



Community Services for Children

Family Connection Newsletter ~ ELRC Region 13

January 2026

Serving Berks & Schuylkill Counties

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Region 13 News

Please note that the ELRC offices will be closed on Friday, January 16th for staff training. We will also be closed on Monday, January 19th in observance of Martin Luther King, Jr's birthday.



The Berks Early Care and Education Council Wants You

The Berks Early Care and Education Council (BECEC) is a community-based organization that consists of parents, representatives of the local Early Intervention administrative agencies, Early Intervention service provider agencies, early childhood programs, and other organizations concerned with early learning and developmental needs for children from birth to 5 years old. The vision of the Berks Early Care and Education Council is that all children, birth to five in Berks County, reach their full potential. See below to get involved.



- [Check out this flyer](#)

Resources for Those Needing Shelter this Winter

In Berks County, Opportunity House will be expanding their Code Blue program to include both single women and couples without children effective Jan 1, 2026.



Single Women and Couples without Children
Opportunity House - 430 N 2nd St, Reading, PA 19601
610-374-4696
Register at Opportunity House at 8pm daily; exit at 6am

Families with Children

Opportunity House - 430 N 2nd St, Reading, PA 19601
610-374-4696
Please call for availability

Single Men

Hope Rescue Mission - 645 N 6th St, Reading, PA 19601
(610) 375-4224

Warming Center

New Journey Community Outreach (the Yellow Church) has a Warming Center program at 138 S 6th St, Reading, PA 19602. The Warming Center will be open to anyone Monday through Friday from 6am - 11:30am, then lunch will follow from 11:30am - 1pm. Breakfast will also be provided. Please share this information with anyone in need of a warm place to go during the day.

For those seeking shelter in Schuylkill County, the following agencies may be able to help:

Servants to All

570-728-2917 or 570-900-1161

[Visit their website](#)

Schuylkill Community Action

570-622-1995

[Visit their website](#)

Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)

LIHEAP can help you keep your home warm and safe during the coldest seasons. From December 3, 2025, to April 10, 2026, you can apply for a cash grant to help pay your heating bill. You can receive from \$200 to \$1,000 based on your household size, income, and fuel type. The cash grant is a one-time payment. The grant will be sent directly to your utility provider or fuel company to be credited on your bill. You can apply for LIHEAP online, by mail, or in-person at your local county assistance office. Click [here](#) for more information and to apply.



Looking for a Career Change?

Do you love children and want to make a difference in the lives of young families? Check out ECE hire for job postings in early childhood education. Click on the logo below to access the latest listings:

Parenting Corner

Rapid Response Team

Rapid Response Team is a short-term intervention designed to support children who may be experiencing challenging behaviors in the early learning setting. This team observes the child at the child care facility and will offer strategies to the teacher and parent. If appropriate, referrals to community resources and services are shared with the family and provider as well.



If you have concerns that your child may be suspended or expelled from child care and could benefit from the Rapid Response Team supports, you can begin the referral process here: [RRT Referral](#)

(This program does require parental and provider consent)

Dealing with Challenging Behaviors

Challenging behaviors are a normal part of childhood and emotional development. Here are five tips to help you (and your child) work through challenging behaviors.



1. Understand the Behavior: Keep in mind there is always a trigger and/or emotion behind the behavior. In trying to identify and understand the trigger, it helps figure out a response.
2. Set Clear Boundaries: Having clear and consistent rules and consequences can help reduce or eliminate minor challenging behaviors.
3. Communicate openly: Talk to your child about feelings; model and discuss appropriate ways to express big feelings.
4. Remain Calm: Harsh or emotional responses tend to escalate a child's aggression. When you stay calm, you're modeling for your child the type of behavior you want to see in them.
5. Positive Reinforcement: Praise the things that your child is doing well!

For more information, see the link below:

[Complete Guide to Managing Behavior Problems - Child Mind Institute](#)



Dad's Resource Center

[The Dad's Resource Center](#) is committed to providing education, community resources, and a voice for dads who are separated or divorced and who are determined to uphold their important responsibility as fathers.

The center will help prepare fathers for the emotional and psychological stresses of their new living situations when coping with separation or divorce.

The Dad's Resource Center approach is to work hard to enable fathers to play the role that their children need by providing them with understanding, education, and community resources available to help them prepare for and work with human service agencies, attorneys, legal entities, and courts, if necessary.

They also will assist dads by emphasizing the need to minimize negative adult behaviors and confrontations for the benefit and the well-being of the children while also providing awareness of the problems, situations, and stresses your children may also be experiencing during this adjustment time.

For immediate help, please call 1-800-947-4941. Click [here](#) for more information.

DID YOU KNOW?

Limit toddler
screen time to less
than an hour a day.



United Way of Berks County

Kindergarten Registration

If you have a child ready to enter Kindergarten in September, now is the time to get him or her registered! Although each school district has their own process for kindergarten registration, most families will need to bring specific documents to register their child. This may include:

- The child's birth certificate
- Proof of residency (like a utility bill or copy of a lease)

- Vaccination records ([the PA Dept. of Health](#)) shares which ones your child needs)
- Any forms required by the school district, like an application or emergency contact list.
- There may be other documents needed, so check with your school district.

Some schools set aside specific dates to register for Kindergarten. Others may provide special events, like summer orientation for their incoming students. Click [here](#) to find your school's contact information and specific registration dates.

There are also some newsletters to help your child prepare for this transition time. Take a look and then [subscribe](#) to get the next release directly into your inbox.

- [Kindergarten Here I Come](#)
- [Kindergarten Here I Am](#)



Parent Project Podcast

Community Services for Children has been hosting the Parent Project Podcast to engage families in areas of common concern for parents. Experts provide perspectives on topics of health & safety, mental health, child transition and other important subjects.

This month, we are joined by Deidra Vachier, CEO and President of CSC, who shares about the importance of routines. Click [here](#) to listen.

PARENT PROJECT PODCAST



Community Services for Children



Child Development



New Year, New Milestones

January is a time for fresh starts and new routines. For young children, every day is a chance to learn, grow, and build skills that will last a lifetime. As we begin a new year, it's a great moment to consider how we can support healthy early childhood development at home and at school.

Early childhood development is the way children grow and change from birth through the early school years. Children develop at their own pace, and each child's path is unique. What matters most is that they feel safe, loved, and supported as they grow.

Small Moments Matter

You don't need fancy toys or special programs to support your child's development.

Simple, everyday moments make a big difference:

- Talk together. Describe what you're doing, name objects, and ask questions, even if your child is too young to answer.
- Read every day. Even a few minutes of looking at books, talking about pictures, or telling stories builds language and thinking skills.
- Play together. Play is how children learn best. Building with blocks, pretend play, drawing, and outdoor play all support brain and body development.
- Routines and comfort. Predictable routines (meals, naps, bedtime) help children feel secure, which allows them to explore and learn with confidence.

Building Social and Emotional Skills

Focus on feelings and relationships to build skills that help children feel more confident, make friends, and be ready to learn in group settings.

You can support your child by:

- Naming feelings: “You look sad that it’s time to stop playing,” or “You’re excited to see your friend!”
- Modeling calm: When you take deep breaths or use a quiet voice, your child learns how to manage big feelings.
- Practicing kindness: Encourage sharing, taking turns, and saying “please” and “thank you.” Praise your child when you notice caring behavior.

Setting Simple Goals for the New Year

Instead of big resolutions, think about small, realistic goals you can enjoy together. These little habits, repeated over time, help your child’s brain grow strong connections.

For example:

- Read one book together each night.
- Spend 10–15 minutes each day in “distraction-free” play time.
- Add one new learning routine, such as counting steps as you climb or singing a cleanup song.

Resource & Referral

Free Tax Preparation



Tax preparation season is here, and it can be stressful going through the filing process. To help ease the burden, PA 211 is working with the IRS providing assistance. Through a program known as VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance), eligible participants can work with a VITA representative to help complete their taxes. VITA offers free tax preparation assistance to families with limited income to maximize their refunds, credits, and to avoid tax preparation fees.

Beginning on January 12, 2026, you can schedule an appointment and view the participating counties by visiting their [website](#).

Utility Scam Alert

UGI and the United Way, have put out an alert that electric and natural gas customers are being targeted by scammers.



Protect yourself:

- If you receive a call that you owe money or your service will be shut off immediately, do not provide any information. Call back to 1-800-267-2722 to confirm account details.
- If you smell a gas leak, exit the property and call after you are 1 football field away.
- UGI employees always carry photo ID cards. Call 911 if you are uncertain.

Check out this [flyer](#) for more details and safety information.

New SNAP Reporting Requirements

Find Out What You Need to Do to Keep SNAP Benefits

More people now have to meet work requirements to receive SNAP benefits. A new screening tool is now available to help SNAP recipients determine if they need to meet the requirements, already meet the requirements, or are eligible for an exemption.

While the tool is used to help recipients understand what they need to do to be eligible, the tool is not a final determination of whether someone has met the requirements or qualifies for an exemption.

- [**Click here to access the screening tool**](#)

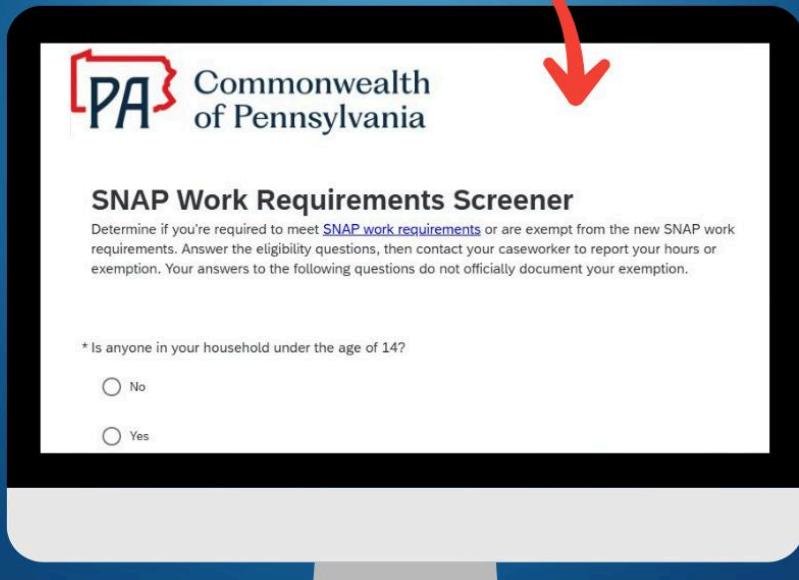
As a reminder, the new requirements state you must:

- work, volunteer, or be participating in an educational program for 20 hours a week (or 80 hours a month)
- report that you are meeting those hours

Individuals with questions about how to report work, education, training, or volunteering activities can contact their caseworker at DHS' County Assistance Office or call the Customer Service Center at 877-395-8930 (or 215-560-7226 if you live in Philadelphia).

Do You Need to Follow New SNAP 🤔 Work and Reporting Requirements?

Visit [**dhs.pa.gov/work**](https://dhs.pa.gov/work) and use the simple online screening tool to learn what you need to do to keep your SNAP benefits!



ECELS Health & Safety Newsletter

Early Childhood Education Linkage System (ECELS) publishes a monthly newsletter full of valuable health & safety tips and resources for children and families.



Click [here](#) to download the most recent newsletter.

Winter Health and Safety Tips

Keep safe and healthy this winter! Below are five starting points to think about!



1. Winter Weather Safety: Dress in layers using hats, gloves, and waterproof boots to prevent frostbite and hyperthermia during outdoor play. Remind children not to share hats, scarves, or water bottles to prevent the spread of germs. Limit outdoor time in extreme cold weather.
2. Cold and Flu Prevention: Encourage frequent handwashing and proper sneezing and coughing etiquette (covering mouths with the arm or elbow.) Disinfect high-touch surfaces at home.
3. Home Heating and Fire Safety: Check smoke and carbon monoxide detectors. Use space heaters and fireplaces safely keeping them out of reach and away from flammable materials. Create and practice a family fire escape plan.
4. Healthy New Year Habits: Set realistic family wellness goals like eating more fruits and vegetables. Limit the use of screen time and encourage active indoor play. Establish consistent sleep routines.
5. Winter Mental Well-being: Plan fun indoor activities to stay socially connected and practice gratitude and mindfulness as a family.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention has a great flyer that has some Holiday Health and Safety Tips that you can adopt and continue throughout the New Year: [Holiday Health and Safety Tips](#)



Bathroom Safety Checklist

Did you know the most dangerous room in your house is the bathroom? More home accidents occur there than anywhere else. Here is a check list you and your children can review to ensure that your bathroom is safe for you and your family.

- Never leave a child unattended in the bath
- Water temperature is below **120 degrees F** to prevent scalding
- Easy access to the following items:

Towel

Shampoo/Conditioner

Soap

- Grab bars in the shower, tub, and toilet areas to help prevent falls
- Non-skid strips to the tub bottom/built in skid-proofing in shower stalls
- Slip-resistant bathmats or rugs
- NO water on the floor
- Toilet lid is down and secured
- Medications and cleaning products are secure and out of reach of children
- All electric outlets are GFCI (ground-fault circuit interrupter)
- Exhaust fan is installed and works properly to help prevent mold growth

For additional information, click [here](#).

The Importance of Fluoride

There are several important ways to make teeth strong and prevent tooth decay. These include drinking tap (faucet) water with fluoride, brushing with fluoride toothpaste, and having a professional apply fluoride varnish. Fluoride is safe. It is found in nature in plants, soil, and water.

See this [Cavity Fighter flyer](#) and the [Getting Fluoride flyer](#) for more information.



Family Engagement



A Trip to the Grocery Store

A trip to the grocery store at any age can serve as an opportunity for your child to gain real and valuable knowledge about math and nutrition. You can guide your child in the discovery of basic Mathematic and Social Studies concepts as you help him or her process information about the world outside

family and home.

Help support your child's mathematics thinking and expression with colorful choices.

Infant: Babies will enjoy seeing the bright colors of fruits and vegetables at the grocery store. Show your baby objects as you put them in your cart. "Here's a nice red apple!" or "See the green pepper?"

Toddler: A trip to the store can provide an opportunity to explore objects not found in the home. You can also involve your toddler in decision making. Offer your toddler choices, "Should we get the red apple or yellow pear?"

Pre-Kindergarten: The grocery store is filled with things to count! Let your child help you count out the number of potatoes you will need to buy for dinner, or the cans of soup that go in your cart.

Kindergarten: If you clip coupons, you may have several bright pictures of the products you will be searching for at the store. Your Kindergartener can be your helper at the grocery store by matching the pictures and words on the coupons to the objects on the shelves.

Suggested Books:

What's in Grandma's Grocery Bag? By Hui-Mei Pan

Our Corner Grocery Store by Joanne Schwartz & Laura Beigessner

Resource: Learning is Everywhere: Activities to do with young children.

www.papromiseforchildren.com

[Visit ELRC Region 13](#)

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