



July/ August 2026

Child Development Today



“When you’re in nature, you
remember—you are part of the
natural world.”
— Rusty Keeler



Summer Play, Growth, & Safety

As we move into the heart of summer, July and August bring a season full of energy, exploration, and opportunity for the children and families you serve.

Embracing Summer Learning

Warmer weather offers the perfect chance to take learning outdoors. Whether it's nature walks, water play, gardening, or creative arts, summer activities can spark curiosity and support development across all domains. Remember, meaningful learning happens through play, exploration, and connection.

Health & Safety Reminders

With rising temperatures, it's important to stay mindful of sun safety, hydration, and supervision during outdoor play. Be sure to review your policies for heat advisories, sunscreen use, and water activities to keep children safe and comfortable.

Wishing you a safe, fun, and inspiring summer season!



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Creating a Learning Environment

Creating an environment that supports brain and language development in infants and toddlers from birth to age three is essential because this is the most sensitive period for building neural connections, communication skills, and secure relationships. During these early years, children learn constantly through interactions, experiences, and exploration. A carefully prepared environment promotes healthy emotional, cognitive, social, and language development.

A language-rich environment is one of the most important foundations for learning. Adults should talk frequently with infants and toddlers by narrating actions, naming objects, and describing feelings and experiences. Using a wide variety of vocabulary, asking simple questions, and singing songs or reciting rhymes help children develop listening and speaking skills. Labeling objects with pictures and words also strengthens early literacy connections.



The physical environment should encourage interaction and safe exploration. Cozy spaces with soft seating and books provide opportunities for quiet bonding and conversation. Furniture arranged to support face-to-face communication encourages eye contact and social learning. Low shelves, mirrors, and open floor spaces promote independence, self-awareness, movement, and curiosity.

Providing developmentally appropriate materials also supports language growth. Board books, puppets, dolls, animal figures, and sound-making toys encourage communication and imaginative play. Real-life photographs of family members or classroom activities help children connect language to meaningful experiences.

Responsive interactions are critical for healthy brain development. Adults should follow children's interests, respond to gestures and sounds, and practice “serve-and-return” communication. Giving children time to respond and using gestures or simple signs strengthens understanding and expression.



Sensory activities, music, movement, and daily routines all provide valuable opportunities for learning new words and concepts. Consistent routines create emotional security, while rotating toys and reducing clutter help prevent overstimulation. Warm, caring relationships with adults, along with opportunities for peer interaction, build trust, confidence, and strong communication skills that support lifelong learning.

“When a flower doesn’t bloom, you fix the environment in which it grows, not the flower.”

– Alexander Den Heijer

Spotlight On...Community Outreach

Community outreach is at the heart of what we do at the Child Development Council. By building strong, meaningful connections with families, providers, and community partners, we create a network of support that enhances the quality and accessibility of early childhood services across our region.



Fun at Cortland County Parade & Ithaca Fest.

Over the past several months, our outreach efforts have focused on connecting with people at local events such as Ithaca Festival, Cortland County Dairy Parade, Dryden Dairy Day parade, and Playdate in the Park. These interactions allow us to share valuable resources, highlight available child care options, and ensure families understand how to access the support they may need.



Playdate in the Park & Dryden Dairy Day Parade

By collaborating with local organizations and participating in community events, we help raise awareness about the importance of high-quality child care. Outreach also strengthens relationships within the community, creating a more coordinated and responsive system of support for children and families.

Provider Corner

July marks the beginning of a new year of grant opportunities funded through NYS OCFS, including Quality Improvement Grants. These grants support programs in creating engaging environments that promote children's development and learning.

Quality Improvement Grants, typically valued at around \$800, may be used to purchase tables, chairs, puzzles, blocks, dramatic play materials, art supplies, and infant/toddler resources. Our experienced staff can help evaluate your program, identify areas for growth, and plan meaningful improvements using environmental rating scales and other assessment tools.

A Quality Improvement Grant is more than financial support—it is an opportunity to strengthen your program and enhance children's learning experiences. For more information, please give us a call.



Stay tuned for a poll question coming your way.
Responses will be featured anonymously in the next newsletter.

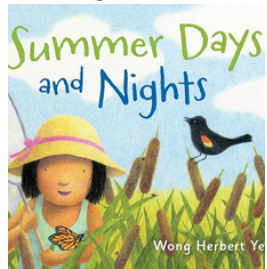
Bookworm Banter

For Ages 0-3



Here Comes Ocean by *Meg Fleming (Author), Paola Zakimi (Illustrator)* *Here Comes Ocean* captures a child's sensory-filled day at the beach through lyrical, rhythmic language and inviting illustrations. The book helps young children explore descriptive language, rhythm, and observation skills.

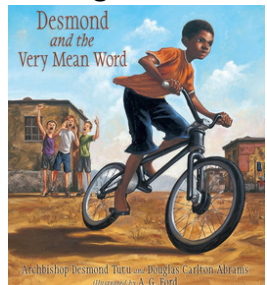
For Ages 3-5



Summer Days and Nights by *Wong Herbert Yee (Author, Illustrator)*

Summer Days and Nights uses gentle rhyming verses to follow a young girl's quiet summer adventures, celebrating curiosity, sensory experiences, and the small wonders of nature from daytime play to the calm of night.

For Ages 5-8



Desmond and the Very Mean Word by *Desmond Tutu & Douglas Carlton Abrams, Illustrated by A.G. Ford*

Desmond and the Very Mean Word follows a young boy's experience with a hurtful insult and his journey toward forgiveness, showing the emotional power of words and the strength it takes to choose empathy over revenge. Often used to support lessons on kindness, social awareness, and forgiveness.

Communication is Key

Providing directions in a positive way is a powerful practice for helping children meet behavior expectations. This resource provides ideas for how you can communicate with children in a positive way.

1. Tell a child what to do instead of what not to do.
2. Show the child by modeling or using a picture of the action.
3. Clearly and simply state what you expect the child to do.
4. Remember young children might have inappropriate behavior because they don't understand the social rules of an activity or interaction.
5. Communicate, with words, signs, or pictures, using language they might understand.
6. Encourage children in a way that lets them know that they are exhibiting the desired behavior.
7. Be enthusiastic and generous with encouragement. Children can never get enough!



Examples:

Avoid	Say/Model	Remember
Don't run!	Walk; Stay with me; Hold my hand	Way to go! Look at you moving safely. Thanks for walking!
Stop climbing!	Keep your feet on the floor	Wow! You have both feet on the floor!
Don't touch!	Keep your hands down; Look with your eyes	You are being safe; you are looking with hands down!
No Yelling!	Use a calm voice; Use an inside voice	(In a low voice) Now I can listen; you are using a calm (inside) voice.
Stop whining!	Use your words/signs/pictures/device so I can help you	Now I can hear you; that is so much better. Show or tell me what's wrong.
Don't stand on the chair!	Sit on the chair	You are sitting on the chair! Wow you're sitting up big and tall!
No coloring on the wall	Color on the paper	Look at what you've colored! Tell me about your picture.
Don't throw your toys!	Play with the toys on the floor	You're playing nicely and keeping the toys on the floor. Your friends are having fun playing with you!
Stop taking big bites!	One bite at a time; chew first, and then you can have another bite.	Great job taking small bites, you are eating safely!
Don't play in the water/sink!	Wash your hands	Thanks for washing your hands! I can tell they are really clean!
No biting!	We only bite food; Show or tell me if you're upset (give the child appropriate words, signs, or visuals to use to express emotion)	You're upset, thanks for sharing that with me!
Don't hit!	Hands are for playing, eating, and hugging; Use your words or signs (give the child appropriate words, signs, or visuals to use to express emotion)	You are being gentle! Good for you!

https://www.challengingbehavior.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/communication_is_key.pdf

Farm to CACFP/Early Childhood: Supporting Healthy Kids and Local Farms

Child care programs in Tompkins and Cortland Counties have an excellent opportunity to the enjoy bountiful produce available from local farms!

Revisit Local Foods

Buying from farm stands, farmers markets, or Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) shares means fresher, more flavorful food and supports the local economy. It also gives children a chance to learn where their food comes from and try produce they may not see every day.

Introducing new foods like squash, greens, or berries can be fun and engaging. Simple activities like taste tests, talking about colors and textures, or helping prepare snacks can encourage children to explore and accept new foods over time.

Core Elements of the Farm to CACFP The initiative operates on three main pillars to connect local child care with regional food producers.

- **Local Procurement:** Serving seasonal, locally grown foods that meet CACFP Meal Pattern requirements.
- **Hands-On Gardening:** Creating and maintaining center gardens (from indoor pots to outdoor raised beds) so children learn where food comes from.
- **Education & Tastings:** Integrating food and agriculture into early learning standards, paired with vegetable and fruit tastings for your children and their families!

For every \$20 on local farms it generates \$30–\$50 in local economic impact that supports farmers, families, and small businesses in our communities. If each program and household committed to spending \$20 each week, that can bring in millions of dollars to the local economy each year!



For information about accessing local foods, please visit <https://ccetompkins.org/agriculture/buy-local> where you can find almost anything you are looking for in Central New York and the Southern Tier!

CCE of Tompkins County has colorful Vegetable ID cards for the market or CSA available on the opening page on the lower left corner. Recipes, and more!



This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

Agency Calendar

Closings:

The agency hours for the month of July and August are Monday through Thursday 9:00 AM to 4:30 PM and **CLOSED** on Fridays. This schedule is only for the months of July & August.

Meetings:

No Center Director meetings- until September
NO SACC Directors meeting- until October

Next FDC/GFDC Roundtables will be in September

Resources

Embracing Summer Learning

<https://www.brighthorizons.com/resources/blog/summer-activities-kids-all-ages>

Summer Self Care All Year Long

<https://www.solutiontree.com/blog/summer-self-care-all-year-long/>

Summer Safety Strategies and Supports- may need to copy & paste URL

<https://starautismsupport.com/june-2026-newsletter-summer-safety-strategies-and-supports>

Child Care Weather Watch

<chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.c-uphd.org/documents/wellness/weatherwatch.pdf>

Creating a Child Care Environment

<chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.mass.gov/doc/classroom-physical-environment-0/download>

Farm to CACFP - Find your local farmers with "Buy Local" guide

<https://cctompkins.org/agriculture/buy-local>

Hometown Happenings

Here's your round-up of free, fun, and family friendly events happening across Tompkins and Cortland Counties.
Mark your calendars and share with families!

Circus Culture Summer Tour

Enjoy six free, family-friendly performances taking place throughout downtown Ithaca. Featuring acts created and performed by community members, students, and teachers, these shows celebrate local talent and creativity. Bring a blanket or a chair and settle in for an evening of entertainment, or simply stop by to enjoy an act or two while exploring downtown.

Check @circusculture on Instagram for updates!

Weekend 1

Thursday, July 24th 6:30pm @ Press Bay Alley Backlot

Circus Culture Performance Camp Show

Friday, July 25th 6:30pm @ Ithaca Commons, Bank Alley

Sunday, July 27th 4:30pm @ Thompson Park in Fall Creek

Weekend 2

Thursday, July 31st 6:30pm @ Press Bay Alley Backlot

Friday, August 1st 6:30pm @ Ithaca Commons, Bank Alley

Sunday, August 3rd 4:30pm @ Thompson Park in Fall Creek

Cortland County Junior Fair

Experience the excitement and tradition of a classic county fair with something for all ages to enjoy. Visitors can explore 4-H livestock exhibitions and homegrown produce displays, cheer on participants in the Fair Queen Contest, and enjoy family favorites such as the Barnyard Olympics and animal costume classes. Learn more about agriculture through the dairy cattle birthing exhibit, then take in the sights and sounds of carnival rides, antique tractor pulls, and plenty of delicious fair food throughout the grounds.

Free admission. Rides and food may require a fee.

July 7th-July 11th

Location: Cortland County Fairgrounds, 4301 Fairgrounds Drive, Cortland

Read to Dogs at Newfield Public Library

A great opportunity for learning and family enjoyment.

Free!

June 3rd, July 1st, August 5th at 3pm

Location: 198 Main Street, Newfield

Training Calendar July- August 2026

Date	Time	Location	Title	Description	Instructor	OCFS Categories
7/14	6:30-8:30pm	Ithaca Office	Art with Young Children	In this training participants will develop a plan for allowing young children to experience child directed art. Time will be spent hands on with materials.	Lisa Potter	1,3
8/25	6:30-8:30pm	Cortland Office	Behavior has Meaning	In this training participants will be able to examine steps for understanding and responding to challenging behavior. Together we will discuss what we observe, what we learn, and how we can respond to challenging behavior.	Lisa Potter	1, 3

The Child Development Council is happy to offer convenient on-site training for child care programs. Our Team is available to travel to your program, or provide a Zoom link, and teach one of our many training workshops to your staff. Email or call for a training catalog and applicable fees.

To register for training: call (607) 273-0259 or email training@childdevelopmentcouncil.org

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