



September Issue

[Early Literacy Series:  
Exploring by using  
Open-ended Questions](#)

[Exploring the  
Playground through  
Science](#)

[Creative Games to  
Play and Learn!](#)

[The Children's Legal  
Advocacy Program at  
Legal Services of  
Greater Miami](#)

[Ask Dr. Hughes](#)

[ELC and You- Safety  
Information During  
Natural Disasters](#)

[Local Events for the  
Whole Family!](#)

[Parent Space](#)

Quick Links

[ELCMDM](#)

[The Children's Trust](#)

[United Way of Miami-  
Dade](#)

[Miami-Dade Parks &  
Recreation](#)

[Miami-Dade Public  
Library System](#)

[Miami-Dade County  
Public Schools](#)

**Explorers!**  
**Exploring Early Childhood with your Child**



Being a kid is all about finding your own way to do things. It's about learning how to use the slide on your own and finding ways to make new friends. It's about exploring the world with a fresh set of eyes and feet and finding surprises around every corner. This month's Parent Link jumps right in with our little explorers, bringing parents along for the ride. Use this as a guide to go on reading and science adventures with your little one, because playing is learning.

Ready? Set? Explore!

**Early Literacy Series: Exploring by Using Open-Ended Questions**

*By: Bethany Sands, Director of Inclusion*

Early language and literacy development, or reading and writing, begins in the first three years and is linked to a child's earliest experiences with books and stories and supported by language acquisition and comprehension. Current research indicates brain development is significantly impacted by these earliest experiences. One of the most effective ways parents and teachers can expand language and comprehension in young children is through conversation and by asking open-ended questions.

Open-ended questions require more than one or two words and usually don't have a right or wrong answer.

Below are some suggestions for helping children, expand language, increase comprehension and support higher levels of critical thinking and problem-solving while exploring their surroundings. These can even be used with infants and toddlers.

- Can you tell me about this?
- Can you tell me what you see on this page?
- What do you think will happen next?

[The Parent Academy](#)

[Legal Services of  
Greater Miami  
Children's Advocacy  
Project](#)



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- What would happen if...?
- What do you think would be better?
- What else could we try?
- What can we use for this for?
- What does this mean?
- How can I help you?
- How can we fix this?



**Open-ended questions** are appropriate for children of all ages. Adjust the questions to match the topic and the child's learning levels. Open-ended questions encourage children to talk about what they are interested in and let them know you value their thoughts.

Next time you have a conversation or are trying to engage a child, ask his or her opinion and see how fast he or she jumps into talking with you!

**Now Go Explore!**

## Exploring the Playground through Science

The playground is full of exciting new experiences for your child. But did you know that swings, slides and climbing structures also offer first-hand experiences with ramps and levers, gravity and friction? According to the article "Exploring Science with Children: Science on the Playground" from PBS Parent, by paying some attention to how things work on these structures you can provide children with important early experiences in physics. Use the following ideas to enhance your child's experience on your next playground visit.

### Infant and Toddler

#### Movements on Swings and Playground Equipment

Using simple, everyday words to describe the current motions such as back, forth, push, pull, will build important descriptive language that is significant in physics. So, engage in lots of talk. The same applies for other playground areas, such as slides and ladders.



#### In the Sandbox

Very young children feel most comfortable in the sandbox. Describe what they are doing and how they are likely to be feeling. Say things such as "You're using your shovel to dig a deep hole!" or "You're pouring the sand to fill up the big bucket," to help your child build language about physical properties of materials, like sand.

## Preschool/Kindergarten

### Balancing

Many children enjoy the challenge of walking along a balance beam and seeing how they can continue to stay on. Encourage your child to talk about how they are feeling as they keep their balance. Asking them to think about what they are doing will help them focus on how certain kinds of movements seem to help balance while others do not.

### Floating Items

The playground offers a safe place to investigate and explore how different things fall. Find a safe space that is high off the ground and bring materials to drop such as balls, feathers and pieces of paper. Do they all fall to the ground the same way? How about when folded into a paper airplane?

## First Grader

### Different Materials on Slides

At this age, the child has a better understanding of what goes on in the playground. Trying different materials on the slides and asking questions such as "What do you think will happen when you put a tennis ball on the slide?" and "Will a ping pong ball do the same?" are great lessons your child can learn on force.

### Balance Challenges

Once your child masters a balance beam, challenge them to take on more difficult balancing acts. Better yet, do them together! Both of you might try walking on the balance beam with a book on your head. How does this feel different from or similar to walking on the beam without a book?

For the full article or other fun exploring ideas please visit <http://www.pbs.org/parents/exploring science/playground.html#1>.

## Creative Games to Play and Learn!

A toddler always has the time (and energy) for playtime, even when you are ready for a nap! But setting aside time to enjoy simple activities with your child will help with their developmental skills. Below are some fun playtime activities you can try with your child, 12 to 36 months, gathered from the ZERO TO THREE National Center for Infant, Toddlers, and Families.

### Toy Treasures

Make a "treasure path" for children by leaving interesting toys for them to discover. By placing the toys at different levels, such as on the floor, on a pillow or on a table, the child will develop muscle strength and balance. Be sure to watch their faces as they make their way along the treasure path since they will be communicating through their expressions and sounds.

## Sing and Do



You can also support your child's communication skills through back-and-forth communication. By singing a simple song like Pat-a-Cake, Wheels on the Bus or Twinkle, Twinkle, and making one or two very simple movements, the child will start to mimic your movements and even say a word or two of the song.

## Swish Sounds

Place a box or basket on the floor and give the children several balls. Each time they put a ball in the basket, ring a bell or honk a bicycle horn. This game builds both lower body strength and coordination. Be sure to talk about the loud and quiet noises in the game.

For more playtime activities or other helpful information on topics such as behavior and development, maltreatment, and care, visit the ZERO TO THREE web site, [www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org).

### References:

<http://www.zerotothree.org/early-care-education/family-friend-neighbor-care/activities-bonding-and-learning-12-24.html>

## The Children's Legal Advocacy Program at Legal Services of Greater Miami

The Children's Legal Advocacy Program at Legal Services of Greater Miami, Inc., (LSGMI) assists parents of low-income children in the areas of disability and special education advocacy. LSGMI represents parents in pursuing the receipt of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits and Medicaid so that disabled children receive the care and treatment necessary to thrive and live to their full potential.

LSGMI also assists parents and children aged 3-22 with exceptional student education in the Miami-Dade and Monroe County Public School Systems, providing everything from advice and education on requesting evaluations to representation at Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings and due process hearings. The Children's Legal Advocacy Program at LSGMI also provides trainings on these issues to parent advocacy groups and local community resources organizations.

For more information on the Children's Legal Advocacy Program, please visit their web site at

<http://www.lsgmi.org/content/families-children#1>.

For more information on services the Legal Services of Greater Miami has to offer visit their web site at <http://www.lsgmi.org>.

## Ask Dr. Hughes

Do you have questions for our resident expert in child development?  
Ask Dr. Hughes!

Each month Parent Link research and evaluation analyst Christine Hughes, Ph.D., will answer your questions about child development. Topics can cover language, social skills, play, behavior, motor skills, and thinking and learning from ages birth to 5-years-old. Dr. Hughes earned her B.A. in psychology from the University of Miami, where she currently teaches part-time. Her research has focused on the development of at-risk infants and children in early intervention. Please email your questions to [info@elcmdm.org](mailto:info@elcmdm.org) with "Ask Dr. Hughes" in the subject line. Also, include the location of your residence in Miami-Dade and/or Monroe County (e.g., Coconut Grove, Kendall, Key West).

Please note that questions may be edited, and not every question received will be answered in the newsletter. To protect the privacy of individuals and maintain confidentiality, names will not be printed, but we may refer to individuals by area (for example, "A mother in Miami Beach asked..."). The information provided in this column released by the Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe courtesy of Dr. Hughes is not intended to be used as psychological or medical advice, diagnosis, treatment, or as any other professional mental health or medical service. As laws, details and personal situations vary from person to person and state to state, articles and content contained in the newsletter are not and cannot be used as substitute for legal, parental, health, mental health, or any other advice.

*The column is not intended to be a solicitation of business or the furnishing of self-help advice. Readers are strongly urged to consult independent and qualified professionals before making any decisions. The views expressed are those of the writer and not necessarily of the ELC.*

## ELC and You - Safety Information During Natural Disasters

If you live in Florida, you must agree we have been lucky with the last two hurricanes just slightly passing us by. But Florida is usually on the prediction track of most Atlantic tropical storms, so it is important to have an emergency plan set for you and your family just in case.

According to the *Ready* Web site, a national public service advertising (PSA) campaign designed to educate Americans to prepare for and respond to emergencies including natural and man-made disasters, there are three key steps to keeping you and your family safe: 1. Get an emergency supply kit (prepare), 2. Make a plan (plan), and 3. Be informed about the different types of emergencies that could occur (stay informed).

### Step 1: Build a Kit/"To-Go Bag"

-Put together an emergency supply kit.

-Water, one gallon of water per person per day, for at least three days

- Food, at least three-day supply of non-perishable foods
- Battery-powered or hand crank radio and extra batteries
- Flashlight and extra batteries
- First aid kit
- Whistle to signal for help
- Dust mask, to help filter contaminated air
- Can opener for food
- Local maps
- Cell phone with chargers, inverter or solar charger
- Medicines



### Step 2: Make a Plan

-You should make a family emergency plan with the following information.

- Evacuation plans, such as places where your family will meet, both within and outside of your neighborhood.
- Access to a vehicle? If you have a car, keep a half tank of gas in it at all times. If you do not have a vehicle, plan how you will leave if you have to.
- Lock your doors once you leave your home.
- Don't leave your pet. Plan how you will care for your pet in an emergency.

### Step 3: Be informed

Hurricane hazards come in many forms and may require you to change your disaster plan, depending on your region and the type of hurricane.

- Learn about damaging and potentially deadly hurricane hazards.
- Learn about what to do if you or someone you know has a disability and other functional needs.
- Learn about the hurricane categories.
- Get your children involved! FEMA offers a great kids Web site on being prepared for a nature disaster, or other unexpected situations. Visit [www.ready.gov/kids](http://www.ready.gov/kids) for the Ready Kids Web site.

Reference-  
Ready web site: [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov)

## Local Events for the Whole Family!

**32nd Annual 5K Walk/Run to Flight Sickle Cell Anemia**  
Meet the Miami Dolphins cheerleaders, NFL and MLB stars.  
KidZone with face painting, and bounce houses.

**When:** Saturday, September 10, 2011

**Time:** Registration for race begins at 5:30 a.m.  
Health fair and other kids areas 8 a.m. - 1 p.m.

**Where:** Sun Life Stadium  
2269 Dan Marino Boulevard  
Miami Gardens, FL 33056

**Cost:** FREE

\*For more information regarding the KidZone, please call 305-377-5787

### Healthy Start Coalition of Miami-Dade National Infant Mortality Awareness Month Event

**When:** Saturday, September 17, 2011

**Time:** 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

**Where:** Betty Ferguson Community Center  
3000 NW 199 St.  
Miami Gardens, FL 33056

**9th South Florida Dragon Boat Festival & Moon Festival**  
A one-day family event with live multi-cultural performances featuring  
Chinese lion dances, Chinese kung fu demonstrations, food, arts and  
crafts and much more.

**When:** Saturday, September 24, 2011

**Time:** 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Programs start at 12 p.m.

**Where:** Haulover Park  
10800 Collins Avenue  
Miami, FL 33154

**Cost:** FREE admission, \$6 parking fee.

\*For more information visit [www.miamidragonboat.com](http://www.miamidragonboat.com)

## Parent Space

The Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe would like you, our parents, to have an area in the *Parent Link* newsletter that you can call your own. This space will provide advice, tips, jokes, stories, and/or even job opportunities that other local parents wish to share. So don't be shy; send us something you would like to share at [info@elcmdm.org](mailto:info@elcmdm.org). Please note that included submissions may be edited for clarity, etc. We look forward to hearing from you.

## About the Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe

The Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe is a nonprofit organization dedicated to ensuring high-quality early care and education for children in Miami-Dade and Monroe counties. Through a variety of affordable and innovative early education and voluntary pre-kindergarten programs, the Coalition serves more than 50,000 children ages birth to 9-years-old and their families.

Founded in 2000, the Early Learning Coalition is among 31 similar organizations in the State of Florida established following the enactment of the School Readiness Act, which consolidated Florida's early learning services into one integrated program.