

Early Learning Parents' Pages

September 2017

Family meals are a big deal! How much screen time is **too** much? What's new in baby safety?



Special days in September? International Literacy Day • Grandparents Day • Dads, Take Your Child to School Day

Family meals are a big deal

Life is so busy for families with young children that sitting down and eating together has become the exception rather than the norm.

In many families, both parents work or single parents work and rush home to make dinner or buy dinner on the way home.

If this is true in your household, you may want to consider the benefits of eating together as a family. Family dinnertime does more than satisfy your family's hunger according to the [Boys Town Guide to Parenting at the Table](#). It also expands their minds and connects family members. There is more research recently on the advantages of families dining together. Research studies show that you can expand your child's vocabulary with mealtime discussions or by just asking questions about his day, his food or his friends. Mealtime chats help your child learn new concepts and ideas and how to talk in culturally appropriate ways.



Another study focused on the positive relationship between the frequency of family meals and school success. It shows that children of families who ate family meals together at least five times a week performed better at school than those that dined together two times per week or less.

Other studies have shown family meals help children's social and emotional development. Your child may have lower anxiety levels, lower levels of high-risk behaviors and more resiliency as a result of family interaction during meals. The time spent together at meals will help your child have healthier relationships with other family members. If you have a young child, he will learn to use eating utensils, drink from a cup, eat from a dish and use a napkin and many other socially acceptable mealtime skills during meals.

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Screen Time:

How much is too much?

You are sitting in the waiting room at the doctor's office with your 3-year-old and he is getting fussy. You get your phone or tablet out and find an app you hope will capture his attention and make the wait bearable. You breathe a sigh of relief as his attention turns to the screen. But guilt quickly makes you question your parenting skills. Should my child be playing on a phone instead of with a toy?

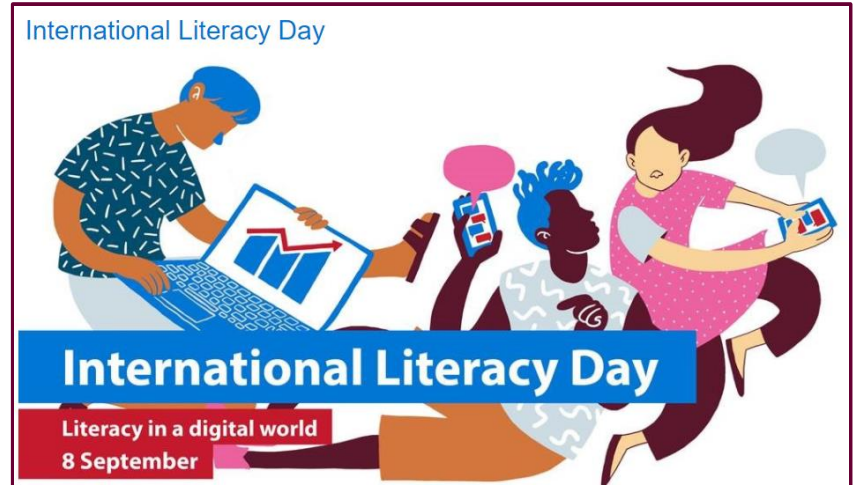
Researchers and early education professionals recommend play and interacting with others as the best way for young children to learn, but children can learn from apps and programs designed specifically for them and their parents. The key to learning is to engage the child in a fun way and talk with him as you view the screen together. Think about your child's attention span and how long he can pay attention to the app or program. Don't be surprised if he quickly tires of an app when he is playing by himself and is able to pay attention much longer when you and he are viewing it together.

Some apps and computer programs are designed specifically for parents to use with children. [Let's Play](#), an app from Zero to Three, gives you activities that help your child learn as you go through your daily routine. The [Vroom app](#) or Vroom Texting sends you daily or weekly tips for activities that support your child's brain development. This app also lets you search for tips to use while waiting at the doctor's office, riding a bus or in the car, doing laundry and



Reading around the world

International Literacy Day



Every year International Literacy Day is celebrated on Sept. 8. The theme for 2017 is *Literacy in a Digital World*. Every city, community and nation is asked to examine the type of literacy skills people need to "navigate increasingly digitally mediated societies and to explore effective literacy policies and programs that can leverage the opportunities the digital world provides." The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) designates International Literacy Day as a day to promote the goal of ensuring that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women in every country, achieve literacy and numeracy by having access to a quality education.



other activities. [Sesame Street games](#) will entertain your child as he learns new words and concepts with help from you. [PBS Parents has online games](#) you can download and play with your child.

If your child is mad, you can use the computer or tablet to watch the episode of [Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood](#) where he gets angry

when his block tower falls or use the [Daniel Tiger for Parents app](#) that has songs, video clips and conversation starters that cover topics such as self-control, feelings and responsibility. Remember to limit the time your child spends looking at a computer, phone, tablet or television screen and try to interact with him as he uses these devices.



Find more ways to [help your child learn during screen time](#) whether on the computer, tablet or TV from [PBS Parents](#).

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DADS

TAKE YOUR CHILD TO SCHOOL DAY

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2017



Sept. 27, 2017 is designated as **Dads Take Your Child to School Day**. This special day highlights the impact that dads have on children's lives. This year the day will spotlight the service that military fathers provide to both our country and their children.



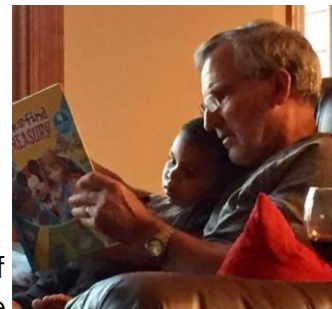
The [relationship between a father and his child](#) has a deep impact on all areas of the child's healthy development: language, thinking, physical and social-emotional. Children with dads who are actively involved in their education have fewer discipline problems and perform better academically. These children grow up to be more responsible adults.

The Florida Department of Education encourages dads of children of all ages to participate. Dads can take infants, toddlers and preschoolers to school as well as school-age children. Take a moment to speak to your child's teacher or the staff member supervising the morning drop-off. Let your child see that you appreciate the people who work at their school. Your child is proud of you and will want to have teachers and other children see you at the school. In families without a dad present, stepfathers, grandfathers, uncles, brothers, foster fathers and other significant male role models are invited to participate. Although the event focuses on fathers, mothers and other family members are also invited to participate.

Some schools and child care centers have events for dads planned for the day. Check your child's school website or parent newsletters for special events.

Calling all Grandparents

Since 1978, Grandparents Day has been held the first Sunday after Labor Day, Sept. 10 this year. Make sure grandparents know that you are thinking of them by celebrating the day!



Grandparents play a number of roles in a grandchild's life. Some are their grandchildren's primary caregivers. The relationship between grandchildren and grandparents is a special one. A positive relationship with a grandparent can significantly affect the social, emotional and academic development of a child.

Help your child make a card, write a story or draw a picture for grandparents. They will enjoy any remembrance from their grandchild. If your child has a new grandparent or a long distance grandparent, there are great ways to stay connected. If grandchildren are old enough to have their own phones, they are most likely using video chatting. Parents can help younger children video chat with grandparents. There are various ways to video chat—Face-



Time, Skype, Gmail and other programs offer free video chat options. While technology makes new advances, grandchildren can often help their grandparents learn and navigate technology. [Grandparents Academy](#) has started a movement to help one million grandparents become social-media savvy and anyone interested in the movement can officially join in.

Whether you connect with grandparents in person, over the phone or by video chat, Grandparents Day is the perfect opportunity for people to express their appreciation for grandparents. It is important that families show their love and appreciation for the positive role grandparents play in the lives of grandchildren.



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Family meals are a big deal

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You and other family members serve as positive role models so he learns what acceptable behavior is during meals.

Research studies show that most families who have frequent family meals also have healthier diets. To help your child develop healthy eating habits, try to have family meals as often as possible. You can ask your child to help select healthy foods that he likes for the family meals.

Make your family meals relaxed and fun. Tell family stories and jokes or let your child ask you questions about your day or your childhood. Avoid using social media, phones, tablets and TV during meals. Avoid arguing, criticizing or scolding during meals. Be prepared for spills if you have a young child and teach him to help clean up after dinner as he gets older. Your child will remember family meals as a positive experience and eventually make family meals an important part of his family in the future.



September is Baby Safety Month



Babies and toddlers are curious and active and it can be challenging to keep them safe while allowing them to explore and learn.

[Safe Kids Worldwide](#) has many resources and safety checklists for babies and children such as the [Baby Safety Checklist](#) and [videos](#). You can find the tips that you need to keep your child safe at any age on the Safe Kids Worldwide website.



Coming in October



- How to handle sibling fights
- Bullying Prevention Month
- Falling for fall and Halloween
- Head Start Awareness Month
- National Book Month

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