

grow nj kids

A Newsletter from your
Technical Assistance Center,
Prevent Child Abuse-NJ

Supporting Essex, Hudson, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Ocean and Somerset Counties

Grow A Garden!

You do not have to have any experience with gardening to have fun growing plants with the children in your care. Start small and take advantage of the “gardening moments” that build up confidence and green thumbs!

How to get started with gardening:

- Purchase seed packets at your local nursery or hardware store. Consider purchasing herbs and vegetables.
- Begin planting indoors in small pots or disposable cups. Be sure to place the cups on a sunny windowsill.
- Be sure that the children water the seeds regularly using a small measuring cup or eye dropper– don’t over-water
- After a few weeks on the windowsill, move your seeds outdoors for maximum sunlight.
- Plan your garden space by picking a sunny spot near a water source.
- Protect the garden from foraging animals with fencing if possible.
- Consider organizing the garden like interest centers in a classroom, with work stations for planting, collecting and turning compost, digging holes, observing bugs and worms, and watering.

How to implement gardening into your curriculum:

- How do changing seasons affect your garden?
- What are the needs of the garden? (planting, caring, harvesting)
- Review the physical world of the garden (soil, seeds, bugs, plants)
- Include a library of garden stories- provide opportunities for planting, cooking, and science experiments throughout the year.



Don't be too worried if everything dies. That, too, is a learning opportunity for all. Teachers can discuss what might have happened, why, and try again. Remember these “gardening moments” are doing so much more than just growing plants! You are fostering communication skills, building strong relationships, and offering another experience for children and teachers to work toward a common goal and having fun all along the way.

Happy Gardening!

Article by Janet Sheppard, Retired Teacher and Early Childhood Consultant
Master Gardener Program | Mercer County
School garden shown here with teachers & children from Trenton Public Schools





Administrators & Outside Play

With regards to outside play, teachers may plan activities and supervise children, yet so much of the responsibility relies on the administration. If you are looking for ways to improve your center's outside play, ask yourself these questions:

Do children know the expectations?

- Have safety rules been explained clearly to all the children, in a way they understand? Are these rules reviewed as often as necessary?
- Is outside play a right children have that is not taken away as a form of discipline or punishment? Are all children included in outside play?
- Are children provided materials and equipment that are accessible to them? Are they able to properly put away what they use or would they benefit from a better storage system?

Do parents know the expectations?

- Is there a comprehensive outside play policy in the Parent Handbook? Are parents told that children who are healthy enough to attend school are well enough to play outside?
- How have you shown parents the importance of outside play? Are parents invited to spend time in the outside area? Do you include playgrounds in center tours? Do you send pictures of children playing outside to parents during the day?

Do staff know the expectations?

- Is there a written staff policy on outside play which includes going out every day? Does it include weather restrictions? Is it understood by all teachers and assistants?
- Do teachers know their responsibility for supervision? Has the need for full attention to children been communicated? Is there a system in place so that some staff evaluation observations are done outside? Are there consequences for improper outdoor supervision (e.g. congregating and talking to each other or using their cellphones)?
- Have you modeled outside learning? Have you asked what the teachers would like to add to the outside environment to make it a better learning place? Have you ever held outdoor staff meetings?

What you say, what you model, and what you hold others accountable for will determine the children's outside play outcome.

More resources on outside play:

- [Natural Playscapes](#) by Rusty Keeler
- [Developing An Outdoor Classroom: Blending classroom curriculum and outdoor play space](#)
- http://www.naeyc.org/yc/files/yc/file/201411/YC1114_Quality_Outdoor_Play_Spaces_Wright.pdf
- NAEYC: [Resources for Teaching and Learning about the Natural World](#)
- <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/eecd/nature-based-learning/Create%20and%20Naturalize%20a%20Play%20Space/hsbsb-infant-toddler-play-space-assessment-final.pdf>
- <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/eecd/nature-based-learning/Create%20and%20Naturalize%20a%20Play%20Space/play-space-assessment-preschool.pdf>
- <http://home.edweb.net/webinar/natural-playscape-makeover/>

How does this relate to Grow NJ Kids?

Does your program conduct health and safety checks with a system to identify and address these safety concerns?

Standard 1.3.1

Is your play area inspected annually to assure that play equipment is safe and accommodates the abilities, needs and interest of each age group served?

Standard 1.4.4

The four highest risk factors for injury are preventable:

- Lack of supervision
- Inappropriate design of play area
- Falls to non-resilient surfaces
- Poor equipment maintenance

The National Program for Playground Safety has developed a report card to evaluate the safety of your playground. The Report Card is based on CPSC guidelines and the NPPS S.A.F.E. model. http://www.playgroundsafety.org/sites/default/files/report_card_form.pdf



Building Gross Motor Skills



Teaching children necessary gross motor skills in the early years provides benefits that can last throughout their lives. It is our responsibility as early educators to ensure that we positively promote physical activity while teaching children gross motor skills. Providing time for both structured and unstructured gross motor play for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers is key.

Be sure to schedule about 30 minutes of structured gross motor play each day. During this time, teachers introduce appropriate materials and/or equipment that can help them learn new skills. Teachers should model skills, provide appropriate tasks, individualize activities, challenge children, give feedback and be actively involved in play with the children as they guide them towards a specific goal.

Along with structured play, it is just as important for children to have time scheduled into their day for unstructured gross motor play, or free play. This is a time for children to refine the skills learned during structured play. Teachers must still be involved by interacting and supervising, and should set up an environment that supports physical play by providing appropriate space and equipment for their age group.

INFANTS

Exposure, space for movement, tummy time, and appropriate manipulatives are key.

Gross motor skills being learned:

- Balance
- Muscle strengthening
- Vision development

TODDLERS

Unstructured opportunity for exploration is key; this is when most of the learning takes place.

- Provide a safe environment
- Allow climbing when appropriate
- Make eye contact
- Encourage effort
- Model appropriate skills
- Create challenges

PRESCHOOLERS

Important gross motor skills to focus on:

- Traveling: running, galloping, skipping
- Jumping: using one or both feet, landing
- Balancing: standing still on one foot, transferring weight, walking on a balance beam
- Throwing: pull arm back, step with opposite foot, follow through
- Catching: watch the ball, reach, pull it in
- Kicking: using instep, standing behind the ball, leaving non-kicking foot beside the ball
- Striking (with body parts and objects): dribbling, using a paddle or bat

Staff Meeting Activity– Improving Outdoor Play

When the weather is warmer and the children spend more time outside, they may not have access to materials inside. This not only affects your ERS scores but also limits their opportunity for learning experiences. Providing a variety of age-appropriate materials outside maximizes learning opportunities! Here is a brainstorming activity you can use in a staff meeting to help improve your outside play space:

Ask staff to think of words that describe:

- what you want to happen when the children play outside
- the positive things children like to do outside
- items children like to play with



Words your staff might provide may include:

Explore | Discover | Carry | Drag | Roll | Stir | Find | Relax | Read | Climb | Imagine | Find | Senses | Sand
Water | Plants | Flowers | Dirt

Using your list, think of what you can change or add to your outside play area to make these things happen, such as:

Pots and pans | Rakes and shovels | Hoses and pails | Seeds and bulbs | Cars and trucks | Books | Blocks
Dolls | Fabric and blankets | Giant spools | Baskets | Buckets | Art supplies | Musical Instruments

Save the Date for these Upcoming Opportunities!



Webinars, *Open to all GNJK programs*

Date	Time	Topic	Presenter	Description
3/31/17	12-1pm	Technology in an Early Childhood Classroom: Going Beyond Screen Time	North Region Central Jersey Family Health Consortium	What is the place of technology in an early childhood classroom? The presentation will help participants move past the traditional emphasis on the inappropriate ways to use technology, focusing on a more developmentally appropriate and comprehensive method of implementation while obtaining resources and activities that will enhance children's learning.



GNJK Peer Learning Communities (PLCs), *County Specific*

Date	Time	Location	County
3/14/17	1-3pm	Child Care Connection, Trenton	Mercer
3/22/17	1:30-3:30pm	DCF Training Academy, New Brunswick	Middlesex/Somerset
3/28/17	12-2pm	North Bergen Public Library, Kennedy Branch	Hudson
4/6/17	1-3pm	Child Care Resources, Neptune	Monmouth/Ocean
5/17/17	12-2pm	TBD	Essex

CONGRATULATIONS!

Congratulations to **The Little Neighborhood**,
in Hudson County, for achieving a
3 STAR RATING!



Prevent Child Abuse New Jersey™



PCA-NJ operates a broad range of preventative services designed to support the improvement and quality of professional workforces and programming, resulting in significant positive impacts on family functioning and health in all 21 counties. **PCA-NJ programs include:**

- ◆ Grow NJ Kids TAC
- ◆ Healthy Families
- ◆ Parents as Teachers
- ◆ Parent Linking Program
- ◆ Enough Abuse
- ◆ Middlesex County Council for Young Children
- ◆ Human Trafficking Prevention
- ◆ Essex Pregnancy & Parenting Connection
- ◆ Parent Education & Technical Assistance
- ◆ The Period of Purple Crying

Central Region TA Center 103 Church Street, Suite 210 New Brunswick, NJ 08901 732.246.8060

Northeast Region TA Center 550 Broad Street, Suite 1105 Newark, NJ 07102 973.371.5301

<https://www.preventchildabusej.org/growtac>