

# Early Learning Parents' Pages

## December 2016



Celebrate handwashing, discover the safest toys for your kids, get vaccinated and find fun activities in Florida during the winter season.



## Safe Toys and Gifts Month

During the holiday season you may be purchasing toys as gifts for your children or for friends or relatives. Make sure the toys you buy are [safe and age appropriate](#).

Age levels on toys are determined by safety for the child, not his maturity level. Toys for children that are entertaining and educational are best selected by the way a child learns and plays at each stage of development.



Consider [safety first](#) when selecting toys for babies, toddlers and preschoolers. Baby toys need to be large enough so your child cannot swallow them or get the toy stuck in his throat.

Battery-operated toys should have battery cases that are screwed closed so your child cannot get to the batteries. It is important to make sure toys do not have sharp edges and are strong enough to withstand chewing, being thrown and sat or stood upon.

Stuffed animals should have a tag saying they have met safety

standards. Do not give children toys or stuffed animals that are prizes at vending machines, fairs or carnivals because they do not have to meet safety requirements.

Toys made of fabric should be flame resistant and washable. Make sure painted toys are painted with lead-free paint and that all art materials are non-toxic.

Crayons and paint should have ASTM D-4236 on the label to indicate they have been tested for safety.

If the toy makes noise, make sure that it is not too loud if your child holds it directly to his ear.



Babies use their senses to learn and explore their surroundings, so they will want to see, taste, feel, smell and listen to their toys. You are your child's favorite playmate, so [toys you can use to interact with your child](#) are important also.

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## Celebrate Handwashing

December 4 – 10 is National Handwashing Awareness Week and a great time to remind your child of the importance of washing her hands.

When you talk to your child about ways to avoid getting sick, ask your child how she can kill germs when she cannot see them. The best way to avoid getting sick is to wash your hands.

Germs are viruses, bacteria, fungi and protozoa so small you cannot see them, but they can make you sick. Germs are spread by contact with surfaces or people that have germs on them.



"What's so small you can't even see them? They are on all your toys and clothes and can make you sick? Germs!"



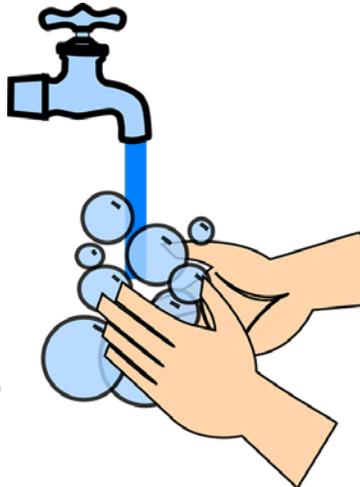
You can make a game out of handwashing. Tell your child she can become a super hero and keep her safe from germs by being a "[germ stopper](#)."

Explain that washing your hands after you play with toys, use the bathroom, blow your nose, cough or sneeze, play outside or touch pets or animals will kill germs that make you sick.

The "germ stopper" way to wash your hands is to use warm running water and soap. The skin on your hands has oils that the germs stick to and soap helps to break down the oils to get rid of the germs and dirt.

Rubbing your hands together creates friction that gets rid of the dirt and germs. Wash the palms and backs of your hands and around the fingernails. Scrub your hands together for at least 20 seconds and rinse them under warm water and dry with a clean paper towel.

The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) and [Kids Health](#) have information and posters for children to learn more. You can also watch a video from [Sid the Science Kid](#) that discusses why kids should wash their hands or try this [handwashing activity](#).



## New Year's Resolutions for Kids

The new year will be here soon and it is important to include your young child in the holiday fun. Many adults make New Year's resolutions and you can encourage your child to make at least one resolution, too.

The [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) has a list of healthy New Year's resolutions for kids and offers resolution suggestions for preschoolers, children 5 to 12 years old and kids 13 years and older.

You can use these suggestions to help your child make a New Year's resolution. Focus on something your child will be able to accomplish with a little help and encouragement from you. When your child chooses a resolution, write it down for him and ask him to draw a picture of himself completing the resolution.



Put the picture on a mirror or wall in his room where he can see it every day. For example, if your child's resolution is to put away his toys before going to bed, read his resolution to him at bedtime and ask if he put his toys away.

Emphasize the importance of your child keeping his resolution and how it helps him find his toys and keeps his toys from being stepped on and getting broken or lost.

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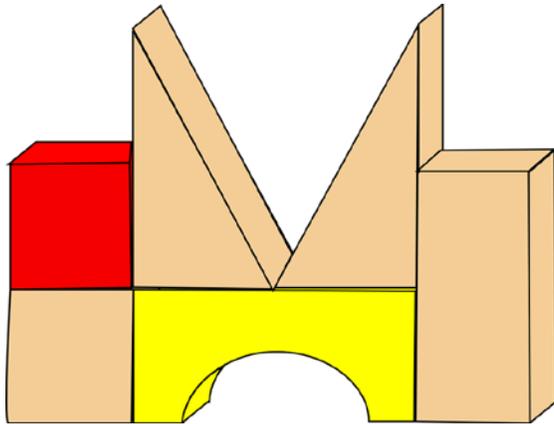
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## Safe Toys and Gifts Month

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Board books, baby mirrors, rattles, soft blocks, sensory blanket-squares, sensory shapes and balls, busy boards or boxes, push-pull toys and mobiles are [toys that babies can use](#) their senses to explore.

[Toddlers](#) like to explore and solve problems, engage in "pretend play" and enjoy physical play. Pop-up toys and busy boxes with knobs, buttons and levers, puzzles with big, chunky pieces, and role play toys like kitchens, doctor's kits, dolls and stuffed animals are [toys for toddlers](#) that encourage gross and fine motor skills and problem solving.



Preschoolers use senses and imagination in their play. They are physically active and enjoy role-play. Toy trains, trucks and cars, blocks, Legos, construction sets, stuffed animals and dolls, toy phones and musical instruments, dress-up clothes, toy workshops and kitchens, tricycles and other pedal toys, books, washable paints and finger paints are [toys that will keep preschoolers entertained](#) and support their physical and cognitive development.

As you shop for children this holiday season, keep in mind the safety precautions necessary for specific age groups. Look for age-appropriate toys that encourage [learning skills](#) and physical development.

## Get Your Flu Shot Now

December 4 – 10 is [National Influenza Vaccination Week](#), as well as National Handwashing Awareness Week. Parents, remember to tell your children to wash their hands to kill germs and take them to get their flu shots. This is the best way to protect your child against colds and the flu.

Influenza outbreaks can occur as early as October, but the flu season peaks between December and March. The antibodies from the influenza vaccination take about two weeks to develop in the body, so you should have your child vaccinated as soon as possible to protect her against the flu virus.

Children under the age of 6 months are too young to get the flu vaccination, so be sure to keep them away from unvaccinated children and adults, if possible. Vaccinating your child will help keep the younger children safe from the flu virus.

Most children are very [nervous and scared](#) when they have to get vaccinations. To comfort your child and make the visit less stressful, try these tips from the Centers for Disease Control –

- Distract your child with a toy or by singing or talking softly.
- Bring her favorite toy or book to distract her.
- Hold your child on your lap, if possible.
- Never scold your child for crying or being afraid.
- Praise your child for being brave and reassure her that she will feel better soon.



Before and after the doctor's visit, talk to your child about why she needed the shot and how it keeps her from getting sick. Ask the doctor or nurse about non-aspirin pain relievers you can give your child to soothe the pain around the injection site. Place a cool, wet cloth on the injection site to reduce redness, soreness and swelling, if needed.

For preschoolers and toddlers, let them watch an episode from [Sid the Science Kid](#) and talk about the video and her experience at the doctor's office.

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## New Year's Resolutions for Kids

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Praise your child when he remembers to put away his toys without a reminder and tell him how many days he has kept his resolution. Do not criticize him if he does not follow through with his resolution every day, rather encourage him to stick to his resolution and get back on track the next day.

Your child can try many different resolutions, such as brushing his teeth twice a day, being nice to friends and others at school and at home, helping clear the table after meals, and washing his hands before eating and after using the bathroom.

You may want to guide your child in choosing a resolution similar to one you have made. If your resolution focuses on eating more vegetables, your child may want to make eating a new vegetable once a week his resolution.

To make a New Year's resolution more fun, you can use Twitter or Instagram, or [write your child's resolution online](#) and it can be released as confetti at the [official New Year's Eve Times Square Celebration](#) on Dec. 31, 2016.

[New Year's resolutions](#) can help your family have a happier and healthier new year in 2017.

## Florida Winter Fun

While it may not feel like winter weather here in Florida, there are many ways families and children can celebrate the winter season.

Take your children through different neighborhoods at night to look at the lights and decorations on different houses. With the time change, it is easy to go out earlier and still get the kids to bed on time.

Check your county for local festivals and events where your children can get their faces painted and participate in fun, winter activities and games.

[Florida State Parks](#) also offer many fun activities and events for kids. One of the most popular park events is the Festival of Lights at Stephen Foster Folk Culture Center State Park in White Springs. Named a top 20 event in the southeast, children 3 and under are offered free admission to see unique holiday light displays on majestic oak trees and the antebellum museum, including a gingerbread village and candy cane forest.



## January Upcoming Events

- National Mentoring Month
- Celebrate Literacy Week
- Martin Luther King Day
- Start the New Year Right by Reading to Your Child



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