



Arkansas Children's Week 2024

Planning Toolkit

Sharing Key Experiences

Welcome

This toolkit is a resource for you as you plan activities and events to celebrate Arkansas Children's Week. As you read through these pages, you'll find information about Arkansas Children's Week, ideas for events, and suggestions for connecting with families, your community, and your local media.

About Arkansas Children's Week

Arkansas Children's Week (ACW) has been a statewide tradition for more than 30 years! ACW is a celebration of children of all ages and their educators and families. Through ACW, early educators and youth development professionals highlight the needs of children and families and the accomplishments of the adults who work with them.

Arkansas State University Childhood Services provides three free resources to support early learning and out-of-school-time programs.

- ▶ Arkansas Children's Week resource book
- ▶ Arkansas Children's Week workshop
- ▶ Arkansas Children's Week planning toolkit

These can be found under the **resources tab** on the **A-State Childhood Services website**, <https://www.astate.edu/a/childhood-services/links-and-resources/>

Our annual, statewide Arkansas Children's Week celebration occurs in April each year.

Arkansas Children's Week

April 6 - 12, 2024

Each year's celebration has a topic, guided by suggestions from the field. This year, our theme is “**Sharing Key Experiences.**” We’ll consider ways to provide opportunities and encouragement for learning and development through play and planned, playful activities.

Big Ideas for 2024

Here are some guiding beliefs for this year's celebration.

▶ **The everyday experiences we share with children matter.**

This year, we're focusing on five key experiences that educators and families share with children.

- **Constructive Experiences**, when children design and build.
- **Imaginative Play**, when children pretend.
- **Creative Expression**, when children communicate through art, music, and more.
- **Exploratory and Investigative Experiences**, when children discover the world around them.
- **Active, Physical Play**, when children experience movement and motion through vigorous play.

We'll take a deeper look at the unique benefits of each key experience. We'll also consider the opportunities we create and the encouragement we provide when we engage with children.

▶ **We foster connections between play and planned activities.**

Play and planned experiences are both valuable for learning and development. Adult-led activities can introduce tools, skills, knowledge, and ideas that extend and enhance play. And, children naturally stretch their abilities and deepen their understanding through child-directed play. It's all interconnected!



Ideas for Celebrating Arkansas Children's Week

Traditionally, communities and individual programs celebrate Arkansas Children's Week in many different ways. In some areas, families enjoy community-wide events hosted by collaborating organizations. All sorts of program-specific celebrations also occur in child care centers and family child care homes across the state. Events in recent years have included open house events, children's concerts, fun fairs, and more.

On the following pages, you'll find many possibilities for Arkansas Children's Week celebrations. These are just examples. You and your staff will also have ideas of your own.

A Celebration of Constructive Play

Invite families to engage in a variety of constructive experiences in a carnival-like setting. Here are some possibilities.

- ▶ Baby builders' zone with large, soft blocks for infants and toddlers
- ▶ Cup stacking area with lots of disposable plastic cups
- ▶ Outdoor construction with large cardboard boxes
- ▶ Wooden block world with unit blocks, cars, people, road signs, and other props to bring a miniature city to life
- ▶ Glow zone with dim lights, translucent magnet tiles, and other see-through building toys, flashlights, and glow sticks or battery-operated tealight candles
- ▶ Lego and Duplo area



This could be an event especially for your program's families. Or, you might use a gymnasium, library community room, or other venue to open the event to all families in your area. Consider partnering with other local programs for a super-sized, memorable community event!

Dress Up Clothing Drive

Some of the very best costumes for imaginative play don't come from the toy store; real clothes are often much more fun! Invite families to check their closets for interesting items that they no longer use. Here are some examples.

- ▶ Hats - such as hard hats, ball caps, sun bonnets, and cowboy hats
- ▶ Outgrown hobby gear - such as sports jerseys, dance shoes, cheerleading skirts, and band uniforms
- ▶ Appealing accessories - such as purses, wallets, vests, bracelets, and old wristwatches



School Family Hang Out

Invite families to meet up after school or on the weekend at a nearby park, nature center, children's museum, or another family-friendly place. It's a chance to connect with classmates, educators, and educators' families. Almost any place can relate to one of this year's five key experiences. For example, you might promote active, physical play at a favorite playground or focus on exploratory experiences at a zoo or nature center.

Imaginative StoryWalk and Pretend Play Place

A StoryWalk is a story-sharing event that takes place along a hallway, sidewalk, or walking trail. Laminated pages of a book (or parts of a story) are mounted on stakes or weatherproof signs. These are placed in order along the trail. As children travel down the path, they encounter the story a bit at a time.

Families can read each "chapter" as they progress along the StoryWalk. Since the Arkansas Children's Week StoryWalk idea was introduced in 2020, it has become a tradition for many programs and communities. Find more tips for a successful StoryWalk at <https://letsmovelibraries.org/storywalk/>

This year, you might consider offering a dramatic play area with props inspired by your story at the end of the path. StoryWalk-inspired play areas provide perfect photo opportunities for children and families! You'll find several possibilities on the following page.

StoryWalk Suggestions

- ▶ *Fire Chief Fran* by Linda Ashman. Pair with fire hats, an arrangement of chairs to serve as fire truck seats, and short lengths of hose for putting out pretend fires.
- ▶ *Froggy Bakes a Cake* by Jonathon London. Pair with a sand or mud kitchen for baking-inspired play.
- ▶ *Mr. Scruff* by Simon James. Pair with veterinary clinic props for stuffed toy cats, dogs, and other pets!
- ▶ *Clop Clop* by Nicola Smee (for younger children) or *The Gingerbread Cowboy* by Janet Squires. Invite children to gallop between story stations. Pair with a stick horse corral or real saddles mounted on bales of straw.
- ▶ *Dig, Dump, Roll* by Sherri Duskey Rinker. Pair with hard hats, big toy dump trucks, and loadable blocks or other materials in a spacious play area. This StoryWalk would also pair beautifully with a real, full-sized dump truck or other construction truck from your community on display!

Guest Performances

Invite a performing arts group to visit your program. Possibilities include choirs or children's musicians, storytellers, and dance troupes. Schoolagers might create skits of familiar stories to perform for younger children.



Paint Party

Set up stations for several different paint experiences, such as fingerprint on slick paper, sparkly salt paint on black paper, and watercolors on wet paper. You can also try driving toy cars through paint, painting with rollers and droppers, and making prints with various objects. Remind everyone to dress in old, washable clothing and provide hand-cleaning stations throughout the event space. Create a handout or newsletter for families to share the benefits of messy, open-ended art experiences.

Chalk the Walk

Place baskets of colorful chalk along a pathway or low-traffic sidewalk. A basketball court or other concrete pad could also work well for this activity. Invite children, families, and staff to draw and write cheerful messages to fill the designated area. If possible, take an aerial photo to capture everyone's artwork.

Program-Wide Art Show

Create a gallery that showcases several original pieces of artwork by each child. Pair the artwork with photos of young artists in action and notes displaying children's comments about their work. Play jazzy music, serve refreshments, and invite families to stroll through your art show.

Update a Nature Space

Invite staff and families to collaborate to plan, design, and create (or refresh) a nature space, such as:

- ▶ Container gardens
- ▶ A short nature path through a wooded area, with a clearing where a group can gather for stories and other quiet activities
- ▶ A shaded outdoor space especially for infants
- ▶ Spaces that nurture small wildlife, such as a bed of perennial flowering plants for butterflies, or a collection of bird feeders, baths, and nesting boxes.

Nature Scavenger Hunt

Provide paper lunch sacks for children to collect natural treasures that they find on the ground. If desired, you can create a scavenger hunt list: something round, something yellow, something longer than your thumb, and so on. Provide an "exploration station" where children can sort their treasures and examine them with magnifying glasses and other tools.

Tricycle Rally or Fun Run

Encourage families to engage in healthy physical activity around your program or at a local park. Families can meet up to walk or jog, push strollers, and/or cycle along your route. If your program includes older students, local police officers could be invited to teach about bicycle safety.

Just-for-Fun Field Day

Create active, playful stations in your outdoor space or a gymnasium. Children can dance, chase bubbles, hula hoop, crawl through tunnels, and play tossing games. Inflatables such as bounce houses can be lots of fun, too. This kind of field day isn't about races and competition--it's simply about having a good time being active together!

Family Workshop

Offer an opportunity for children and their special adults to learn something new together. You might offer a mini cooking class, a yoga session, or a nature walk. Other possibilities include making birdhouses, crafting puppets, or learning a simple line dance.

Staff Shout-Outs

Take candid photos of staff interacting with children during the weeks leading up to Arkansas Children's Week. Then, throughout the week, share the photos through secure social media or project them on a screen for families to view in your program lobby. Pair the photos with fast facts about how these interactions support learning and development. Here are some examples.

- ▶ Ms. Brady tells the best stories! She helps us think creatively!
- ▶ We love building ramps with Mr. James. We're stretching our problem-solving skills!
- ▶ We learn about our world when we explore outdoors with Ms. McKenzie! Look—we found earthworms!

Program Parade

Invite children to decorate t-shirts, make hats, or dress as their favorite imaginative characters. You could also make musical instruments and streamer rings. Plan a safe, outdoor parade route around your program. Very young children can ride in decorated strollers or wagons while preschoolers march, skip, and hop along. School-agers might lead the parade on bicycles and kick-powered scooters.

Families can gather along the parade route to watch and cheer, and you can record groups parading along the route. Encourage children to wave and call hello as they pass. This will be a fun video to share with families. Don't forget to invite your local television news station to attend your parade!



Celebrating Educators

Many programs view Arkansas Children's Week as an opportunity to celebrate program staff. Families and administrators might write notes of appreciation or make brief video tributes for each educator. Here are some other ways that programs have recognized and thanked staff for their role in children's learning.

- ▶ Acknowledgement and a round of applause at your ACW family event
- ▶ Arkansas Children's Week t-shirts, tote bags, or aprons
- ▶ Decorations on each classroom door, or an entranceway banner expressing appreciation for staff
- ▶ Breakfast pastries or a luncheon in the staff break area, or restaurant gift cards to give staff a night off from cooking
- ▶ Break room makeover to give educators a special, spa-inspired space to relax and recharge
- ▶ Small appreciation gifts for the ways they support and encourage children each day. Here are some possibilities.
 - A coffee or tea “pick-me-up” in appreciation of the positive energy they bring
 - A tube of good-smelling hand cream in appreciation of the “hands-on” ways they engage with children each day
 - A bouquet of flowers representing the ways they help each child bloom and grow



Who can help your program thank the people who ensure positive, playful experiences for children every day?

Spreading the Word About Arkansas Children's Week

Celebrating with children, families, and staff is part of the Arkansas Children's Week tradition. ACW also provides an opportunity to spread the word about Children's Week and the important issues and ideas for children and families in your community.

Before Children's Week begins, consider reaching out to other programs in your community to share ACW resources and encourage participation. You might also connect with college and CDA educators who help prepare future teachers, home educators, children's museums and libraries, and so on. Who are the people and programs that support children and families in your community?

You can spread the word through traditional and social media before, during, or after Arkansas Children's Week. Write a newsletter article for families, send a letter to the editor of your local newspaper, or craft blog and social media posts to share with your online community.

You could talk about the Arkansas Children's Week tradition or this year's topic – "Sharing Key Experiences" – and the significance of play and positive, playful learning activities. Arkansas Children's Week can also offer an opportunity to highlight the importance of high-quality child care and other relevant issues.

Safe and Respectful Sharing

Be sure that you have a release form for every child whose picture or video you would like to share. All parents or guardians in a child's life should give consent and be fully aware before their child appears in print, television media, or social media posts.

Some strategies to help keep children safe include private and non-shareable social media posts, photos/videos that do not show children's faces, and posts that do not use children's names.



Connecting with A-State Childhood Services

We'll be posting before and during Arkansas Children's Week, and we'd love to hear from you. You are invited to follow and share from our social media accounts!

- ▶ Our Facebook page can be found by searching for "Arkansas State University Childhood Services."
- ▶ Our Instagram account can be found by searching for "astate.childhood.services."

You can subscribe to our weekly digital newsletter [here](#) or by emailing TLewis@AState.edu.

And, we'd love to hear all about your Arkansas Children's Week ideas and events! You can reach us by emailing MWhite@AState.edu.

Sample Timeline for Planning ACW Events

Most programs begin making contacts and planning events well in advance. Here's a suggested timeline. This timeline is just an example and can be adjusted to meet your program's needs.

Stage 1 - Getting Started

- ▶ Brainstorm partners for planning.

Make a list of program staff, family members, and other program friends who might want to help with planning. If you are planning a collaborative community-wide or regional event, your planning team might also include partners from child care and early learning programs, schools, and support agencies in your area. Think about the knowledge and skills that each potential team member might contribute to your event(s).
- ▶ Picture how planning will take place.

Think about when and how your planning group might connect. Do you envision phone calls, video conferencing, lunch meetings, or something else? You don't need exact meeting dates yet but should have an idea of the commitment that you will need from group members.
- ▶ Finalize a planning team.

Reach out to the people on your list. Tell about the Arkansas Children's Week tradition and explain your timeline for meeting and planning. Are they willing and able to participate? Establish a first meeting date.

Stage 2 - Collaboration

- ▶ Meet with the planning team to brainstorm ideas for Arkansas Children's Week.

Focus on your goals. What makes each potential event feel like a fit for children? How could you involve families, and what safety protocols should be considered? You'll also think about the cost and time commitment needed for various ideas. Narrow your list down to the ideas that feel most appropriate and feasible.

- ▶ Determine a budget or funding source.

- ▶ Plan dates and times for event(s).

Look at other community events that are scheduled and think about the days and times when families will be most likely to participate. Offering events at various times of day may boost attendance. You might offer an event at drop-off one day and an evening event another day.

- ▶ Decide on locations for your event(s). Are any permissions needed to use these spaces? Are there any insurance/liability or safety/security concerns? Will all areas be accessible to children or adults with limited mobility?
- ▶ Break down your event(s) into tasks that can be managed by different team members. Examples include, but are not limited to:
 - Gaining permission to use spaces and making reservations
 - Gathering materials and supplies
 - Working with all classroom staff to ensure that everyone is included
 - Contacting and coordinating with local businesses or other partners
 - Designing flyers and social media posts to share information about your event(s)
 - For example, one sub-committee might create flyers while another collects needed supplies.
- ▶ Make a list of agreed-upon responsibilities and set a timeline for each major task.
 - You or a designated coordinator will check in with volunteers and sub-committees throughout the process.
- ▶ Share information about Arkansas Children's Week plans with all program staff. "Save the Date!"
- ▶ Begin collecting orders for Arkansas Children's Week t-shirts, if desired.

- The 2024 Arkansas Children's Week t-shirt will be navy blue with a brand-new logo! Click [here](#) or go to <https://bit.ly/ACW2024logo> to view and download this year's logo.
- Shirts may be ordered from your favorite local or online print shop. Most shops will need orders by mid-March to ensure timely delivery.



T-shirt Day is Thursday, April 11, 2024.

Join others across the state and wear your ACW shirt with pride!

Stage 3 - Coordination

- ▶ Register for—and plan to participate in—an Arkansas Children's Week 2024 workshop. The workshop will be available in March and April in communities around the state!
- ▶ Continue to follow up with all sub-committees. Is everything going according to plan and schedule? Work together to solve any challenges that arise.
- ▶ Finalize t-shirt orders if desired.
- ▶ Finalize all reservations for spaces and any associated contracts or agreements.
- ▶ Begin making decorations, assembling materials for projects, or completing other labor-intensive tasks. Starting well in advance will make this fun, rather than fatiguing!
- ▶ Advertise your event(s) with signs, banners, social media posts, and/or family reminders. Check that families have complete information about dates, times, and locations.
- ▶ Contact local officials about issuing an Arkansas Children's Week proclamation. By reading a proclamation, officials highlight the importance of children and families in their community.

- ▶ Contact local media about coverage for your upcoming events. Children’s Week events are positive, community-interest stories for your local newspaper and/or television news station.

Sample media invitation for local television or newspaper

[Name(s) of your Program/Affiliate/Organization(s)] is celebrating Arkansas Children’s Week, April 6 - 12, 2024! This is an opportunity to show what [your city] is doing to help young children here in our community.

[Describe your event, highlighting any opportunities the news station can video or the newspaper can photograph. This could include the reading of a proclamation by a local official, or it could be something visually interesting at your event.]

[Name(s) and Title of your Affiliate/Organization's Leader(s)] will be on hand to discuss Arkansas Children's Week and the local impact of important early childhood education issues. For more information about covering Arkansas Children's Week events, please contact [Name(s) and Title of your Event Coordinator] at [email address] or [phone number].

Stage 4 - Final Preparation

- ▶ Continue to generate excitement about your upcoming event(s)!
- ▶ Schedule a final meeting to ensure that all event preparations are in order. Think about each person's role on the day of your event(s).
- ▶ Share specific event plans with all program staff and answer any questions about when events will occur and how they will flow. What do classroom staff need to know to have a successful experience?
- ▶ Find ways to recognize families and staff as part of your week-long Arkansas Children's Week celebration.
- ▶ Carry out and enjoy your well-planned event(s)!



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Stage 5 - Reflection and Conclusion (after your events)

- ▶ Have a get-together with the planning team to celebrate and evaluate. How did it go? What were your successes?
- ▶ Send letters of appreciation to community leaders, businesses, volunteers, and others who supported your event(s).
- ▶ Begin or continue an Arkansas Children's Week file for future reference.
- ▶ Tell us about your event! We would love to hear your Arkansas Children's Week 2024 stories! You can share your experience with us by emailing MWhite@AState.edu.



Your program shares valuable key experiences with children and encourages families to do the same. **Thank you for all you do!**



Childhood Services



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