



DIRECTOR'S CORNER

>>> SPRING 2020

An effective family engagement system builds connections between home and school and is an essential component to meeting the needs of each child in your program.

TIP#1 EARTH/ARBOR DAY: GO GREEN!

Earth Day is April 22 and Arbor Day is April 24. Taking care of the environment, the classroom and their home is not only an essential skill to teach children - it also provides unique opportunities for discussion about how certain materials are made and how they can be re-used. See ideas [here](#).

For some parents, a child care center that is committed to protecting the environment is an important factor in their child care search. They are looking for a green daycare that makes use of the latest in environmentally friendly products and practices to offer a safe, non-toxic space for their children. As a result, many facilities are transforming into eco-friendly child care centers, allowing parents to feel comfortable leaving their children in a healthy environment for them to learn and grow. As part of your routine spring cleaning this season, why not consider some easy ways to create a green child care environment? [Here are some simple tips](#).

TIP#2 APRIL IS STRESS AWARENESS MONTH

Provide resources to parents, children ([Kids get stressed too](#)) and staff on how to reduce stress to create a healthy school family. See tips [here](#). Plan an event for children and their families to discover ways to reduce stress such as, Yoga Night, or introducing Mediation/Breathing techniques into everyday routines, getting outside more by taking walks or gardening, listening to music throughout the day, more free art time for the kids and even putting fish aquariums/ bowls throughout the center can be very relaxing for all.



TIP#3 STAFF APPRECIATION

Start planning now for staff appreciation days coming up. Admin Professionals Day is April 25 and Teacher Appreciation is the first week in May. Employee appreciation is never out-of-place. Use every opportunity to demonstrate your gratitude and appreciation to employees. Small surprises and tokens of your appreciation spread throughout the year help the people in your work life feel valued by you all year long. Food is always a great idea! Bring in food each [themed](#) day that week (Muffin Monday, Taco Tuesday, etc.) have families help host a potluck Luncheon. Check out this [article](#) for ideas.



(Muffin Monday, Taco Tuesday, etc.)

TIP#4 SAFETY DRILLS: DRILLS SAVE LIVES

"What saved the children was that the teachers had practiced their drills so many times they didn't need to think what to do when the tornado hit. They just reacted." -Abby Larsen, owner and director of A Step Above Learning Center, Moore, OK.



Tornado season in the US is between March and June. Tornadoes occur with rapid onset and, perhaps, no warning. Decisions must be made fast and actions taken immediately. One cannot wait for the storms to strike to plan what must be done to save lives. Prepare now and develop an emergency action plan for your center. Make sure your safety drill procedures are in place and are up to date. See the ODJFS Rule [here](#) to conduct monthly weather emergency drills in the months March through September. Check all room maps to make sure they are correct and readable. Plan to have periodic severe weather drills and severe weather safety training. Drills not only teach students and instructors the actions they need to take, but will allow you to evaluate your plan's effectiveness. Learn more [here](#). Take this a step further and revisit all your scheduled drills, such as fire, safety & lock down drills.

REMEMBER to communicate updates or changes to the plan:

- All staff members should be aware of plans
- have a written schedule for training and drills
 - drills should be multi-hazard
- drills should include all children, every employee, every volunteer with all levels of abilities
 - keep parents informed of drilling activities

For more ideas, see this guide: [Child Care Emergency Preparedness](#)





TIP#5 PREPARING FOR SPRING

With warmer weather approaching take a look at your “Outdoor Play Policy” and share with families. Don’t forget about staff too. When new staff start working at the child care program, written policies will help them learn about responsibilities and expectations at the program regarding outdoor play. Policy statements can help child care providers and families understand why outdoor play is so important for children’s health, development, and mental state. Policies describing outdoor physical activity can encourage outdoor play in most weather conditions. This can help families understand the need to make sure their children are dressed appropriately for the weather each day. With this remind parents to bring in weather appropriate change of clothes as we move from sweaters/coats to light jackets and rain jackets and boots. Children love to play and explore puddles. See this [article](#).

All child care programs should have written policies that include the benefits of outdoor play and ways for children to participate in fun active play and connect to nature. When writing or revising policies, include these areas. <https://www.familyengagementcollaborative.com/outdoor-policy.html>

TIP#6 PLAYGROUND INSPECTIONS/NATURE PLAYSCAPES



Depending on your “Outdoor Play Policy” and the weather it may have been a while since you have been on the playground. So it is a good idea to begin thinking about inspecting your playground equipment to ensure the safety of the children who will play on it. Look for visual signs of wear and tear, structural damage, vandalism or broken glass/other debris that could be dangerous. To prevent children from tripping while at play, correct or remove any hazards, such as exposed concrete footings, tree stumps and rocks. Check mulch to either add or turn in “fall areas.” Warm weather brings snowmelt and a lot of rain. Repair any areas that have inadequate drainage or low spots that would allow standing water. Additionally, adequate playground supervision is another item to reflect on. Prepare your playground for the year by completing proper inspections and maintenance, as well as training your staff.

Take our outdoor space to the next level by adding some nature playscape elements to your outdoor areas. Natural playgrounds typically make use of natural materials to create an outdoor play area for children. However, building an entirely new natural playscape can be a large investment for any preschool. [See this list](#) of easy to implement natural playground ideas so you can start incorporating natural play activities into your child care facility’s outdoor space this Spring. A natural playground is thought to encourage young children to interact with their environment and make discoveries through open-ended play. See the benefits [here](#).



TIP#7 GARDENING

Gardening is a healthy, fun activity for children and allows them to engage in their natural curiosity and wonder. So start planning your center’s garden either indoor or out. If you don’t have room for an entire theme garden, take the ideas and miniaturize them for a container or pot. This will be even better if children recycle their own toys or shoes as planters! More info: <https://kidsgardening.org/>

Gardening provides different forms of engagement for children, including designing, planting, and maintaining gardens; harvesting, preparing, and sharing food; working cooperatively in groups; learning about science, math and nutrition; and creating art and stories inspired by gardens. Center gardens create positive environments that connect with young children’s senses, allowing them to plant, grow, harvest, and ultimately prepare healthy eating experiences. Children develop healthy eating habits and preferences at an early age. The more engaged children become with hands-on food education, such as gardening and food preparation, the more likely they will prefer and routinely consume fruits and vegetables later in life. See some gardening ideas below:

- Engage families by hosting a luncheon using the vegetables that were grown in the Center’s garden. The children can help cook a simple vegetable soup to share with their families. When children participate in growing their own food, they are more motivated to taste, eat, and enjoy the produce resulting from their efforts. Gardening also helps children build an understanding of and respect for nature and our environment.
- Grow flowers and vegetables and hold a Farmers Market allowing the children to provide a low-income community with the opportunity to purchase (or donate) fresh produce and locally grown goods. This teaches children compassion towards the Earth, people, and animals while giving back to the community.
- Make it a [Sensory Garden!](#) An objective in sensory garden design is to encourage users to interact with the plants, often directly, for instance by breaking off leaves to smell or taste. So all plants must be non-toxic, hardy and sturdy enough to withstand handling. Another reminder is make gardening FUN and that all involved think it is PLAY! Try sharing this idea with families too. Live in a city? See [Urban Versatile Balconies and Decks](#).
- Composting can teach kids a variety of concepts and it can be great for your school garden as mulch on top of your soil. It will keep moisture in the garden and prevent weeds from germinating on the surface. The worms and beneficial microbes will come up from the soil into the compost and work the nutrients into the soil. [See this article](#) on how to compost with kids and start composting as a Center.

