



JAN - MARCH 2026 ISSUE 5

Newsletter

early
learning
coalition
OF PASCO & HERNANDO
A Space To Grow In Service
www.elcph.org

20
Years



ELCPH Mission Statement
Creating a supportive community
for children to be successful in
school and life.



ELCPH Vision Statement
Supporting quality education
for every child.

Healthy Together – Wellness Starts at Home: Small Habits, Big Impact!

Wellness begins at home, and the smallest daily habits can create the biggest impact on your family's health. Focusing on simple, consistent routines helps build a foundation for long-term well-being.

Start with nutritious meals. Incorporating fruits, vegetables, and whole grains doesn't have to be complicated. Involving the whole family in meal preparation teaches healthy choices and turns mealtime into a meaningful bonding experience.

Physical activity is just as important. Encourage movement in ways that fit your lifestyle - such as family walks after dinner, weekend bike rides, or dancing to your favorite music. Regular activity strengthens the body, boosts mood, and sets a positive example for children.

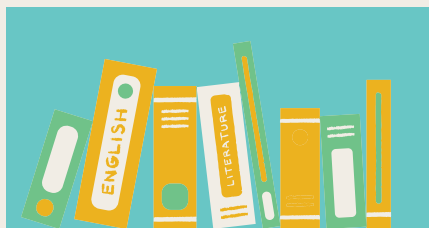
To support mental wellness, simple practices like daily gratitude, mindfulness exercises, or unplugged family time can reduce stress and create a supportive home environment.

*Small
steps
every
day*

***Consistency is key! Small, intentional changes—
like drinking more water, getting enough sleep,
or washing hands regularly—add up over time,
leading to healthier habits that last.***



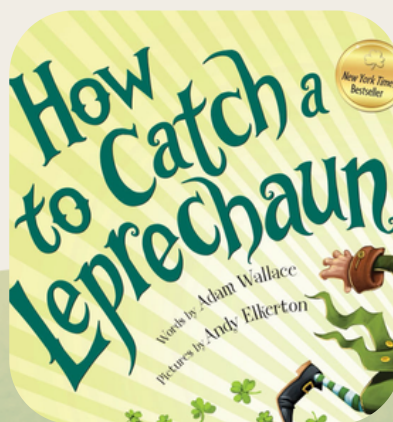
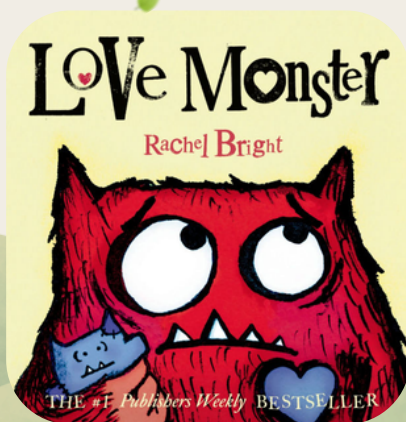
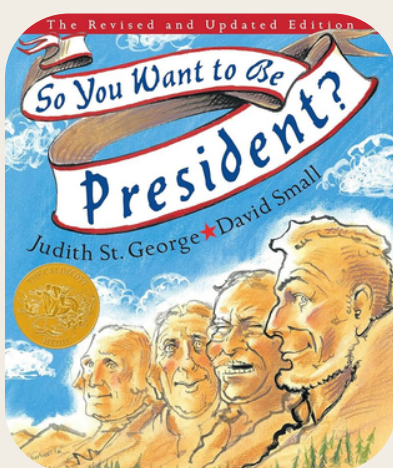
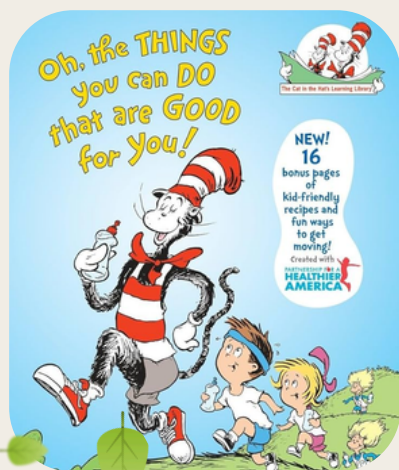
By embracing wellness at home, families can thrive together, proving that even small steps can make a big difference in overall health.



Owlvivia's Reading Corner

Celebrate Health and Holidays

If you're looking to help your child learn about healthy habits and the holidays ahead, consider picking up a new book! The stories below offer engaging ways to explore wellness, kindness, community, and seasonal celebrations like St. Patrick's Day. This season, stop by your **Pasco or Hernando County libraries** to check out these titles:



CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations to Amy, the winner of last quarter's holiday bike giveaway! Did you know that you could win a prize this quarter as well? Enter our latest giveaway! One lucky winner will receive an exclusive sensory bundle from Sensory Strong. Entries close March 4, 2026.



[Click here to enter the giveaway!](#)



Family Engagement

Healthy Habits Together

Balanced Bites for Growing Minds

A recent study published in the Journal of Nutrition found that children who do not receive adequate nutrients are more likely to struggle with school readiness later on. In other words, food fuels children's brains. What your child eats today helps support curiosity, energy, and a readiness to learn.

The good news? You don't need fancy recipes or extensive preparation. A few simple habits can make a big difference. A balanced meal for young children includes a variety of food groups: fruits, vegetables, protein, dairy, and grains. Mixing and matching foods helps meet nutritional needs while honoring your child's preferences. Early childhood is also a great time to explore new foods like hummus, edamame, yogurt, or whole-grain crackers.

Concerned about sugary snacks at school or playdates? Try pairing treats with nutritious options. Apple slices with a cookie or veggies with hummus during celebrations allow children to enjoy treats while still nourishing their bodies. Healthy eating doesn't need to be perfect—consistency, variety, and effort go a long way.

[Click here to unlock 3 months of healthy family engagement activities!](#)



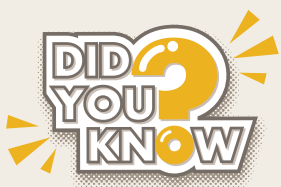
Try introducing some of these fun recipes as your child's next snack or lunch:

- ♥ Veggie pinwheels
- ♥ Rice crackers with peanut or sunflower seed butter
- ♥ Sweet peppers with hummus
- ♥ Yogurt with fruit and granola



These simple family engagement activities for January through March are designed to help families connect, learn, and stay healthy together. Each month highlights seasonal themes and important celebrations while encouraging routines that support physical, dental, and mental health.

Families will enjoy activities such as brushing teeth together, taking short nature walks, practicing calming breaths, reading bedtime stories, and preparing healthy snacks. Whether celebrating a holiday, trying a new fruit or vegetable, sharing gratitude, or playing a movement game, these moments strengthen family bonds and support healthy development—one simple activity at a time.



The School Readiness (SR) program has a new income threshold for initial entry into the program!

This family-friendly change aligns the income threshold to be at or below 55% of the State Median Income (previously 150% of the Federal Poverty Level). This means that more families will be eligible for the SR program! The SR program offers financial assistance to eligible families in need of affordable quality childcare for children, age birth – 12 years old. Families are encouraged to apply on the Family Portal or reach out to a Family Services Specialist with any questions regarding program eligibility.

Registration for the 2026-2027 Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Program year is now live in the Family Portal!



VPK is a free program for children who reside in Florida and are 4 years old on or before September 1 of each year. VPK is designed to prepare 4-year-olds for kindergarten and build the foundation for their educational success. If your child will be 4 years old on or before September 1, you can now apply for a VPK Certificate! Families will need to complete an application and provide proof of age and residency for the child. For eligibility questions or a complete list of acceptable documentation, please contact a Family Services Specialist.

VPK Families for 2025-2026 School Year



Florida VPK supports the development of early literacy, executive functioning, and social emotional skills. To learn more about Florida VPK, please click Family Portal below!

Florida **VPK**

To learn more about School Readiness, please click Family Portal below!

Florida **School Readiness**

You may apply for School Readiness services through the Family Portal below. If you are eligible, you will be placed on the Wait List until enrollment takes place, depending on availability of funding.

Family Portal





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Sleep plays a critical role in early childhood development, supporting memory, learning, emotional regulation, language development, and physical growth.

Why does sleep matter for brain development:

During sleep children's brains build neural connections for learning memory, consolidate skills learned during the day, regulate emotions and stress, release growth hormone, strengthen attention and impulse control.



Recommended sleep per age (0-5)
0-3 months 14-17 hours a day.



Naps included
4-11 months 12-16 hours a day.

2 to 3 naps a day
1-2 years of age 11-14 hours a day.

One long nap and consistent bedtime is key.
3-5 years of age 10-13 hours a day.

Most 3-year-olds still nap, but naps fade by 4-5.

Sleep Tips to Boost Brain Growth

Consistent routine - consistent bedtime, wake time, and nap schedule each day.

Create a sleep-friendly environment - dark, cool room with white noise.

Encourage daytime physical activity - physical activity helps children fall asleep faster and sleep more soundly.

Limit screens before bed - Avoid screens 1-2 hours before bed to protect melatonin levels and support easier bedtime.

Watch evening habits - Avoid sugar, heavy meals, or intense play close to bedtime.



Community Partners



[Click Here](#)



[Click Here](#)

If you have questions or would like to suggest content, please contact Family Services Supervisor, Brenda Mayo at b.mayo@elcph.org.