



Quality ChildCare

For Registered Home-Based Providers

LEARNING TO GROW ★ WINDWARD COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Vol. IX, No. 1

10 Hallmarks of Quality Child Care

- ★ Build trusting relationships
- ★ Provide consistent care
- ★ Support children's health
- ★ Provide a safe environment
- ★ Provide positive guidance
- ★ Provide a language-rich environment
- ★ Foster curiosity and development through play
- ★ Individualize care and learning activities
- ★ Partner with parents
- ★ Pursue personal and professional growth

This Month's Hallmark of Quality Child Care

Pursue Personal and Professional Growth

Keeping Your Brain Healthy & Sharp

Our brain is absolutely amazing! It enables us to think, learn, create and feel emotions, and it controls all of our body's functions – including every blink, breath and heartbeat! We may not know the details of what's going on inside our head, but here's something important to know: brain scientists have made some important findings about the brain, and they have discovered that there are **things we can do to get our brain working at its best – at any age.**

In Dr. John Medina's book, *Brain Rules for Aging Well*, he connects what scientists know about how our brain develops – and what we can do to help our adult brain work at its best and thrive. He presents practical advice for staying vital, happy and sharp based on brain science, including the following:

- Hang out with friends as often as you can
- Reduce your stress
- Dance!
- Learn something new – or teach someone what you've learned

In his book, Dr. Medina also expands on the brain benefits of exercise, a healthy diet, and good sleep. These same pillars of a healthy body are also pillars for a thriving brain. In this newsletter, we will focus on other critical activities that are important for our brain health:

- social interactions – which has many benefits including helping us manage stress
- dancing (synchronized movements)
- mental fitness (memory-strengthening activities)

Whether you are a younger adult or an older adult, practicing these valuable tips will keep your brain sharp and help it to work at its best, while also reducing chronic stress, burnout, and allowing you to engage more effectively with the children in your care.



Connect with Others

“Social interactions are like vitamins and minerals for aging brains, with ridiculously powerful implications.”

— Dr. John Medina

Having good friendships, belonging to a social group, or participating in any other type of positive social interaction (whether with a trusted group or a valued individual) – significantly boosts our cognitive (mental) abilities, and may also reduce our risk of developing dementia. Research has shown a strong correlation between social interactions and cognitive health.

Dr. Medina points out that our social interactions do not have to be within a long-term relationship or with a lot of people. As long as the interactions are positive, it has shown to be beneficial for our brain – boosting cognitive processing speed and working memory. The added good news is that our social interactions can lessen the damaging effects of stress on our brain.

Socialization *increases* a hormone in our brain which functions to decrease anxiety levels and make us feel more confident in our ability to cope with stressors. Moreover, studies have shown that cultivating relationships with the younger generation helps to reduce stress, anxiety and depression (great news for family child care providers)!



Benefits of Dancing

A wealth of research has shown that exercise and physical activity can help adults keep their minds sharp. Not many people think of dancing as a form of exercise, but dancing presents many benefits, including the following:

- Promotes social interaction
- Involves heavy cognitive stimulation as it requires participants to learn and memorize synchronized coordinated movements
- Improves motor skills as well as cognitive skills like problem-solving and comprehension, short-term memory and impulse control
- Reduces inflammation, while stimulating factors that promote the function and growth of neural cells

We encourage you to dance with the children in your family child care program. The type of dance doesn't matter! Make it a part of your daily routine and you'll be building your children's brain as well as yours! Here are some ideas to try:

- Use a “movement of the day” and introduce different dance moves that the children can practice.
- Incorporate dance while reading a story or singing a song.

Mental Fitness (Memory-Strengthening) Activities

Dr. Medina and other brain scientists suggest many other activities that can boost your memory and brain function. Here are a few:

- **Read books and magazines** as a way of keeping your mind engaged: one study found that just 30 minutes of reading can reduce stress levels. With the children, read stories aloud daily; try having one or two children select a book to read aloud each day.
- **Compose a grocery list** and memorize it. When you get to the store, don't automatically pull out your list – instead pick up everything according to your memory. Only consult your list at the end. With the children, try playing memory games, such as concentration (picture card matching game).
- **Work on jigsaw puzzles:** this can be a great way to challenge and exercise your brain. You can also make sure to have puzzles of all difficulty levels available for the children (simple ones as well as harder 25-piece ones).
- **Use all your senses:** Try doing activities that require you to smell, touch, taste, see and hear at the same time. With the children, you can bake cookies or visit a farmer's market.
- **Learn a new skill.** Research shows that learning a new skill can help improve memory function in older adults. After you learn a new skill, teach it to someone else. Moreover, learning a more demanding skill, such as learning a new language, is the most scientifically proven way to reduce age-related memory decline. Children are constantly learning new skills. As you learn something new, you can share it with the children.
- **Cultivate an attitude of gratitude.** Focusing on things we are thankful for exerts measurable positive effects on our brain. You can do this with the children, too. For example, at lunch time, ask the children to recall something they enjoyed doing that day. Repeat it by saying, "Leah is thankful for the time she had looking for sleeping grass."



Training Opportunity

From Self-Care to Self-Aware: SEL Starts with You, by Kelly Oriard and Callie Christensen

This 1.0 hour webinar focuses on the relationship between self-care and resilience and offers tips for identifying moments throughout your day when you can take care of your needs and ultimately, create a positive learning environment.

<https://home.edweb.net/webinar/sel20220517/>

Featured Activity

Bake Gratitude Cookies

Adapted from: Focus on the Family Clubhouse Jr.

<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/clubhouse-jr/recipes/crispy-hearts/>



What you need:

- 2/3 cup nut butter
- 1/3 cup honey
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 3 cups crispy rice cereal
- Heart-shaped cookie cutter

Directions:

1. Stir together nut butter, honey and vanilla in a large mixing bowl.
2. Add crispy rice cereal and stir until evenly coated.
3. Smoosh mixture into heart-shaped cookie cutter. Place cookie on waxed paper or parchment paper. Repeat until mixture is gone.
4. Refrigerate cookies for 1 hour until firm.
5. Enjoy and share them with others. It's a sweet way for children to show thanks.



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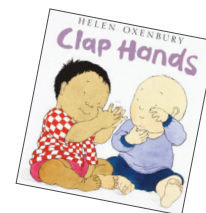
Suggested Books

Discover these books and more at the Hawai'i State Public Library www.librarieshawaii.org

Clap Hands

by Helen Oxenbury

Infants and toddlers will love this short simple fun board book that features babies at play – clapping, dancing and spinning, eating and waving.



Owl Babies

by Martin Waddell

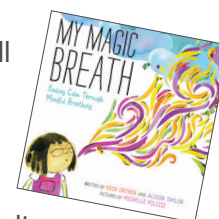
Three baby owls awake one night to find their mother gone, wonder where she is, and begin to worry. Joyous flapping, dancing and bouncing greet their mother's return. A tender tale to remind the youngest of children that Mommy comes back.



My Magic Breath

by Nick Ortner

This beautiful picture book will help children discover calm through the magic of mindful breathing. It is a great story to help children process the emotions they may have felt throughout the day and help prepare them for bedtime.



I'll Always Love You

by Hans Wilhelm

Elfie is the best dog anyone could ever ask for. Every day she and her owner play together and every night her owner tells her "I'll always love you." Elfie grows older and one day her owner has to say goodbye to her. This tender story is a perfect way to make the topic of loss a little less scary for kids, and also teach empathy.



Citations

Medina, J. (2017). *Brain Rules for Aging Well*. Seattle: Pear Press.

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