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SUMMER NEWSLETTER 2026

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



Hello Summer! Tips for Healthy, Active, and Safe Fun

School may be out, but the learning and growth never stop! Summer is the perfect time for children to explore the outdoors, develop new skills, and make lasting memories. Here are a few ways to make this summer the best one for your family:

1. Take the "Learning" Outdoors

You don't need a classroom to keep young minds sharp. Turn a walk in the park into a nature scavenger hunt or use sidewalk chalk to practice letters and numbers. Even a simple trip to the local library for a summer reading challenge can turn a rainy day into an adventure.

2. Safety First: Sun and Water

The Western NY sun can be stronger than it looks!

- Apply Sunscreen: Use SPF 30 or higher and reapply every two hours.
- Stay Hydrated: Encourage kids to drink water throughout the day, even if they don't feel thirsty.
- Water Watch: No matter how close you are always keep a "designated watcher" on duty when children are near water.

3. Simple Summer Joys

You don't need a big budget for big fun. Some of the best memories are made with:

- Blowing bubbles on the porch.
- Building a "fort" out of old cardboard boxes.
- Catching fireflies at dusk.

We wish everyone a safe, sun-filled and joyful summer season!

Niagara Community Action

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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:

July 3, 2026
September 7, 2026

Contact Information:

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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 a quality initiative grant 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

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 ccrrniagara@niagaracap.org

Interest-Based Learning



Research shows that children learn best when they are interested in what they are doing. This is called interest-based learning. Studies have found that when learning activities match a child's interests, children stay focused longer and learn more. They are also more likely to stay engaged compared to activities that adults choose without thinking about what the child enjoys.

Interest-based learning happens when a child's favorite activities, toys and topics become the starting point for learning new skills. The things that make a child smile, laugh, and feel excited are used as stepping stones for growth.

Interest-based learning experiences must:

- Capture and hold a child's attention.
- Keep a child engaged.
- Give children chances to practice skills they already have.
- Help children learn new skills.
- Teach children that their actions can cause things to happen.

When children see that their choices and actions matter, they feel confident and capable. Interest-based learning helps children build skills while having fun. When children are excited and curious, learning feels natural and enjoyable.

Interest-based learning includes:

- Noticing what a child enjoys.
- Observing how a child interacts with different things.
- Including learning opportunities in everyday activities.
- Paying attention to which activities the child chooses to play with repetitively.
- Giving numerous chances for children to explore and discover what they like.
- Responding quickly and positively to their hard work whether success or failure.
- Allowing children to feel proud of their work.

Adults play an important role in interest-based learning by encouraging children and joining in their interests. Adults help children grow. You can encourage interest-based learning by observing what a child enjoys most, talking with parents or caregivers about the child's favorite activities either at home, at school or day care, planning activities around the interest of the child and thinking about what skills the child can practice during those activities. For example, if a child loves cars, you can count cars, sort the cars by color, have the children write and illustrate stories about cars or race the cars outside. Learning can happen anywhere. Children that are interested stay engaged longer and learn more. Their interests truly open the door to meaningful learning experiences.

Interest-Based Learning Activities for School-Age Children

Creative Arts & Media



For children drawn to storytelling, performance, or visual arts, these activities build fine motor skills and self-expression.

- Puppet Theater: Kids can craft their own puppets from household items and perform a play based on their favorite book or movie.
- Media Production: Encourage tech-savvy kids to create a podcast, radio show, or short movie using apps or home cameras.
- Comic Strip Creation: Children can design their own characters and write dialogue, which supports narrative writing and literacy skills.
- Collaborative Murals: Using sidewalk chalk or large paper, kids can work together to create shared art, fostering teamwork.

S.T.E.A.M. & Construction

Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math (STEAM) activities are ideal for children who enjoy building, experimenting, and figuring out how things work.

- LEGO Coding Maze: Teach the foundations of coding without a screen by having kids engineer a physical maze for a marble or small character.
- Themed Science Experiments: Match experiments to current interests, such as creating a baking soda volcano for a child interested in earth science or growing crystals for one interested in minerals.
- Egg Drop Challenge: Challenge kids to design a protective container for an egg to survive a fall, teaching engineering and physics principles.
- Lego Area/Perimeter Games: Use building blocks to teach geometry by measuring the area and perimeter of their creations.

Outdoor & Active Exploration

Physical activities help burn energy while teaching strategy, geography, and observation.

- Nature Scavenger Hunts: Provide a magnifying glass and a list of specific items to find (e.g., three types of leaves, something magnetic), which builds observation and critical thinking skills.
- Backyard Treasure Hunt: Use a hand-drawn map of the yard or park to sharpen map-reading skills and spatial awareness.
- Birdwatching: Using cardboard tube binoculars, kids can track local bird species and document them in a notebook to learn about ecosystems.
- Obstacle Courses: Designing their own course—whether for themselves or their bikes—teaches planning, sequence, and coordination.

Games & Strategic Thinking

Strategy-based games help school-age children build memory, patience, and mental flexibility.

- Math Jeopardy or Bingo: Turn boring math problems into a competitive team game using a "Jeopardy" board style or "Word Bingo" cards.
- Classic Strategy Games: Games like chess or checkers require kids to plan moves in advance and adapt to opponents' actions.

Interest-Based Activities for Younger Children



Interest-based learning for younger children (infants through age 5) focuses on play-based exploration, where their natural fascinations like water, animals, or building become the foundation for developing motor skills and early literacy.

Sensory & Scientific Discovery

For children curious about how things feel, look, or change, sensory play builds early scientific thinking.

- **Sensory Bins & Stations:** Fill bins with rice, beans, or sand to hide small toys for treasure hunts. This develops fine motor skills and tactile awareness.
- **Water Play Discovery:** Use funnels, cups, and floating toys to explore concepts like buoyancy and volume. For a "bath-time laboratory," introduce sponges to squeeze, which builds hand strength.
- **Color Mixing Experiments:** Use washable paint or colored water to let children predict and observe what happens when primary colors combine.

Construction & Engineering

Children drawn to stacking and building are naturally practicing spatial reasoning and math.

- **Block & Loose Parts Play:** Beyond standard blocks, add "loose parts" like cardboard tubes, wooden planks, or plastic containers to encourage complex building.
- **Nesting & Sorting:** Use household items like different-sized bowls or socks for sorting by color or size, which introduces foundational math categorization.
- **Recycled Creations:** Transform a simple cardboard box into a car, fort, or spaceship, fostering creativity and problem-solving.

Imaginative & Dramatic Play

Role-playing helps toddlers and preschoolers process social roles and build vocabulary.

Happy Day Play Family Learning

- **Themed Play Centers:** Transform a corner into a grocery store, doctor's office, or restaurant using props like play food, old clothes, or empty boxes.
- **Puppet Shows:** Use hand puppets or stuffed animals to retell favorite stories, which enhances listening skills and emotional expression.
- **Animal Imitation:** For kids obsessed with animals, encourage them to mimic how different creatures move and sound to develop gross motor skills.

Movement & Nature Exploration

Physical play is essential for burning energy while teaching observation and coordination.

- **Sensory Nature Walks:** Bring a small basket on a walk to collect "treasures" like smooth rocks or crunchy leaves, then sort them by texture.
- **Indoor Obstacle Courses:** Use pillows, chairs, and tape to create a route that requires crawling "under" or hopping "over," building spatial vocabulary.
- **DIY Music Parade:** Craft shakers from plastic bottles filled with rice or "guitars" from rubber bands and tissue boxes to explore rhythm and sound.

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.



Sidewalk Chalk Paint Recipe

EASY 2-INGREDIENT Sidewalk Chalk Paint



HAPPINESSISHOMEMADE.com

What You Will Need:

- Muffin Tin
- 1 cup Cornstarch
- 1+ cup Water
- Liquid Food Coloring

1. Mix together the water and cornstarch and stir until the cornstarch dissolves.
2. Divide the paint mixture into the wells of a muffin tin or similar painting tray.
3. Add a few drops of food coloring to achieve the desired colors (*note that the colors will dry much lighter on the sidewalk than they appear in the tin!*)
4. Paint your sidewalk or driveway!

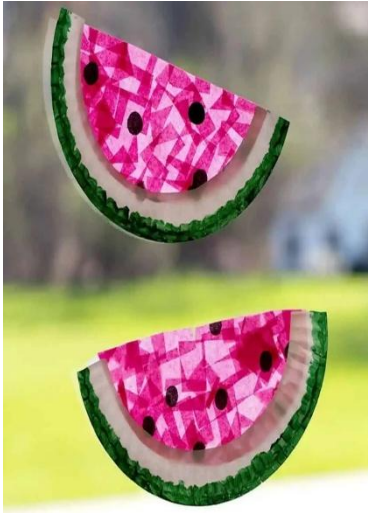
Hand Print Aquarium



What You Will Need

- Popsicle stick or craft stick
- Paper for the hand print
- Google eyes (For older children)

1. Depending on the age of the child have the child trace and cut out their handprint or use a painted handprint.
2. Glue the handprint to a popsicle stick or craft stick
3. Use a thumb print for the nose and eye for younger children
4. Use a google eye for older children.
5. Create a mural with the finished fish or have the children put on a puppet show.



Paper Plate Watermelon Suncatchers

Celebrate summer and the bounty it brings with this super fun paper plate watermelon suncatcher craft!

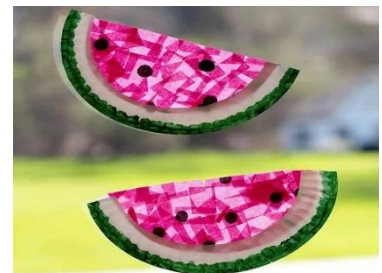
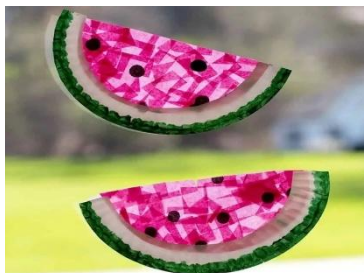
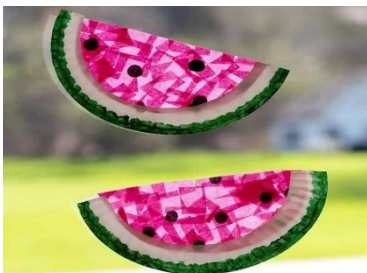
What You will Need:

- pink tissue paper (cut into 1 inch squares)
- black tissue paper (cut into small circles)
- white paper plates
- adhesive clear laminate shelf liner
- green paint and a paint brush
- tape
- scissor

Instructions:

1. Cut the paper plate in half.
2. Next, cut off the "plate" part leaving only the textured rim.
3. Paint the bottom half of the textured rim green.
4. Next cut a small rectangle of clear shelf liner (enough to fit inside the space in your paper plate).
5. Invite your child to cut small circles from the black tissue paper and place them directly onto the sticky side of the shelf liner.
6. Next, place small squares of pink tissue paper onto the sticky side of the shelf liner.
7. When the shelf liner is covered, cut another small rectangle (about the same size) and place it over the tissue paper.
8. Trim any ragged ends.
9. Place the tissue paper rectangle into the paper plate (seed side out) and secure it with tape.
10. Trim off excess edges to create a watermelon slice.
11. Hang in the window with tape and enjoy!

The sun makes the “fruity” part of this watermelon activity look so vibrant when you hang it in the window. The watermelon seeds really pop out against the pink as does the rind! The project can be adapted to any age group!



Meal Pattern Minute: Creditable Meal Components

Here are some helpful resources from the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) website related to creditable meal components. It is important to ensure that children receive health meals and snacks while they are in child care and at home.

When you're planning meals in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), it's not just about choosing foods that taste great, it's about choosing creditable foods. But how can you tell which foods are creditable and which are not? What does it really mean for a food to be considered a "creditable meal component"?

Tune in to Isabel Ramos-Lebron, MS, RDN, LD, as she explains what makes a food or beverage a creditable meal component in the CACFP.

Transcript: What is a creditable meal component in CACFP? A creditable meal component is a food or beverage that meets CACFP meal pattern requirements and can be counted toward a reimbursable meal or snack. The five meal components are fluid milk, fruits, vegetables, grains and meats/meat alternates. Each must meet specific guidelines such as meeting the minimum serving size or added sugar limits to be creditable.

Explore more resources about crediting meal components in CACFP. Click on the underlined links to access the resources.

- **CACFP Meal Pattern Reference Card**
 - A helpful breakdown of infant, child and adult meal patterns and which meal components credit for each meal type.
- **Crediting Handbook in the CACFP**
 - This comprehensive guide outlines how foods credit in CACFP, including examples, serving sizes, and tips for documentation.
- **National CACFP Association: Meal Pattern Resources**
 - Access tip sheets and training tools to help you accurately credit meal components in the CACFP as part of a reimbursable meal.
- Try adding this #CACFPCreditable one-skillet dish, **Julia's Beefy Macaroni**, to your next menu.



Grain



Vegetable



Fruit



Meat/Meat Alternate



Fluid Milk

Teaching Children Resilience



Teaching resilience is about showing children that mistakes aren't "failures" they are just data for next time. Here's a breakdown of strategies to help children navigate through those tough moments.

1. Reframe the "Mistake"

Help children shift their internal monologue from *"I can't do this"* to *"I can't do this yet."*

- The "Beautiful Oops" Concept: Borrowed from the famous children's book, teach them that a spill or a torn paper can be the start of a new piece of art.
- Audit the Error: Ask, "What part was the hardest?" or "What should we try differently next time?" This moves them from emotion to problem-solving.

2. Model "Healthy Struggling"

Children watch how adults handle frustration. If you drop your keys or spill coffee, narrate your process out loud.

- Say: "Ugh, I'm so frustrated I dropped that! Let me take a deep breath so I can think clearly about how to clean it up."
- Show: Avoid rushing to "fix" everything for them. If they are struggling with a puzzle, wait an extra 30 seconds before offering a small hint rather than doing it for them.

3. Normalize Disappointment

It is tempting to tell a child "It's okay" or "Don't be sad," but that can dismiss their feelings.

- Validate first: "It really stinks that your tower fell over. You worked so hard on that."
- The "Pity Party" Timer: Give them a minute to be genuinely sad or mad. When the timer goes off, ask, "Are you ready to try again, or do you need a break?"

4. Build a "Coping Toolbox"

Resilient kids know how to calm their bodies so their brains can work.

- Physical Breaks: Teach "Dragon Breaths" (breathing in deep and exhaling "fire") or "Starfish Breathing" (tracing fingers while breathing).
- Positive Affirmations: Create simple mantras like, *"I can do hard things,"* or *"Mistakes help me grow."*

5. Focus on the Process, Not the Result

Praise the effort, the strategy, and the persistence rather than just the win.

- Instead of saying "You're so smart for getting that right!" Try saying "I saw how you kept trying different blocks until that one stayed up. You didn't give up!"

6. Small Wins Lead to Big Resilience

Give children age-appropriate "jobs" like setting the table or feeding a pet. Successfully completing a task, even if they have to correct a small mistake along the way, builds the self-sufficiency children need to handle bigger challenges later.

From the Business Specialist for Child Care Providers

What Is the Iron Triangle in Childcare?

The Iron Triangle in childcare is a simple but powerful financial model that helps explain what programs need to stay open and provide high-quality care. It focuses on three key areas: full enrollment, full fee collection, and revenue that covers expenses. These three components must work together to create a stable and sustainable childcare business.

Each side of the triangle is connected. If one side becomes weak, it affects the others and can create challenges for the program. For example, when a program has empty seats, it loses income that cannot be recovered. When families pay late or not at all, the program may struggle to pay bills or staff on time. And when the money coming in does not fully cover expenses—such as wages, supplies, food, and utilities—programs may be forced to cut corners, which can impact quality.

The Iron Triangle also helps providers understand that many financial challenges in childcare are not due to poor management, but instead are part of a larger system where balancing these three areas is difficult. By focusing on strengthening each side of the triangle, providers can make more informed business decisions.

When enrollment is full, fees are consistently collected, and revenue covers the true cost of care, programs are better able to support staff, maintain safe and engaging environments, and provide consistent, high-quality care for children and families.

In short, the Iron Triangle is a practical tool that helps childcare programs stay financially healthy, make informed decisions, and protect the quality of care they provide.



To learn more about the Iron Triangle look for a training in the Community Child Care Clearinghouse of Niagara newsletter located at the bottom of the links tab of our website:

www.childcareofniagara.com

Cavity Free Kids

Baby Teeth are Important

Why are baby teeth important?



- They help us smile, eat, talk and hold space for adult teeth.
- Baby teeth, also called primary teeth, will usually start to come in at about 6 months of age and continue to come in until about 30 months of age.
- The combination of germs and carbohydrates (sugars and starches) creates an acid that attacks teeth.
- Cavity causing germs can be passed from a mother or caregiver to a baby through kissing, sharing utensils or by putting baby's pacifier in mom's mouth.
- Cavities in babies and young children can be prevented by making sure mom doesn't have active tooth decay. It is important for pregnant women and mothers of young children to get preventive care and dental treatment.
- White or brown spots on teeth can be early signs of a cavity, and a black spot is probably a cavity.
- Untreated cavities can lead to a serious infection.
- Baby teeth are placeholders for permanent teeth. It is important to keep a child's baby teeth healthy so that a child's permanent teeth come in strong and healthy.

Setting Goals to Keep Baby Teeth Healthy

1. Brush your child's teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste.
2. Ensure your child drinks only water between meals.
3. If your baby goes to sleep, with a bottle fill the bottle only with water.
4. Ensure your child eats tooth healthy foods such as fruit, vegetables and cheese for snacks and meals.
5. Take your child to dentist. A child's first dental visit should occur by the time your child gets their first tooth or their first birthday.
6. Follow-up with treatment appointments as required by your child's dentist.

It is important to remember that with proper oral hygiene, cavities are 100% preventable. In addition, it is important to get regular checkups for your child because changes in your child's mouth can happen quickly.



July 4th Activities

Sparklers for Younger Children



For children not old enough for sparklers, here is a great option. Paper sparklers! Gather patterned red, white, and blue straws and construction or metallic paper. Cut thin strips down the long side of the paper, leaving about two inches uncut at the bottom of each sheet. Then, have the children wrap the uncut edge of the paper tightly around the top of a straw. Secure with tape and there you have it: Safe and silly sparkler fun!

Fourth of July Windsocks



How to Make 4th Of July Windsock Toilet Paper Roll Craft

What you need:

- toilet paper roll
- blue paint
- paint brush
- scissors
- white and red tissue paper
- white paper
- star paper punch or white paint
- yarn
- hole puncher

1. Start by painting the toilet paper roll blue. Let the paint dry completely before you work with it more.
2. While you wait for the paint to dry, cut the tissue paper and cut the stars out of paper.
3. Once the paint has dried, make two holes on one side of the toilet paper roll across from each other. Single hole paper punch is the best tool for this job.
4. String the yarn through both holes.
5. Tie the yarn at the top.
6. Glue the stars you previously cut to the painted toilet paper roll.
7. Apply glue on one end of the tissue paper strip and press it inside the toilet paper roll.
8. Alternate between white and red colored tissue paper strips until you complete the circle.

Your windsock is complete and ready to hang and enjoy!

Fourth of July Snacks

Red, White and Blue Fruit Slices

This is a healthy, easy and quick snack that children will enjoy making and eating!



1. Top watermelon slices with yogurt.
2. Add sliced bananas and blueberries for a red, white and blue summer treat.

Star Waffles



Ingredients

- 5 WGR waffles (1 oz eq. each).
- 2/3 cup low-fat cream cheese, softened.
- 1 tsp vanilla extract.
- 5 cups of your choice of red, white and blue fruits such as, strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, and banana.
- 2 tbsp maple syrup (optional).

Directions

1. In a bowl, whisk together the cream cheese, syrup and vanilla.
2. Spread two tablespoons evenly on top of each waffle.
3. Serve 2 waffle slices and 1/2 cup of mixed fruit on a plate. Have children add their own fruit topping to their star design!

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



Zucchini Tater-Tots



Ingredients

- Cooking Spray
- 3 large zucchini, grated
- 2 large eggs, lightly beaten
- 1/2 cup shredded cheddar
- 1/2 cup grated Parmesan
- 1 tsp. dried oregano
- 1/4 tsp. garlic powder

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees and grease a baking sheet with cooking spray.
2. In a large bowl, whisk the eggs until the yolks are broken and the mixture is yellow.
3. Add the zucchini, cheddar cheese, parmesan cheese, oregano and garlic powder and mix until combined.
4. Scoop 1 tablespoon of the mixture and roll it into a tater-tot shape with your hands and then place on the baking sheet.
5. Bake until golden or approximately 15 to 20 minutes.

Early Childhood Behavioral Health Services and Support



The Community Child Care Clearinghouse of Niagara offers the following services, resources and training to educate caregivers about children's behaviors, triggers and mental health as well as finding strategies to reduce their own frustrations and anxieties. It is important to have someone to talk to when facing burnout and stress. It is also important to know what is developmentally appropriate and when a child needs more support than you can provide on your own. These services are provided at no cost to child care providers.

Training presentations which cover approved Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) training topic areas are available on the following topic areas:

- **Finding the Why in Young Children's Behavior:** In this training, participants will learn about why children in their child care program may be exhibiting disruptive behaviors and what providers can do to form better relationships and minimize disruptions.
- **Autism, It's Not What You Think:** This presentation includes interactive conversation regarding the myths around autism and what autism is. This presentation will also focus on neurodiversity as a whole as well as ADHD and sensory processing disorders.

Behavioral Health Consultation

Our Behavioral Health Consultant has 30 years of experience in early childhood as a teacher, family child care provider and day care center director. She has extensive experience and training in autism spectrum disorders, child trauma, neurodiversity and brain development.

The consultation process involves approximately 12 weeks of support to child care providers. The consultant will come to your program and assist staff with supporting the mental health of their students as well as themselves. They will be given tools to understand and address conflicts in the program. More importantly a provider will not be able to meet the needs of the children if their own needs are not met. Providers will receive resources and support in finding their own tools for self-regulation.

For more information, please contact **Erin Crump** at ecrump@niagaracap.org or by phone at 716-285-8572 extension 115.



Nature-Based Play: Supporting Infants & Toddlers Through Everyday Experiences

By: Stephanie T. Long | Infant Toddler Specialist

A child's physical health, emotional well-being, and cognitive growth are deeply connected to their environment, especially access to consistent, engaging learning experiences. Infants and toddlers learn about the world through their senses, their relationships, and their everyday interactions. One of the most meaningful and often underutilized ways to support early development is through nature-based play. Whether it's feeling the warmth of the sun, watching leaves move in the wind, or exploring the texture of grass, nature offers rich opportunities for learning, regulation, and connection. You may be wondering what this looks like for young children and how to help them feel comfortable with the outdoors and the unknown elements that come with it.

Safety is often the number one concern for families and childcare professionals when introducing outdoor experiences. Worries about allergens, insects, toxic plants, and unpredictable environments can create hesitation. The good news? Outdoor play does not have to feel risky or overwhelming. With thoughtful planning, supervision, and simple strategies, nature becomes a powerful & accessible extension of a child's learning environment. Incorporating nature into early care settings does not have to be complicated. Just like indoor routines, predictable outdoor experiences help children feel safe and supported. Consistency builds comfort, and comfort builds confidence. Nature-based play is simple, flexible, and developmentally appropriate!



Simple ways to get started:

- Try a “Family 15” : Spend 15 minutes outside each day as a group, no matter the weather. Let your child take the lead and show you what interests them. Even if you're not a fan of the great outdoors, keep in mind your child is a fan of everything: a squirrel chattering in a tree, a bird perched on a power line, even a colorful leaf.
- Learn more about natural materials & creating safe outdoor environments: Search for the “Nature Play at Home” Guidebook by the National Wildlife Federation.

These small moments can build curiosity, attention, and early problem-solving skills. Outdoor play is more than just “getting fresh air,” it directly supports emotional regulation. You do not need expensive outdoor toys to create meaningful experiences. In fact, children often engage more deeply with simple, open-ended materials.

Try these low-cost ideas:

- Nature scavenger hunts (find a leaf, stick, rock)
- Water play with cups, buckets, or recycled containers
- “Nature baskets” filled with safe items for infants
- Cloud watching or shadow play
- Outdoor music with pots, pans, or sticks

Outdoor Play & NYS Guidance

Outdoor play is not only best practice it is a regulatory expectation across all modalities of care in New York State. While specific section numbers vary by program type, the expectations remain consistent.

All types of regulated care must:

- Provide daily supervised outdoor play, weather permitting
- Outdoor play may only be limited due to:
 - Inclement or extreme weather
 - A documented health concern (per a health care provider)
 - Families may request that a child remain indoors, but the child must still be supervised by an approved caregiver

These regulations are not meant to limit outdoor play—but to ensure it is safe, intentional, and accessible for all children. Even in programs without dedicated playgrounds, outdoor experiences can still be implemented through planned walks, the use of community spaces, and small outdoor areas adapted for exploration. When paired with proper supervision, handwashing, and thoughtful planning, outdoor play becomes a safe, regulated, and essential part of high-quality care.



Additional Resources

- The Outdoor Environment: Designing for Engagement <https://www.virtuallabschool.org/infant-toddler/learning-environments/lesson-3>
- Engaging Toddlers in Nature Play (NAEYC) <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/blog/engaging-toddlers-nature-play>
- Outdoor Experiences for Infants and Toddlers (Head Start) <https://headstart.gov/learning-environments/article/outdoor-experiences-infants-toddlers>
- Nature-Based Learning with Infants and Toddlers (Community Playthings) <https://www.communityplaythings.com/resources/articles/nature-based-learning-with-infants-and-toddlers>
- “Nature Play at Home” Guidebook (National Wildlife Federation) <https://www.nwf.org/ECHO/Resources>



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Celebrating Labor Day Together!

As we transition from the bright, sunny days of summer to the crisp beginnings of fall, we want to take a moment to celebrate the hardworking families and staff who make our community so special. Labor Day is more than just a long weekend; it is a time to honor the dedication and contributions of workers everywhere.

What is Labor Day?

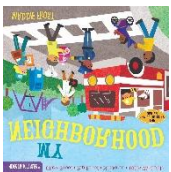
For our little ones, Labor Day is a great chance to learn about different jobs and the people who help us every day. You can explain it simply, Labor Day is a special holiday on the first Monday of September that honors all workers from doctors and teachers to builders and bakers for the hard work they do to help our world".

Fun Ways to Celebrate at Home

If you're looking for meaningful ways to connect with your child this Labor Day, here are a few kid-friendly ideas:

- **Career Dress-Up:** Encourage your child to dress up as what they want to be when they grow up. It's a fun way to talk about different jobs.
- **Family Picnic:** Pack a basket with healthy snacks like fresh fruit and sandwiches and head to a local park for a relaxing afternoon.
- **Thank-You Cards:** Help your child create a simple drawing or "thank you" card for a local worker they see often, like a mail carrier or a grocery store clerk.
- **Backyard Water Fun:** If it's still warm, cool off with some simple water games or a sprinkler.

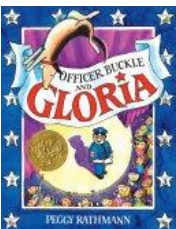
Community Helper Books: These books help young children recognize and appreciate the people who work in their neighborhoods.



Welcome to **My Neighborhood!** It's full of friendly people, the mail carrier delivers mail, the garbage collectors keep things clean. This book is great for Infants and Toddlers.



Helpers in Your Neighborhood (National Geographic Kids): This book features large photos of firefighters, mail carriers, and crossing guards. This book is great for preschoolers.



Officer Buckle knows more about safety than anyone in the town of Napville. But whenever he tries to share his safety tips, nobody listens. Until, that is, the Napville Police Department gets a police dog named Gloria. This book is great for children ages 6 to 12 years.

Getting Outdoors: Enjoying Off-Site Activities



The warm days of summer bring time to go outdoors and enjoy child-friendly community activities and events. For child care providers, off-site activities add a special dimension to summer programming, fueling curiosity and excitement in the children. Although outside experiences are generally casual, please remember whenever and wherever you care for enrolled children, you remain a licensed or registered program

and must adhere to the New York State Office of Children and Family Services child care regulations.

When planning an off-site activity, review the regulations regarding program requirements, transportation, supervision, health and nutrition. Although school-age programs and day care centers must have field trip plans approved by the director, all programs should consider the following when planning off-site activities:

1. The age-appropriateness of the venue and activity. Ensure the daily routine regarding snacks, meals and rest are incorporated into the day. *414.7(c), 416.7(a), 417.7(a), 418-1.7(a)(1)*
 - Public pools must have a certified lifeguard on duty and a current permit from the health department. (*regulations section .5(g&h)*).
 - Public playgrounds need to be free from hazards.
2. How the program is getting to the venue. (*regulations section .6*)
3. Maintaining direct competent supervision and ratios. (*regulations section .8(j)*)
 - Remember only those approved by the Office as caregivers can be left alone with the children. *414.8(e), 416.8(d), 417.8(d), 418-1.13(i)*
 - Volunteers for the day are considered visitors and must adhere to the program's visitor's policy. (*regulations part .8 (p)&(q)*)
4. What to bring with you.
 - Accurate children's attendance records (*regulations section .15(c)(5)*)
 - Children's Blue Cards (OCFS) or other approved enrollment information with emergency contact information (*regulations section .15(c)(3)*)
 - First aid kit (*refer to the program's approved health care plan*)
 - Medication (*refer to the program's approved health care plan*)
 - Water (*regulations section .12(l)*)
 - Snacks (*regulations section .12(a)*)
 - Hand sanitizer (*regulations section .11(i)(4)*)

Secure permission in writing from parents and guardians before taking the children off-site as they need to be aware of where their children are at all times. (*regulations section .15(8)(i)*)



A solid plan that follows the OCFS regulatory requirements will ensure a safe experience for children. Get the children outside and enjoy what the community has to offer. Summer is finally here!