



# HOME

VOL 13

# US




# CLASSROOM



BRIGHTSIDE UP

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well



## Sorry, not Sorry!

By Emily Vantassel

If you're like me, then you may have the instinct to say "Sorry!" whenever something unfortunate happens; whether it's your responsibility or not. Saying 'Sorry' for anything and everything was asked of me as a child. Sorry I didn't listen the first time. Sorry I took your toy. Sorry I'm not available on that day. Sorry, sorry, sorry! In my junior year of high school, a new student asked me, "Why do you apologize so much?" After some reflection, I realized the reason I said

sorry so much was because I thought that was the expectation. I would say it whether I meant it or not because I thought I had to, and it was polite. This wondering stuck with me and eventually I began to wonder about how 'Sorry' is used and taught with children. I spent time observing interactions among adults and children and I quickly realized that whenever a conflict or misbehavior occurred, the child would be asked to apologize before things could move on. In some instances, children were disciplined if they refused to apologize. One child even said, "I'm not sorry! They hit me first."

My observations left me with the new wondering of 'Why are we teaching children to apologize, no matter the circumstances, when sorry doesn't fix it?' Because it's true, sorry doesn't make the feelings automatically go away nor does it sweep the moment under the rug like it never happened. Yes, it may be polite, but does it make amends? That is not to say that apologies do not have a place in the early childhood world, because they certainly do, but is there a way we could utilize them to support empathy building rather than 'fixing' the problem? After all, children are not born empathetic. Empathy is developed through time by experiencing it from others and observing it in action. Other Early Childhood Educators have had similar wonderings, and many have concluded that forced apologies are counterintuitive. Meaning, when we ask children to apologize, they might do so but do they really mean it?

What would it be like if we were to first model empathy by teaching children how to make amends? If you push a peer down, rather than saying sorry, what if we were to ask them if they're okay? Do they need anything? An ice pack or some space maybe? Making amends, and even apologizing, can be challenging when we know we're in the wrong or hurt someone. The feelings of guilt and unease can linger, and we may need to process them before making amends. It is okay if a child is not ready to make amends right away. Rather, this is a great opportunity to model

empathy by supporting both parties and their unique needs. Something I run into often is a child taking a toy from a peer. Approaching this with the intention for connection and empathy modeling would look like the following three steps.

- 1** Say what you see. "I see you took the train from \_\_\_\_ and they are crying. I think they are feeling sad."
- 2** Model empathy. "\_\_\_\_, I understand you are sad the train was taken. That is a sad thing."
- 3** Invite the child to make amends. "What could we do to help \_\_\_\_ feel better?"

By approaching challenges in this way, you are slowing things down and helping children to not only recognize the full impact of their choices, but also teaching them how to care for others and make amends.



Visit [brightsideup.org](https://brightsideup.org) for brightsider insights and ways to get involved in **creating a world where all children are understood.**

## ALL ABOUT ALLERGIES

by Desiree Myers, RN CCHC

### WHAT ARE ALLERGIES?

Simply put, allergies occur when the body overreacts to something it encounters. While most of the time, our bodies consider this “something” as normal, occasionally, the immune system sees it as foreign and reacts by releasing histamines, resulting in what we know as allergy symptoms.

### ARE ALLERGIES SERIOUS?

Some allergies cause minor, non-life-threatening symptoms like watery eyes or a runny nose. However, severe allergies can trigger anaphylaxis, a life-threatening reaction that requires immediate treatment.

### FOOD ALLERGIES: A CLOSER LOOK

Not all allergies relate to food, but they affect roughly 1 in 13 children in the United States. While not all food allergies are serious, many can lead to anaphylaxis if the allergen is not avoided.

### COMMON FOOD ALLERGENS

Children can be allergic to various foods, with peanuts, tree nuts, soy, milk, wheat, eggs, fish/shellfish, sesame seeds, and certain berries being the most common culprits. The severity of these allergies varies.

### EXPOSURE AND SYMPTOMS

Exposure to allergens can lead to a range of symptoms, including itching/swelling of the lips/tongue/mouth, throat tightness/hoarseness, cough/wheeze, hives/rash, vomiting/diarrhea, abdominal cramping, shortness of breath/trouble breathing, fainting, and more. Immediate action is crucial—call 911 and the

child’s parents. Many children with severe allergies have an Epinephrine auto-injector for emergency use. Some also use antihistamines in addition to Epinephrine.

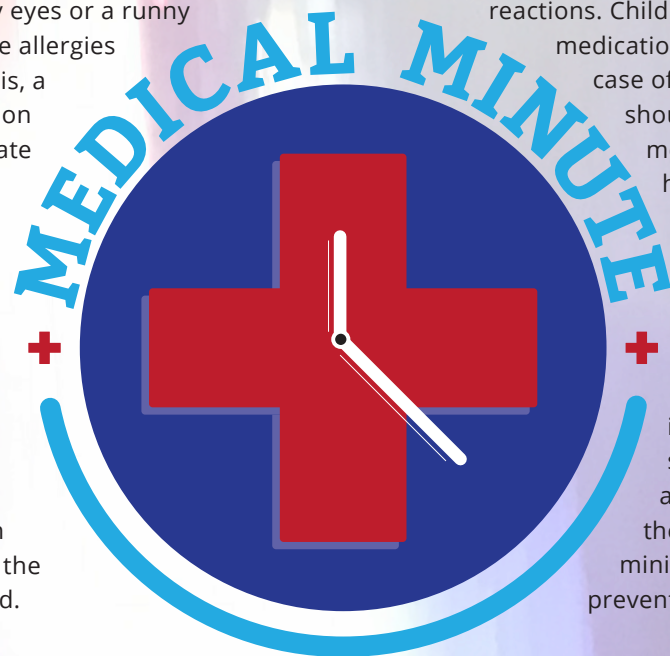
### CHILD CARE CONSIDERATIONS

In child care programs, if a child has a diagnosed allergy, specific paperwork required by OCFS should be completed. This paperwork equips staff with the knowledge and instructions needed to prevent and respond to allergic reactions. Children with prescribed medication should have it on-site in case of emergencies. Programs should implement prevention measures, such as proper handwashing, cleaning, and food preparation. Additional steps may include allergy postings, staff awareness, careful food label reading, allergen avoidance, and, in some cases, providing separate food for the allergic child. Combining these measures effectively minimizes exposure and prevents allergic reactions.

Note: Maintaining safety measures during holidays and celebrations can be challenging, as outside food is often introduced, increasing the risk of allergic reactions. Refer to Bonnie Shultz’s article, “Healthy Celebrations,” for alternative celebration ideas to avoid unintentional allergen exposure.

Join us on Instagram for our Medical Minute Question of the week:  
Can an infant with a food allergy still breastfeed?

Resources: Managing Chronic Health Needs in Child Care and Schools: A Quick Reference Guide, 2nd Edition



check out our

# PODCAST!

Listen wherever you get your favorite podcasts.

Introducing our new column: Seeking Sensory! In this column, we'll be visiting child care programs in our community, with our senses wide open – eyes, nose, mouth, ears, and fingers – on the look-out for exciting sensory play experiences to share with you. We didn't have to venture far because sensory experiences are everywhere! Infants and toddlers are constantly using their five senses to explore and understand the world around them. They mouth objects, grab, dump, and toss things, discovering what rolls, bounces, makes loud sounds, what sticks together, what's sour or sweet, and so much more. Sensory play helps them develop

was typically passed along or set aside. As I observed the children engaging with April, I couldn't help but wonder if these scents were triggering memories of past experiences. Perhaps the aroma of cinnamon evoked warm memories of Saturday morning cinnamon rolls or the festive holiday baking sessions with grandma. It certainly did for me! While we may never know precisely what was going through the children's minds, the connections they forged with their teacher that day undoubtedly fostered positive sensory experiences for them to build upon.

by Kathleen Harland

# seeking sensory

a deeper understanding of these properties and how they can interact with them.

During our visit to the Saratoga Regional YMCA, Malta Childcare, we found April Wickham and her enthusiastic infants relishing the delightful aroma of mandarin orange slices. April had ingeniously crafted smelling jars and bottles filled with an array of scents like cinnamon sticks, lavender, pine needles, and oranges. The children reveled in expressing their preferences for various smells, often twisting their heads and bodies in playful exaggeration, or eagerly requesting another whiff of their favorites with beaming smiles and outstretched arms. Cinnamon emerged as a clear favorite, frequently clung to, while pine



If you're an infant-toddler teacher with captivating sensory play experiences to share, send an email to [homeandclassroom@brightsideup.org](mailto:homeandclassroom@brightsideup.org) and you could be featured!





# CRAFTING MAGIC

by Rebecca Delgiudice

*Autumn, with its vibrant foliage, is the ideal time to gather nature's treasures and create your very own indoor studio to keep those creative juices flowing through the winter months.*

## COLLECT COLORFUL LEAVES:

Kickstart your crafting adventure with a fun leaf scavenger hunt! Arm yourself with a bag to carry your leafy treasures and embark on a quest to find leaves of various colors. Remember to be cautious about where you pluck them from, as some plants can cause irritation (like poison ivy). If you have curious young toddlers, give them a hand, and ask them to join in on this colorful quest. Engage your preschooler by challenging them to find a leaf that matches the color of their shirt. Encourage school-age children to sort the leaves based on shape, size, and color, creating delightful groupings.

Once your leaf collection is brimming with colors, you and your child have choices to make. Will it be a leafy collage with glue on paper? Or perhaps a venture into the world of leaf printing?

## LEAF PRINTS:


For the littlest ones, consider creating leaf prints by tracing them using paper and crayons. Begin by placing a leaf on a flat surface like a table, then lay a piece of paper on top. Let your child choose a crayon color

they fancy. With the paper wrapped around the crayon horizontally, have them trace over the leaf, revealing a beautiful impression. For preschoolers and school-age children, let's take it up a notch! You can use acrylic paint to lightly coat the leaves, though be prepared as this part can get a tad messy.

Cover your workspace in advance. You'll need paper, acrylic paint, brushes, water, and a rag or paper towels to wipe the brush between colors. Start by inviting your child to pick up a leaf for printing, and you can choose one too! Gently coat your chosen leaves, including the stems, with paint. When they're covered, using both hands, press the paint-coated side of the leaf down onto the paper. Apply enough pressure to make an impression but not so much that you rip the leaf. Lift the leaf by the stem and behold your masterpiece! Fill the page with prints or consider outlining and coloring the rest. Here's where your creativity can truly shine!

## NATURE COLLAGE:

If we can glue pasta onto paper plates, why not try gluing pinecones onto paper? While you were on your leaf-hunting adventure, did you spot your little one pocketing an acorn?




Collaging is a fantastic chance to mix materials and experiment with various textures. Think of it as a second scavenger hunt! If your child was adventurous in their gathering, you might already have everything you need on hand. Challenge your child to find natural objects with different textures—you can use our list as a guide. Their enthusiasm might surprise you! For toddlers, this is an excellent opportunity to introduce them to various textures and explore concepts like "same" and "different."


## NATURE COLLAGE SCAVENGER HUNT:

Can you find something...

Smooth	Light
Rough	Crunchy
Bumpy	Long
Fuzzy	Short
Heavy	



Once you've collected your treasures, see if your child can arrange them artfully on a single piece of paper. Preschoolers and school-age kids will relish the challenge, while toddlers might need more space to express themselves—that's perfectly fine! Revisit the concepts of "same" and "different" with your toddler. Label what you see and ask open-ended questions about their creation. Not sure where to start? Try asking, "Tell me about what you made." If your child enjoys this activity, consider keeping materials on hand for future collages. Invest in a bin to store the supplies, making it easy for your child to return to their indoor nature studio whenever inspiration strikes.



If you've tried any of these activities, we'd love to see your creations! Feel free to share your photos with us at [ksmith@brightsideup.org](mailto:ksmith@brightsideup.org). Happy crafting!

# INTENTIONALITY

## a special project

by Jenny Edwards

The smell of oil mixed with gasoline is still one of my favorite smells. That is the smell of my father when he would come home from work and give me a great big bear hug, with his bristly face against mine as he lifted me off the ground. My father, who was an auto mechanic, hence the mixed scents of oil and gasoline, taught me the value of having and using the correct tool. Just like auto mechanics, most professions have specific tools they use to accomplish their work.

Our tools include our knowledge of child development, the art of reflection, and applying intentionality in our planned activities and room arrangement. "An intentional teacher acts with purpose and knowledge to ensure that young children acquire the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in school and life. Intentional teaching is planful, thoughtful, and purposeful" (*The Intentional Teacher, NAEYC*). The importance of room arrangement is often overlooked, but when research and intentionality are applied, how a room is set up becomes an integral part of educating children.

This article features a special project and partnership with Hudson Valley Community College's (HVCC) Education and Social Sciences Department. Guided by the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale, Brightside Up and the Education faculty began a project to revitalize the preschool teaching laboratory. The first step was reflecting on the general arrangement of the room and the placement of the interest centers. The latest research advises that loud interest centers such as dramatic play and blocks are set apart with physical space and furnishings from the quieter centers, like the library center, the cozy spot, and the writing center. Children who need a break from all the activity of a preschool classroom can retreat to the more quiet and less active centers. This helps children with their cognitive focus and emotional control. The arranging we had to do was to add a "buffer center" between the library and block centers. Typical buffer centers are art, science, sand and water tables, math, and fine motor which usually feature quiet materials, limit the number of children, and have a moderate level of activity.

Follow along in this 3-part series as we revitalize and investigate the intention built into the centers at the HVCC preschool teaching lab. In this issue, we will explore the sensory, library, and cozy areas and invite you to look at your own learning spaces as we explore purposeful room arrangement together.

### INTENTIONALITY IN THE BLOCK CENTER

#### What We Changed:

In the block center, the unit blocks are sorted into similar shapes. Once the blocks are set on the shelves according to shape, the shelves were labeled with an outline of the block. The shape label is best for unit blocks along with the printed word naming each shape. The reason this is done is so children can match the shape of the block and place it on the correct shelf. When blocks are sorted by shape on shelves, it helps them find the exact block needed for a structure. In addition to the unit blocks, the block center also includes hollow blocks. The hollow blocks are set on the shelves first by the shape: rectangles, squares, and columns, and then by size. The labels on the shelves are images with accompanying print. We also added certain accessories for a block interest center; including small figurines of people, vehicles, animals, roads and community buildings.



Presenting the final in a 3-part series as we revitalize and investigate the intention built into the centers at the HVCC preschool teaching lab. In this issue, we will explore intentionality in the block center, dramatic play and science centers and invite you to look at your own learning spaces as we explore purposeful room arrangement together. For parts 1 & 2, download Home & Classroom Vol 11 & 12 at [brightsideup.org](http://brightsideup.org).

### Opportunities for Learning:

In a well-organized block interest center, children have the freedom to unleash their creativity, enhance cognitive critical thinking, and grasp the principles of physics as they construct structures. With ample time, space, and materials at their disposal, they expand their capacity for “big thinking.” Block building inherently fosters problem-solving, organization, and design considerations. Children not only reflect their environment through their constructions but also engage in daring experimentation, often attempting to build towering structures to test their limits. With the guidance of deliberate teaching practices, they eventually acquire the skills to create sturdy foundations to achieve their desired heights.

Furthermore, language skills thrive through interactions with peers and teachers, while math skills are explored through concepts like fractions, shapes, and sizes during unit block activities and cleanup. A block interest center serves as a rich tapestry where numerous skills and academic lessons are seamlessly woven into the learning experience.

### What’s the Big Idea?

The block center empowers children to exercise their decision-making skills. Here, they have the freedom to select the blocks they want to work with, figure out their construction projects, and creatively enhance their structures using a variety of available accessories. As educators, our role is to support the protection of the child’s creations and help as needed by supplying materials or offering guidance to facilitate their building efforts.

### The Rating Scale:

The Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale states that a high-quality block center has ample blocks (unit and hollow blocks) for at least three children to build sizable structures and enough clear floor space for three children and an educator. The blocks and accessories should be organized by type and the labels on the shelves should be an outline of the block

or a picture with accompanying printed name. Accessories should be stored in containers and the containers and shelf should be labeled.



### Expanding the Learning:

In a classroom, three children were building a pirate ship with the hollow blocks and unit blocks. This classroom had a very generous supply of hollow blocks. Once the boat was constructed, and it took up most of the block center, the children found their pirate costumes in the dress-up (swaths of fabric) and then proceeded to raid the art center. One child made a flag for the ship, another child drew the map to the treasure, and another child, with the help of the teacher, made eye patches. This is an exceptional example of the amazing play that is possible when there is ample space, time, and materials.

Intentionality carries all the way through clean-up as a teacher can be very intentional about using language that describes the shape of the block, the size of the block, helping the child match the block to the label, and finally reading the name of the block, while pointing to the print. During clean-up of the hollow blocks, a teacher can first talk about what shape the block is, and then compare the size of the block to figure out whether it is a small, medium, or large rectangle.

## INTENTIONALITY IN THE DRAMATIC PLAY CENTER

### What We Changed:

Another area that lends itself to amazing learning opportunities is the dramatic play interest center. This center includes two themes: one is the housekeeping theme and the other is a rotating theme. We chose to include a grocery shop in our dramatic play center to include more play with a focus on building math skills. In addition to embedding diversity and designing two themes, intentionality is also present in how the materials are arranged in the center. For example, the dishes and pans are placed in the cabinets by size and then the silhouette is outlined under each item along with the printed label.

### Opportunities for Learning:

An intentional teacher will teach specific concepts and skills while interacting with children in this learning center. Interact and ask questions about the play, the roles the children are representing, activities they are involved in, add vocabulary, expand on concepts or definitions, insert counting skills, and take on a role themselves to model for the children.

When clean-up begins, be intentional about the language used with the children and ask questions such as: “What size do you think that pan is, small medium or large?” “Do you see the label that matches the size of that plate? Is that plate small, medium, or large compared to the other plates on the shelf?”

### What’s the Big Idea?

In this learning center, children explore role playing, role negotiations, and become story tellers. They make social connections with their peers and learn to solve problems and to regulate themselves all in the context of their pretend play. Children can develop their sense of empathy and acceptance and explore their fears through pretend play.

### The Rating Scale:

The Environmental Rating Scale scores a classroom in the high-quality area if two themes are present in the dramatic play area, but housekeeping must always remain as a constant. The scale also scores dramatic play areas as high-quality if there is a large variety of dress up, dolls, food, and props for both themes. This is also the center where most diversity is present in the assortment of play foods (cultures), the diversity in the dress-up clothes (representing occupations, ages, gender, and cultures) and in the play dolls (abilities and races).

### Expanding the Learning:

An intentional educator will carefully plan the themes in this center around the classroom’s current area of study. One educator, when they were studying families and homes brought in a large cardboard box and cut out a door and windows. Then that morning at breakfast, she said how they had this wonderful house, but it seemed very empty. This led to a discussion of what is inside the children’s houses and what they could put in their “new house.” As a group they decided that their house needed pictures on the walls. They talked about what kind of pictures they had in their houses and what they will put in their “new house.” So, after breakfast was cleaned up, the educator set paper, markers, crayons, and tape on the nearest table next to their house. The children created all sorts of pictures for their house and taped them on every possible surface. They narrated to the educator what they were drawing and where they were going to put it. Educators, with their children, can create a pizza shop, a flower shop, a barn, a shoe store, a doctor’s office, and on and on. The depth of learning and discussion that freely happens with these themes is extraordinary.



## INTENTIONALITY IN THE SCIENCE CENTER

### What We Changed:

We added a science center to support exploration of the scientific method. Our classroom science interest center features rocks, shells, bark, seeds, bird nests, insects in resin, and fact cards and non-fiction books.

### Opportunities for Learning:

The typical sorting of natural objects that occurs and the language that transpires while children are sorting is utterly amazing. An intentional educator will engage with the children and ask open ended questions such as: "How are you sorting those items?" "Tell me about this group of shells and why you sorted them that way?" "Do you know the name of this one?" "Maybe we can figure that out together using this book." "Maybe we can chart how we are sorting these?"

### What's the Big Idea?

Children are naturally curious about and captivated by the world of nature that surrounds them. To gain understanding, children use their senses: hearing, sight, smell, taste, and touch to investigate and experiment with the natural world. When an intentional educator provides many safe, hands-on opportunities for the children, then he/she is promoting the children's propensity to ask questions and gain knowledge about the natural world.

### The Rating Scale:

A high-quality science center includes at least fifteen items from five categories: living things, natural objects, factual/ nature-science picture books, tools, and sand or water tables with appropriate toys/tools. Additionally, a high-quality science center will have activities prepared by the educator that encourage the children to explore the concepts of measuring, comparing, or sorting.

### Expanding the Learning:

An expansion of learning can take place over the course of a couple of days. A good rule of thumb is that when the children are first introduced to new items, they should just have a day or so to freely explore the items. Then the educator could prepare intentional sorting, comparing, or measuring activities. For example, once the children have freely explored the shells for a couple of days, the educator could set out a small, medium, and large bowl with matching labels and show the children how to compare sizes and sort the shells accordingly. The next day the educator could set out the scale and one small wooden block, along with a chart. Then the educator could lead an activity to see how many large shells it takes to equal the weight of the small block, and then repeat with the medium shells and small shells. After this activity, they could chart the different attributes of the shells such as pointy, round, jagged, smooth, and holes. This would naturally lead to the discovery that shells, just like people, have several different attributes.



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# CACFP

## Child and Adult Care Food Program

CACFP provides reimbursement for nutritious foods that contribute to the wellness, healthy growth, and development of young children. Family, group family, and legally exempt child care providers are eligible to participate. (Child care centers can participate through the Dept. of Health).

Joining is easy and the benefits are invaluable. In addition to reimbursement, you will receive free training and ongoing education on food safety, nutrition, menu planning, shopping and budgeting.

Visit [brightsideup.org](http://brightsideup.org) and connect with us today to start ***serv*ing up savings.**



EPHEMERAL

art

We often ask children to commit to their art with tape, glue, or use permanent drawing materials of paints, crayons, etc. I have recently done a deep dive into ephemeral art, also known as nature art, land art, and earth art. Ephemeral art is temporary art found in nature and created with natural materials. The art may turn into an image that you recognize like a bird or a person, but you may also be creating a pattern like a mandala (geometric design that is usually circular) or a spiral. Some artists do build sculptures out in nature that are meant to stay standing, check out Danish sculpture artist, Thomas Dambo.

#### How to get started:

Do you need inspiration to get started? Turn to the internet or your local book store for images of ephemeral art by artists: Andy Goldsworthy, Richard Shilling, Julia Brooklyn, and Thomas Dambo. There are also many YouTube videos that documents famous artists and everyday people creating their ephemeral art.

Spend time outside: back yard, park, beach, lake or the woods.

Collect natural objects: pine cones, pine needs, acorns, leaves, flower petals, rocks, seashells, twigs, driftwood, feathers, bark, reeds, sticks, ice, snow, mud.

The idea is that the art is not permanent and it stays outside and the weather, animals, or other people may interrupt your art. If you provide children with framing for their art: towel, sheet, or placemat, sandbox, cake pans you may be cleaning it up when done.

Many ephemeral artists use only natural objects for their art, but some will use

scissors or twine to pull their sculptures together. However we do not want to leave litter out in nature so please do not leave plastics or other loose parts outside when you are done with your art.

Document the art by taking a picture or video of the process of making it or have your child journal their art by drawing it with paper and pencil.

Also consider protecting (not disturbing) the natural habitats used by insects and other critters.

#### STEAM

Creating land art is an excellent STEAM activity (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, & Math). While creating land art talk about the different textures and shapes of the materials. Are you looking for a bigger or smaller leaf? How many more seashells do you need? Will your art be symmetrical or asymmetrical? If you are creating a rock structure, talk about balance, weight, flat surfaces compared to rounded rocks while trying to balance. Of course the Art in steam is highlighted. Children are using their imagination to create something out of the materials they find in nature. Another developmental domain practiced in this activity is approaches to learning. This developmental domain is often overlooked because it has more to do with how a child is learning and not what a child is learning. Creating art in nature includes approaches to learning by prompting children to be curious about the environment they live in, develop initiative by pursuing their own art goals, and increasing their persistence in an activity.

If you find yourself inspired, please share a picture of your masterpiece made of and in nature on our Facebook page.

Image by Rabea Brok / Pixabay



Image by Mick Haupt / Pixabay

Website Resources  
 Childhood by Nature. The Beauty of Ephemeral Nature Art.  
<https://www.childhoodbynature.com/the-beauty-of-ephemeral-nature-art/>  
 Early Science Matters. Ephemeral Art.  
<https://earlysciencematters.org/ephemeral-art/>  
 Land Art for Kids by Richard Schilling and Julia Brooklyn  
<https://www.landartforkids.com/>

Book Resources:  
 Mattland written by Hazel Hutchins and Gail Herbert and Illustrated by Dusan Petric  
 Publisher: Annick Press (2008)  
 Anywhere Artist by Nikkie Slade Robinson  
 Publisher: Clarion Books (2018)  
 Land Art for Kids (Series): by Richard Schilling & Julia Brooklyn; Publisher: Blurb  
 In the Woods (2010)  
 On the Beach (2009)  
 Stone by Andy Goldsworthy  
 publisher: Abrams (1994)



Kälte

Kälte

**Very Good Hats by Emma Straub and Illustrated by Blanca Gomez**

What comes to mind when you think of a hat? A fedora? A bucket hat or a baseball cap? How about pajama pants, bubbles, or pudding cups?

In this thoughtful and poetic read-aloud, you and your child can discover the truth: That anything can be a hat so long as you believe it is. Similar to the concept in the classic story *A House is a House for Me* by Mary Ann Hoberman, this book suggests that everything is just a hat for something else. On each brightly colored and intentionally detailed page, readers will learn how easily everyday items can be transformed into a unique and fashionable piece of headwear.

As you turn each page, encourage your child to point out the hats they see and tell you which one is their favorite. Ask which hats they might like to wear. Extend their engagement by pointing out the smaller details within the pages, like the man who's lost his hat to the wind or the miniature hats on each woodland creature.

Consider wrapping up your story time with some creative play of your own. Present your child with a variety of toys and safe household items and watch their imagination come to life. Notice your child's interests and share in their sense of wonder as they discover all the hats that had been hiding around your home.

Scan to win a copy of *Very Good Hats*, plus you'll get a tip card & activity, and demo visit from Brightside Up!

Bright Reads: Very Good Hats



**Bright Reads**  
by Nora O'Hanlon

# MAMA

*mindful moment*  
with Kim Polstein, LMSW

## BREATHE WITH ME

This month's mindful moment focuses on you and a partner. This may be an adult or a child, someone you love and trust, maybe someone you're trying to help to calm their own body. This month we will explore together the power of breathing with someone. For example, I will sometimes do this with my fiancé when one of us is feeling overwhelmed or stressed, or when I just want to feel close and connected to him. Breathing together can be done a lot of different ways.

You can start by just saying "breathe with me" or inviting a partner with a question: "will you breathe with me?"

Then, touch each other in some way. You may feel comfortable placing one hand on your belly and the other on their heart (and vice versa). You may feel more comfortable sitting back-to-back pressing into each other lightly. You may choose to sit side by side and put a hand on each other's backs. Or maybe you want to lay down with your partners head on your chest or

belly, or vice versa. It all depends on who you are with, and what you both feel most comfortable with.

Once you find your comfortable position. Breathe in together through your noses for a count of 4-5 seconds. Then, slowly, breathe out together through your nose or mouth for a count of 6-7 seconds. Focusing on a longer exhale helps to regulate our nervous systems. Continue this practice as long as you like. You may even choose to practice syncing your breath by breathing at your own pace until your breath naturally syncs together. When our bodies sync up like that it can be an extraordinary experience.

For more fun breathing activities to try with children visit the Brightside Up website for tip cards and videos.



# LET'S MAKE CELEBRATIONS HEALTHY AND SPECIAL

BY BONNIE SCHULTZ

Birthday and holiday celebrations are truly special moments in the school year, shaping the culture of our learning environment. But, did you know they can be healthier without losing their magic?

Often, cupcakes and sugary drinks are the default choices for these occasions. While some schools limit these celebrations to once a month or attempt to cut back on sweets, the empty calories can still pile up. When tempting, low-nutrition foods are on the menu, kids might nibble even when they're not hungry. Surprisingly, more than 30% of empty calories come from school settings.

So, how can we make these events memorable while keeping them wholesome? In her book "The Art of Gathering," Priya Parker emphasizes the importance of understanding our gathering's purpose. Specifically, how can we honor someone in a way they'll cherish? What special activities align with the child's interests?

There are plenty of creative (and healthy) ways to celebrate.

- Consider a birthday badge as a recognition symbol.
- Create unique celebrations based on the child's passions.
- Offer privileges for the day, like being the teacher's helper, line leader, or song selector.

Remember, the focus should be on personalized, interest-driven activities rather than sweets. Need more ideas?

- Nature enthusiasts may enjoy a nature scavenger hunt.
- Active kids could navigate crepe paper streamer mazes.
- Talkative children might relish show-and-tell time.
- Musical talents shine in a percussion parade.
- Bookworms can pick the story for the day or invite an adult to read to the class.
- Children who know their preferences may choose tabletop toys or active games.
- Science buffs can experiment with making infused water (removing the ingredients before drinking).
- Social butterflies might opt for pajama days or bubble parties.

For families who want to contribute, printed napkins or plates featuring the child's interests add a fun touch to the healthy snacks or meals.

Healthy cooking can also be tasty and fun:

- Try making overnight oats, ready to enjoy the next day.
- Kids love mashing avocado, lime, and garlic powder for guacamole.
- Rainbow spring rolls turn colorful veggies into a hands-on meal.
- Hummus veggie wraps on whole wheat tortillas are perfect for little hands.
- Organize a healthy food tasting, comparing different fruits, cheeses, or veggies.
- If a touch of sweetness is desired, smoothies, fruit-yogurt popsicles, and fruit cereal parfaits are delicious, and kids can help make them. Children are more likely to try foods they've had a hand in preparing!

Let's make celebrations healthier, memorable, and loads of fun! Overnight oats may be flavored in many ways, below are three quick and easy options.

## OVERNIGHT OATS

### BASE INGREDIENTS

- ¼ cup oats**
- ⅛ cup Greek yogurt**
- ¼ cup milk or alternative**
- ½ Tablespoon chia seeds**

Combine all ingredients, cover and refrigerate overnight.

For peanut butter and strawberry flavor add ¼ cup mashed strawberries and 1 tablespoon peanut butter or sun butter

For apple cinnamon flavor add ¼ cup apple sauce, 1/8 cup chopped apples, and 1/8 teaspoon cinnamon

For chocolate peanut butter banana flavor, add ¼ mashed banana, ½ teaspoon cocoa powder, 1 Tablespoon peanut butter or sun butter

For carrot cake flavor add ¼ cup grated carrot, ½ teaspoon cinnamon, 1 tablespoon soft raisins

When celebrations are focused on a child's unique interests or choices, deep memories are made.

# values & traditions

As a child, I looked forward to August every year which signaled our family vacation to New Jersey. August was synonymous with beaches, boardwalks, and birds. Even after many years, I can still vividly remember the noise of the waves crashing and the slight saltiness of the resulting breeze. The squawking of the seagulls flying above the boardwalk, looking for any pieces of food that had been left behind. Although a quick weekend trip, my father and mother worked hard to ensure my sisters and I had a vacation every year; something we could all look forward to. As a result, I have endless memories to thank them for. I am not yet a mother, however, I know one thing is for sure. I hope to keep this tradition alive so that my children will have the opportunity to create beautiful memories of their own, just as I did.

The book titled Traditions: Fostering a Sense of Community in Preschool, by the authors Jacky Howell and Kimberly Reinhard, discusses how traditions have been and will continue to be important to every culture. Most importantly, traditions help children form a strong sense of identity and can enhance their well-being. How? Traditions form what researchers call an emotional imprint; values that are held, often unconsciously, and result from experiences in childhood. Traditions help create positive experiences and memories, nurture a family's connection, and strengthen a family's bond. Traditions can vary from family to family, don't have to cost any money, and don't have to only revolve around the holidays. They can be as simple as going on a walk every Sunday, eating dinner together once a week, or creating a weekly family game night.

I spoke to a few staff members here at Brightside Up to listen and learn about their favorite traditions, as well as traditions they hope to pass down to future generations.

**Desiree**

***Favorite tradition(s): Everything Fall activities, Halloween.***

***The why: With three birthdays in October, the Fall season holds a special place for Desiree. Desiree and her family enjoy apple picking, visiting local farms, and enjoying seasonal treats such as apple cider donuts. Mostly everything, "except pumpkin spice!" Recalling her childhood, Desiree grew up trick-or-treating in her home town in Vermont. A show of community strength and connection, trick-or-treating in Shaftsbury is an event that spans multiple blocks; a community tradition in and of itself. From going trick-or-treating herself to now taking her daughter, Desiree continues to visit Shaftsbury and carries on her childhood tradition.***

**Nicole**

***Favorite tradition(s): Annual family trips***

***The why: "Nostalgia, togetherness, a time to bond, have fun and create memories" Nicole describes what family vacations mean to her. Growing up Nicole traveled extensively with her family. As a result of her travels, Nicole grew to welcome change, seek new possibilities, and become highly adventurous. Continuing to travel with her son, Nicole wants him to be able to have fun and create memories of his own. "I want Liam to never settle, to know that there is more out there in the world for him, and to explore beyond his own bubble. I also want him to be driven and work hard to be able to do the things he loves, such as going on trips."***

## Strengthening family bonds

by Kim Chamorro, Intern

**Claire**

***Favorite tradition(s): Baking Christmas cookies.***

***The why: One of Claire's favorite traditions started when she first began dating her now husband. Claire recounts "We would gather at his mom's house and make at least 15 platters of cookies, each one of us taking platters home to share with people." From neighbors, to clients, to coworkers Claire and her family would spread Christmas joy through cookies! Traditions allow us to connect and share moments with those we hold dear, but also with our communities and social networks. By continuing these traditions with her young children, Claire hopes to instill memories and create a little bit of "hope and magic" for them to remember.***

**Brittany**

***Favorite tradition(s): Sunday dinner.***

***The why: A powerful tradition, Sunday dinner helps to slow the business of life and gives families a chance to connect and bond with one another. For Brittany, Sunday dinner is a central part of her heritage. She grew up with Sunday dinners every week. Connecting with her parents, sister, cousins, and grandparents over homemade pasta or pizza, Brittany hopes to pass this tradition down to her future children. Describing her favorite tradition, Sunday dinner gives Brittany "a sense of safety and comfort... it goes beyond feeling obligated to spend time with my family... if I don't, I feel like something is missing."***

**Barbara**

***Favorite tradition(s): Picnics in the summer.***

***The why: In the past, Barbara attended family reunions at the Taconic State Park. Reuniting the family from the Capital Region all the way down to Pennsylvania, her family reunions created immense joy and resulted in many memories. Having to reinvent this beloved tradition, for the past four years, every summer Barbara and her son have gathered with cousins, aunts, and extended family for a local picnic in Saratoga. A day to connect and relax, this potluck style picnic involves delicious food ranging from hot dogs and burgers to salads and sweet treats. Barbara notes you can also expect a competitive game of corn hole or Kan Jam to occur.***

Traditions can vary from family to family, but the key is to be purposeful and set aside time to connect.

# Spotlight CAMILA'S DAYCARE

Witnessing toddlers immerse themselves in pretend play is an immensely enjoyable experience. Through role-playing, children discover new avenues to express themselves, share thoughts and ideas, and even connect with their emotions, enabling them to explore both themselves and their surroundings. Camila's Day Care, a group family child care program owned by Gladys Galarza and her husband Alexis Rivera, fully embraces this practice. That's why they create opportunities for toddlers to dive into the world of make-believe. They transform their environment by introducing dress-up clothes and props, delving into exciting themes like community helpers.

Observar a los niños pequeños sumergirse en el juego de la imaginación es una experiencia sumamente placentera. A través del juego de roles, los niños descubren nuevas formas de expresarse, compartir pensamientos e ideas, e incluso conectar con sus emociones, lo que les permite explorar tanto a ellos mismos como su entorno. El cuidado diurno de Camila, un programa de cuidado infantil familiar propiedad de Gladys Galarza y su esposo Alexis Rivera, abraza completamente esta práctica. Por eso crean oportunidades para que los niños pequeños se sumerjan en el mundo de la fantasía. Transforman su entorno al introducir ropa de vestir y accesorios, adentrándose en emocionantes temas como los ayudantes de la comunidad.





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