

Good News Gazette

December 2017-January 2018

Holiday Ideas to Promote Play

The holiday season is upon us! Regardless of your holiday traditions, most of our families' celebrations will include gifts for children.

Whether you are looking for practical gift ideas that encourage active learning, entertain young visitors, or you just want to play with your child to escape the frenzy of the season, here are some ideas for you...

The advocacy group TRUCE (Teachers Resisting Unhealthy Children's Entertainment) works to promote safe, healthy play for children. Their gift giving guide has some practical ideas for age-appropriate toys that encourage active learning.

Toys have high play value when they...

- Can be used in more than one way
- Allow children to be in charge of what happens next
- Appeal to children at more than one age or level of development
- Are not linked to video games, computers, TV or movies
- Can be enjoyed by both boys and girls

Toys have limited value when they...

- Can only be used in one way
- Look exciting but quickly become boring because they only require the child to push a button and watch what happens
- Lead the child to spend more time with TV or other media, letting the screen control the play

- *Separate girls and boys by giving certain types of play gender labels*

When my children were small, they would often open a gift and proceed to play with the box it came in...sound familiar? If so, try one of the Shoe Box Gifts below!

Shoe box gifts are collections of small, familiar items that are organized around a play theme and presented in an appealing way. They also show that expensive toys in fancy packages aren't necessarily the best.

Making Shoe Box Gifts

Decorate an empty shoe or appropriate-sized box and lid (gift wrap, stickers, etc.)

Choose a theme and put a clear label on the box which includes both a simple word and picture of the theme.

Use small containers, ziplock sandwich bags, or build dividers with small pieces of cardboard to make compartments for the various items in the shoe box. Young children appreciate organization—being able to return everything to its place.

While some materials may require adult supervision (paint or food coloring), try to select materials that the child can manipulate without too much oversight.

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Important Notes

Winter Break

All Gretchen's House Centers will be closed December 25- January 1. We will reopen again on Tuesday, January 2, 2018. If your family will be gone before or after the break, please let us know in advance. Many teachers request time off during the holidays. Substitutes are in short supply at this time of year so it helps us to know if attendance will be low.

No Public School Days

The Chelsea and Ann Arbor Public Schools will be closed 12/25/17-1/5/18. School resumes on Monday, 1/8/18. Our winter holiday coincides with some of these dates, but our school age programs will offer full day care for kindergarten and school age children on January 2nd -5th. Sign up sheets are posted in the Older Preschool and School-age rooms.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day – Centers Closed

Please take note that all Gretchen's House Centers will be closed on Monday, January 15, 2018. We use this day for our annual cultural competence training. We appreciate parent support of our staff training time.

2018 Contracts

All currently enrolled families should have received a new child care contract for 2018 in November. These contracts reflect rates and days the centers will be closed for January-December, 2018. Contracts for 2018 were due to the office by December 1st. If you have questions about your schedule or fees, see your center director as soon as possible.

Please note that January billing statements will go out before we close on December

22nd. Payments are due when centers reopen on January 2, 2018. Late fees will be assessed for payments made after January 10th.

Woombies for sale

Gretchen's House is a distributor of the Woombie sleep sack for infants. This allows us to purchase Woombies at a discount. We are happy to share our price with you. Please speak to your center director for more information. For more info on Woombies, check out their website at www.thewoombie.com.

Outdoor Clothing Needed

Cold weather is here! Please send your child to school with the appropriate outdoor gear, because we go outside every day, unless the wind chill is below 0. At this time of year, each child needs:

- a warm coat
- snow pants
- waterproof mittens
- hat
- snow boots
- slippers or "inside only" shoes

We also recommend having 2-3 extra pairs of socks along with size and weather-appropriate extra clothes in your child's cubby. We are working on establishing a good supply of extra outdoor gear at each center. If you have gently used coats, snowpants, gloves or boots that your child has outgrown, please consider donating them to our "extras" box. Any surplus that we receive will be donated to the Salvation Army's coat drive. Thanks for helping us make outdoor play more convenient and comfortable for all of our children!

If you are interested in learning more about our approach to outdoor play, please ask your teacher for a copy of the purple page on the subject.



Neighborhood News

The **Stadium** center hosted its annual Winter Wonderland this month. Children and families enjoyed cookie decorating, face painting, games, and more! Thanks to everyone who joined us for a fun celebration!

The **Stadium** center collected new household items for homeless families through S.O.S. Thanks to all who participated!

The children at **Traver** have been enjoying the snow! The preschoolers love using the child sized snow shovels to clear paths on the playground.

Thank you to all of the **Traver** families for making our Annual Winter Celebration a huge success! During the holiday season Traver staff and families collected donations for a sponsored family through the Ann Arbor Women’s Center. Thank you everyone for your generosity!

Dhu Varren’s Scholastic Book Fair was a smashing success with all classrooms receiving books from their wish lists that were generously donated by families, as well as the center earning over \$800 in free books from the sale. It was wonderful watching so many children and families collaborate over which books to purchase and seeing their excitement when they recognized a book title. Thank you to all of our families who participated.

Our food drive for Food Gatherers collected so many needed supplies that are vitally important, especially at this time of year. We are grateful once again to our families for their generosity in giving.

Oak Valley hosted their annual “Winter Wonderland” on December 18th. Make It-Take It winter projects, cookie decorating, and games highlighted the evening. Thanks to all of the families who joined us to make it a fun time!

Oak Valley started a new tradition for the winter holiday season. We have a sharing

table, where families and staff are invited to share their own holiday customs and traditions. It has proven to be both fun and educational. It’s not too late to share your holiday traditions – please join us!

The **Chelsea** family holiday cookie decorating party was a huge success. Thanks to all of the families who joined us for our annual event!

Chelsea Preschool students have been collecting items for Faith in Action. Thanks to all of our families for their generosity to this wonderful community resource.

WISD hosted its annual Winter Party on Friday 12/15, including open Family Swim Night at the High Point school. Thanks to all who attended it and made it a fun night!

For the fifth consecutive year, **Mt. Vernon** will be working with The Salvation Army to help provide for families in need in our community. Donations of unwrapped toys are being collected for their Angel Tree. We appreciate the generosity of our families!

The staff at **Mt. Vernon**, in coordination with the GH administrative staff and the GH on Wagner Rd are adopting a family through the Women’s Center of Southeastern Michigan, in lieu of their staff gifts to each other. The season of giving is upon us and with so many in need of our community, we are pleased to coordinate efforts to help make giving meaningful to young children and simple for families and teachers.

The School Agers at **Mt. Vernon** made and decorated cards in November that were delivered to local seniors and veterans through the Meals on Wheels program.

Mt. Vernon was visited by two guest readers in November. Laura Raynor, local storyteller came and read to the preschool classrooms. Laura is an aunt to one of the preschoolers and is a regular storyteller at



These staff members are celebrating Gretchen’s House anniversaries this December and January!

	Years
Heike Hampel	21
Kathleen Lovernick	20
Christiana McKiddie	11
Kelly Lessard	11
Claudia Korf	10
Danielle Wiener	10
Crystal Park	10
Arzu Aksu	6
Linda Alvira	5
Jordan Scavone	4
Emily Schinske	2
Katherine Burnett	2
Nicole Glenn	2
Zaynab Abdullah	1
Abby Boerema	1
Rachel Kriebel	1
Bridget Stanecki	1
Yuyang Terry	1
Joseph Enos	1

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Physical Development & Health



Climbing opportunities gives the chance to use all of our muscles as we move up, down and across climbers.



Jumping in the ball pit is fun exercise.
"1,2,3....JUMP!"



We always have objects available for the children to engage in heavy work.



Children like to help out with the "big jobs" of picking up walnuts and raking leaves. We are experts at helping the kids find fun ways to get out and use their bodies.



Part of our physical health that we take care of is washing our own hands.





Babies are always given a variety of ways to move their bodies on their own.



A walk in the woods is good for anyone.



Ms. Anita comes and leads us in yoga. This helps me learn flexibility. My body is AMAZING!



One of our favorite activities is pushing and riding in the swing.



Holiday Ideas

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CPR and First Aid

Sessions begin with CPR renewal, so those who do not need First Aid will be free to leave following the first half of the session. Trainings are held at our Oak Valley center. Sign up with Heike at 734-327-6126 or email her at heike.hampel@gretchenshouse.com.

Upcoming dates:

January 9

February 7

Shoe Box Gift Theme Ideas:

Just some idea starters – come up with your own ideas!

Sensory Fun

- Hypo-allergenic, unscented shaving cream (use whipped cream for younger children who will try to eat the cream!)
- plastic tray (or use the container)
- food coloring
- popsicle sticks, clean combs, plastic fork, etc.
- smock or old T-shirt (or play in the bathtub!)

Shoe Box Garden

- plastic-lined shoe box
- potting soil
- seed packets
- small watering can
- popsicle sticks
- garden tools
- gardening gloves

Collage Kit

- roll of wax/craft/freezer paper
- recycled gift wrap/ribbon
- children's glue or tape
- pine cones, acorns, twigs, leaves, etc.
- found materials: old keys, plastic bottle tops, buttons, fabric scraps, etc.
- craft feathers, glitter, pipe cleaners, etc.

Rescue/Hospital

- flashlight
- bandaids
- fabric strips/ bandages
- ace bandage
- sling
- eye patch
- gauze
- stethoscope
- surgical mask

Playdough

buy a can of playdough or make your own
garlic press
plastic knife
popsicle sticks
wooden dowel
plastic lids
small tray/plate
buttons/beads
plastic animals

Playdough Recipe

1 cup flour
1 Tbsp. oil
1 cup water
1/2 cup salt
2 tsp. cream of tartar
food coloring

Mix ingredients in saucepan. Cook on low heat. Stir constantly until playdough pulls away from sides of pan. Scoop playdough onto wax paper. Knead until smooth. Store in airtight container.

BEYOND SHOE BOXES

Recycle large boxes that can be painted/ decorated for dramatic play. Create a car, spaceship, animal, creature, house, or cave. Extend the play possibilities by adding blocks, flashlight, tablecloth, and/or pillows.

Materials:

- appliance box
- paint, tape, markers
- wallpaper books to decorate and glue
- utility knife (for adults to cut holes)
- carpet samples

For more information on promoting healthy play with young children, visit the TRUCE website: www.truceteachers.org or www.naeyc.org for information on a variety of topics relating to young children.

We wish you and your family a safe, healthy and happy new year!



Unexpected Center Closings

Gretchen's House centers may close when the public schools close for inclement weather, or when mechanical issues arise that prevent us from providing a safe environment (such as no power, heat, or electricity). We have several ways to notify parents and staff in these situations.

OneCallNow. We now subscribe to this service which allows us to send emails and/or phone messages to any family members who have signed up. At least one phone number and email address for your family is automatically included, and you may add as many additional phones or emails as you like. You may

also change those numbers and emails whenever you would like to, and may also opt in to receive text messages. *Please talk to the center Director if you are not sure that you are signed up for OneCallNow.*

Our snow line (734-480-8592) will also continue to be updated with the same information. Closing status will also be posted on Facebook. We will no longer use the Twitter account, since OneCallNow sends text messages.

In general, if the Ann Arbor Public Schools close due to weather (or Chelsea, for our programs there), you should look to the sources listed above for more information. GH centers in Chelsea and Ann Arbor will often have a **delayed opening** at 10:00 a.m. in these situations, but there are times when it will be possible for us to open on time, even if the public schools do not. (For instance, if the schools close due to extremely low temperatures, we are usually able to open on time). If we feel it is necessary to keep our centers closed for the day, we will make that decision **by 9:00 a.m.**

So, sign up for OneCallNow messages and check the *snow line*, *Twitter*, *Facebook*, or *our website for information when there is any question about centers being open*. Although it is our desire to remain open, many of our teachers live outside the immediate Ann Arbor area. We need to have enough staff at the centers to be in compliance with licensing requirements, and as always, safety is our first priority.

Staff members **may not** care for children during days when the center closes for weather conditions. We suggest parents trade care with other families on snow days if your work does not permit you to stay home.

Parking Lot Safety

As you well know, our parking lots can get very crowded at drop-off and pick-up times. To keep everyone safe, we ask that you please:

Do not leave your unattended car running, ever.

Never leave children alone in the car.

Drive slowly, even if you are running late!

Hold hands of small children and stay within arms reach of older ones.

Park your car in a way that allows other drivers to enter their cars and exit the parking lot safely, even if you will just be away from your vehicle momentarily.



Neighborhood News

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the Ann Arbor Library. Grace Helms Korte, Certified Mindfulness Instructor, came and read stories and did activities to encourage mindfulness with young children. Grace offers local parent and child mindfulness classes for preschoolers, as well as working with local public school classrooms with a focus on mindfulness and mindful listening.

Upcoming Events:

Gretchen's House on **Mt. Vernon** will host its Annual Winter Party for families and children on December 20th from 4:30 to 6:00. There will be musical entertainment, face painting, cookie decorating, and hands on crafts.



...because learning should be fun!

Staff News

Erica Cross (Traver) earned her Associates Degree in Early Childhood Education. Congratulations Erica!

In November, **Oak Valley** had a second round of visits from Japanese educators, physicians, scientists and business owners. They are planning on opening an early childhood program that will follow the HighScope curriculum. During their visits, they have observed the physical environment, as well as the daily routing and adult-child interactions. They plan on another visit

prior to breaking ground on their new facility. Thanks to the Oak Valley staff for their warm welcome to our visitors!

Director **Chrissy McKiddie** (Mt. Vernon) and Master Teacher, **Marie Gaab** (Dhu Varren) presented at the Howell Community Sharing for Healthy Caring Conference in November. The topic was Riding the Emotional Rollercoaster with Toddlers and Preschoolers, steps to support problem solving.