

Community Services for Children

Family Connection Newsletter ~ ELRC Region 14

March 2026

Serving Lehigh & Northampton Counties

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Region 14 News

Home Buyer Seminar

The Home Ownership Counseling Program (HOCP) is coordinated by Community Actions of the Lehigh Valley which will prepare you to become a homeowner through their HOCP seminar.

The HOCP seminar is organized into six sessions which are conducted on two consecutive Saturdays. During these six sessions you will learn about:

- Preparing for Home Ownership
- The Importance of Good Credit
- Shopping for a Home
- Obtaining a Mortgage
- The Closing Process
- What to Expect as a Homeowner

Individual Counseling is also available to you during and after the home buying process. Staff can assist you with:

- Reviewing Your Credit Report
- Loan Document Preparation
- Budgeting
- Determining Your Affordability
- Selecting the Best Mortgage for You



Upon completion of all six sessions, you will receive a certificate of achievement. The certificate should be presented to the loan officer at the time of completing the mortgage application. This will demonstrate that you are serious and informed about home ownership.

- Click [here](#) for more information.
- You can also call: 610-691-5620

The March session is closed, but you will be able to register soon for the June 6th & 13th session.

Children Striving Together

Children Striving Together provides free educational programs to help youth with difficult transitions. They offer a variety of tools and materials, workshops, and one-on-one tutoring so children can become the best versions of themselves. CST kids get assistance with basic studies, SAT prep, college applications, and a lot more. Our job is to make sure transitions are smooth and kids are confident in their decisions.

- Click [here](#) for more information.



Utility Assistance – New Bethany

New Bethany has utility assistance - electric, gas, and oil, available for applicants who qualify. The assistance is on a first come, first serve basis, and rental assistance is also provided for the City of Bethlehem residents.

New Bethany offers hope and support to people who experience poverty, hunger, and homelessness.

Qualifying Areas: Lehigh & Northampton Counties.

Their contact information is:

610-691-5602 x208
ccirksey@newbethany.org
333 West 4th Street
Bethlehem, PA 18015

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

Children Denied Care

If your child is denied care at your child care program, please notify your ELRC Family Specialist. This could be due to a behavioral concern or facility issue like a plumbing or heating problem, a staff shortage, or another unforeseen circumstance.

While child care providers are making sure the environment is safe for your child and staffed appropriately, the ELRC needs to know when care is denied.

Also, please seek the support of your Family Specialist if your child is suspended or expelled due to challenging behaviors as they may be able to connect you with other resources in your area.

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)*

RRT Tip of the Month *Talking About Feelings*



Young children often act out when they don't know how to express their emotions. Help your child learn emotional language by naming feelings throughout the day. For example, "You look frustrated that the block tower fell," or "You seem really excited to play outside." When children learn to identify their feelings, they begin to develop healthier ways to communicate and cope.

PROMOTING SOCIAL EMOTIONAL
LEARNING



What is Social-Emotional Learning?

Social-emotional learning is the process of developing the self-awareness, self-control, and interpersonal skills that are needed for school, work, and life success.

5 Social Emotional Learning Skills

- Emotional self-awareness — knowing what one is feeling at any given time and understanding the impact those moods have on others.
- Self-regulation — controlling or redirecting one's emotions; anticipating consequences before acting on impulse.

- Motivation — using emotional factors to achieve goals, enjoy the learning process and persist in the face of obstacles.
 - Empathy — sensing the emotions of others.
 - Social skills — managing relationships, inspiring others and getting desired responses from them.
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Parent Project Podcast

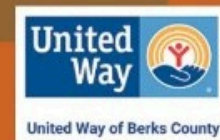
Community Services for Children has been hosting the Parent Project Podcast to engage families in areas of common concern for parents. Experts provide perspectives on topics of health & safety, mental health, child transition, and other important subjects.

This month, we are joined by Dr. Brown from the Children's Clinic at LVHN. Dr. Brown discusses promoting healthy sleep habits in young children. Click [here](#) to listen.



DID YOU KNOW?

Preschoolers learn more by pretending than watching.



Child Development

Growing Independence This Spring

Spring is a season of growth, change, and new beginnings—and young children experience this same kind of growth every day. As children develop, they naturally begin to assert independence. You may notice your child wanting to do things on their own, make decisions, or try new skills. While this can sometimes feel challenging, it is an important and healthy part of child development.



Independence helps children build confidence, problem-solving skills, and a strong sense of self. When children are given opportunities to try tasks independently—such as putting on shoes, washing hands, or choosing an activity—they learn that their actions matter. Even when things don't go perfectly, these experiences teach resilience, patience, and perseverance.

Supporting Independence at Home

There are many simple ways families can encourage independence at home:

- Offer simple choices throughout the day, such as choosing between two outfits, snacks, or bedtime stories. This helps children feel in control while

still having clear limits.

- Allow extra time for routines like getting dressed, cleaning up, or getting ready to leave the house. When children are rushed, they may feel frustrated instead of confident.
- Break tasks into small steps and let your child complete what they can on their own. For example, you might start the zipper on a coat and let your child pull it up.
- Encourage helping with age-appropriate tasks, such as setting the table, feeding a pet, or sorting laundry. Helping builds responsibility and pride.
- Create child-accessible spaces, like low hooks for coats, baskets for toys, or step stools in the bathroom, so children can manage tasks independently.
- Be patient with mistakes and focus on effort rather than perfection. Spills, mismatched socks, and messes are part of learning.
- Use encouraging language, such as “You’re learning how to do that,” “I can see you trying,” or “You did it all by yourself.”

In the classroom, we support independence by encouraging children to make choices, care for their belongings, participate in daily routines, and solve small problems with guidance. When children feel trusted and supported both at home and at school, they are more likely to take healthy risks and develop confidence in their abilities.

As you welcome spring, you celebrate your child’s growth, remembering that, just like flowers, children grow best when given time, patience, and encouragement.

Resource & Referral

Free Tax Services



The [Volunteer Income Tax Assistance \(VITA\)](#) program offers free tax help to people who make \$60,000 or less, persons with disabilities, and limited English-speaking taxpayers who need assistance in preparing their tax returns. Families can usually find VITA sites in community and neighborhood centers, libraries, schools, shopping malls, and other convenient locations. Many VITA sites offer virtual or “drop-off” tax return preparation. To locate an open site near you, use the [VITA Locator Tool](#), [GetYourRefund.org](#), or call (toll-free) 800-906-9887.

In addition, the [IRS Free File](#) offers many online resources and tax help. Find tax forms, instructions and publications, online payment options, and more. Individuals can even prepare and file their federal income tax online, free.

COMPASS



COMPASS is an online tool for Pennsylvanians to apply for many health and human service programs and manage benefit information.

Families can apply for financial assistance to help pay for child care, apply for SNAP Food Assistance and energy assistance through LIHEAP.

Visit <https://www.compass.dhs.pa.gov/home#/> to get started.

COMPASS also helps families find child care options by using their online program search [here](#).



Parent Workshop: Lifting Family Voices

Are you pregnant or a parent/caregiver of a child/children birth to age five in Pennsylvania?

If so, Pennsylvania's Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) invites you to register for the Lifting Family Voices: Using your Story to Strengthen Programs and Spark Change workshop on May 20th, 8:30am – 4:30pm in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania.

- Click [here](#) for more information.

In this workshop, you will gain tools and tips to help you develop and share your family's story and experiences.

- Click [here](#) for more information.

Virtual Talk for Caregivers with Special Smiles

Do you care for a person with intellectual or developmental disabilities? Special Smiles and Special Outreach Services are hosting a "Teeth Talk" on April 16th at 5:30pm for caregivers.



This free chat will guide caregivers to tackle challenging behaviors related to toothbrushing and how to care for the oral health of your loved one or client. Caregivers will have the opportunity to ask questions.

- Click [here](#) for more information.

Skybrary: Free Books for Kids

Skybrary is an ad-free kids' reading app, that promotes reading by offering access to over 1,000 free online e-books. They also have over 150+ virtual field trip videos helping children ages 3-9 to discover the joy of reading.

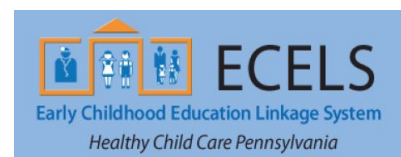


- Click [here](#) to learn more.

Health & Safety

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.

Household Safety

Many parents talk about needing to “baby-proof” their home when their little one becomes mobile, but what exactly does that mean? There’s more to household safety than locking up chemicals and putting covers on outlets. It’s important to be proactive and go through every room to determine any potential hazards.



For example:

- Do you have anti-tip brackets installed on furniture?
- Are small objects, including refrigerator magnets, out of reach?
- Are bags out of reach?
- Do your windows have guards to prevent them from opening wide enough for a child to slip through?
- Are curtain and blind cords tied up and out of reach?
- Are there child-proof latches on cabinets?
- Are shelves and mirrors hung securely?

While it may seem like a lot, doing a thorough check of every room on a regular basis can go a long way in protecting your loved ones.

For more Household Safety Checklists, click [here](#).



Oral Health Care During Pregnancy

Oral health care during pregnancy is important for mom and baby. Getting oral health care, including cleanings, X-rays, fillings, and pain medication, is safe during pregnancy.

Oral health care tips during pregnancy:

- Brushing twice a day with fluoride toothpaste, drinking water throughout the day, and eating nutritious foods will help keep you and your baby healthy.
- If your last dental visit was more than six months ago or if you have an oral health problem or concern, make an appointment as soon as possible.
- Getting oral health care during the second trimester is best. During the first trimester, you might have morning sickness. During the third trimester, it can be uncomfortable to lie on your back in the dental chair.
- Tell the dental clinic staff that you are pregnant and your due date. This information will help them provide the best care and keep you comfortable.
- Tell the staff about any changes in your teeth or gums. Also, tell them about all medications, including vitamin and mineral supplements, that you are taking.

Family Engagement

Creative Ways to Have Family Fun in March

March brings on the beginning of Spring, and with it a time of family fun for inside and outside of the home. As plants begin to "spring" to life, this is the perfect opportunity to do a planting and gardening activity with your children. Other special

days in March from the first day of spring to St. Patrick's Day can bring more opportunities for fun.



Here are some great ideas to try:

- Plan Your Garden
- Plant Seeds Indoors
- Draw a Garden Spider
- Paint Flowerpots
- Make a Terrarium
- Make Yummy Green Snacks for St. Patrick's Day
- Eat a St. Patrick Day Inspired Meal
- Make St. Patrick's Day Crafts
- Read St. Patrick's Poetry
- Go on a Nature Walk
- Make a Bird Feeder
- Enjoy and Outdoor Picnic

For details and instructions for these activities, click [here](#).

**Adopted from [Mary Hanna Wilson](#) 2/26/2023*

Visit ELRC Region 14

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