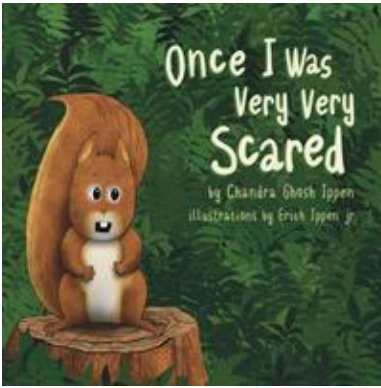
## Directions

1. Steam broccoli until tender.
2. In a bowl or food processor, combine eggs, breadcrumbs, cheese and seasonings.
3. Coat steamed broccoli evenly with the mixture.
4. Bake at 350° F for 15-20 minutes.

This recipe was created in partnership with [Sesame Street in Communities](https://www.sesamestreet.com/communities).



That you read, the more things you will know. The more that you Learn, the more places you'll go. -Dr.Seuss



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