



Arkansas Children's Week 2023

Planning Toolkit

**Play Yards, Neighborhoods,
and Other Special Places**

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**, http://asuchildhoodservices.org/#!ar_childrens_week

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

Arkansas Children's Week

April 15 - 21, 2023

Each year's celebration has a topic, guided by suggestions from the field. This year, our theme is **“Play Yards, Neighborhoods, and Other Special Places.”** We'll consider ways to nurture children's positive relationships with their immediate environment and the world right outside their door. Whether your special places are sidewalks, city parks, and shopping centers - or pastures, barns, and creeks - you're sure to find people to meet, creatures to wonder about, and many fascinating things to explore!

Big Ideas for 2023

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

► **The everyday places we share with children matter.**

We can be mindful of the arrangement and aesthetics of our indoor and outdoor areas as we strive to welcome children and families, foster trust and belonging, and invite play and exploration.

► **Within our places, we can create special spaces that are meaningful and memorable.**

We can optimize opportunities for children to have experiences within our larger program and with the natural world around us. Lobbies, hallways, gardens, courtyards, and lawns are full of potential!

► **We can help children connect with their communities.**

With us, children can develop a relationship with the people, places, and events that make their hometown and region unique.



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 have ideas of your own.

Meet Us at the Park

Invite families to join you for a playful gathering at a nearby city park, state park, or nature center. This could take place in the evening after school or on a weekend. Depending on the features of your park, your gathering could include some of the following.

- ▶ Simple, active games such as parachute games
- ▶ Splashpad play, supervised by families
- ▶ A sing-along or a dance party
- ▶ A simple scavenger hunt
- ▶ Nature walks
- ▶ A picnic lunch or supper

Neighborhood Connections

Program neighbors come in many forms. If your program is a family child care home, your neighbors might be the people who live in the homes on either side of yours. If your program is large, your group's neighbors might be staff, teachers, and students around the building. And if your program is in a small-town downtown, your neighbors might be businesses around the square. A food truck on the corner can be a neighbor, and so can a library at the end of the street.

Whomever your neighbors may be, it could feel valuable to talk about them with children and think together about ways that you might show kindness or appreciation to them. For example, you might make and deliver cards, muffins, or some other small token of appreciation. If it feels safe to do so, children can even help with deliveries or pop by to sing their favorite songs.

Creating a Nature Space

Staff and families could 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.

Community Day of Play

Highlight the value of play for children of all ages by hosting a community event where families can build with blocks or cardboard boxes, play in a sand kitchen, bounce on inflatables, or engage in other vibrant play experiences. Consider partnering with other programs in your community for a super-sized event!

Locally-Inspired StoryWalk

A StoryWalk is a story-sharing event that takes place along a 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.

If you would like to begin or continue a StoryWalk event, choose a book that reminds you of your community or region. For example, if yours is an urban program, you might try *Everybody in the Red Brick Building* by Anne Wynter. If your StoryWalk borders a pasture or grassland area, try *Over in the Meadow* by Ezra Jack Keats. Or, partner with a nature center to place *Sheep Take a Hike* by Nance E. Shaw along a short trail.

Find more tips for a successful StoryWalk at <https://letsmovelibraries.org/storywalk/>

Living Forest Event

Invite volunteers to dress as local wildlife. As children and families travel along a designated path, they'll encounter characters who share a song or rhyme or invite them to join in a simple activity.

- ▶ A bumblebee character might share the [*Here is the Beehive*](#) rhyme and remind children that they pollinate plants and flowers to help them grow.
- ▶ A bird might ask children to look around to find a twig to contribute to a nest, reminding children that springtime is the season when birds build nests and lay eggs.
- ▶ A squirrel might share the [*Gray Squirrel*](#) rhyme and invite children to spot leafy squirrel dreys (nests) in the trees.
- ▶ A rabbit might share the [*Here is a Bunny*](#) rhyme, reminding children that many wild creatures are shy. They hide when they hear people coming!

What other creatures can your planning committee think of? This event could take place along the edge of a wooded area near your program, or you might partner with a local park or nature center to host a community event.

Truck Corral

Invite big and interesting trucks from your community - such as fire trucks, garbage trucks, big rigs, and dump trucks - to visit you for a family event. Have the trucks park in a roped-off area of your parking lot where families can safely walk through to talk with operators, take photos, and get an up-close look at each truck.

Field Trip Fun

If you are able to take field trips, visit one or more of the places that make your community special. Possibilities include museums, landmarks, farms, and more.

Before you visit, think about how you'll use the field trip to help children build a positive relationship with this place. For example, they might meet and interview someone who works there, take photographs as part of a tour, or engage in simple activities.



Art Gallery

Invite children to create artwork inspired by your community, town, or region. Partner with a local bank, library, community center, or business to display children's work. Your display might be titled, "Celebrating (Town Name)".

A Collaborative Community Guide

Invite families and staff to respond to an online survey about your community by sharing one or more of their family's favorites, such as:

- ▶ Favorite playground
- ▶ Best place for a picnic
- ▶ Best nature walks for young children
- ▶ Favorite fountain or sculpture
- ▶ Best place to fly a kite
- ▶ Favorite bakery or ice cream parlor
- ▶ Favorite community activity
- ▶ A special place in our community that not everyone knows about

Pair family responses with children's drawings to create a collaborative guide that can be copied or shared digitally. If your program includes schoolagers, they might be interested in creating a map to accompany your guide.

Pop-Up Travel Center

Connect with a [tourist information center](#) to collect brochures about family-friendly attractions in your region. Work with preschoolers or schoolagers to create a "travel center" in the lobby of your program with a shelf full of brochures, a local map, and a display of posters or children's drawings that represent your area. Add comfortable seating to invite children and families to browse the brochures and plan together.

Story Sharing

Interview family members to record short videos of them talking about a place that was special to them when they were small. One person might talk about an old barn on a family farm. Another person might tell about a shop where a grandparent worked or a treehouse in their backyard. Find a way to share the videos through secure social media or in another way.

Program Parade

Invite children to decorate t-shirts, make hats, or dress as their favorite community helpers. You can also make musical instruments and streamer rings. Or, you could use instruments and props that you have on hand. 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 ride 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.

- ▶ Arkansas Children's Week t-shirts, tote bags, or aprons
- ▶ Door decorations at the entrance of the program or on each classroom door
- ▶ Treats or a luncheon in the staff break area, or restaurant gift cards to give staff a night off from cooking
- ▶ “Shout outs” on social media highlighting the special strengths and talents of each staff member
- ▶ Break room makeover to give educators a special, spa-inspired space to relax and recharge



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 – "Play Yards, Neighborhoods, and Other Special Places" – and the significance of helping children build positive relationships with their communities. 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 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.

Stage 2, cont.

- ▶ 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 your event(s) down 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 other program staff. "Save the Date!"
 - ▶ Begin collecting orders for Arkansas Children's Week t-shirts, if desired.
 - The 2023 Arkansas Children's Week t-shirt will be lime green with our traditional logo. Click [here](#) or go to <https://bit.ly/ACW2023logo> 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 20, 2023.

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 2023 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 kits for families, 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 15 - 21, 2023! This is an opportunity to show what [your city] is doing to help young children here in our community.

[Describe your event, highlighting things 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 children and families will do 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)!



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 2023 stories! You can share your experience with us by emailing MWhite@AState.edu.



Your program strengthens your community while creating a special place for Arkansas children and families. **Thank you for all you do!**



Childhood Services



Division of Child Care and
Early Childhood Education