



Arkansas Children's Week 2026

Planning Toolkit

Learning Comes Alive Outdoors

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 resources
- ▶ Arkansas Children's Week workshops
- ▶ Arkansas Children's Week planning toolkit and planning webinars

These can be found under the **resources tab** on the **A-State Childhood Services website**. [Click here](#) to access the site, or scan the QR code at right.



Our annual, statewide Arkansas Children's Week celebration occurs in April each year and concurs with NAEYC's Week of the Young Child.

Arkansas Children's Week

April 11 - 17, 2026

Big Ideas for 2026

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

- ▶ **Time spent outdoors matters.**

Ample, ongoing time outdoors supports health and wellness, improves mood, reduces stress, and boosts cognition. The positive effects of outdoor time can last for hours--or even days!

- ▶ **Our outdoor learning spaces are full of possibilities!**

Outdoor spaces engage the senses and spark wonder. There's always something new to discover as communities go about their day, weather rolls in and out, and seasons change. We can design and equip vibrant outdoor spaces that set the stage for physical development, cooperative and collaborative play, mathematical thinking, science and social studies learning, and more.

- ▶ **Some of the most positive, purposeful interactions between adults and children happen outdoors.**

Educators model curiosity and encourage children to make connections, try new ideas, and seek answers to their questions. Our warm, responsive interactions help children grow as confident communicators and problem-solvers.



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.

Family Outdoor Play Day

In a safe, roomy outdoor location, create stations for playful family experiences. Here are some possibilities.

- ▶ Bubbles
- ▶ Dance area
- ▶ Hopscotch
- ▶ Sidewalk chalk
- ▶ Hula hoops
- ▶ Wet sponge toss
- ▶ Cornhole or other favorite lawn games
- ▶ Parachute games with a staff leader
- ▶ Read aloud area with a basket of picture books
- ▶ Fruit juice popsicles, or another favorite outdoor treat



Staff can be positioned in each area to connect with families and join in the fun!

Playground Reading Buddies

Guest readers are a classic tradition for many programs, but not all visitors feel comfortable reading books to large groups of children. Instead of making guest readers perform center stage, consider inviting them to join during outdoor playtimes.

You can prepare for their visit with a special seat for the reader, a quilt or sit-upons where children can gather, and a book basket stocked with some of your group's favorites. When each guest arrives, introduce them to the children and help them get settled. Children may move freely in and out of the reading area to connect with the reader. Involving guests in informal reading is less stressful and more fun for everyone!



Collaborative Garden Project

Involve staff and families in planning and building a space where children can see, touch, and help care for plants. Here are some possibilities.

- ▶ [A container garden](#) with vegetables and/or fruits
- ▶ A beanpole teepee, a tunnel or arch of flowering vines, or a [sunflower house](#)
- ▶ [A sensory garden](#) with fragrant herbs
- ▶ Window boxes or flowerbeds
- ▶ A tree-planting event

Meet Me at the Park

Plan a weekend or evening family meetup at your favorite municipal or state park. Your get-together could include a playground playdate, a nature walk, a sing-along circle, a picnic or cookout, or other activities that suit your group.

Creative, Repurposed Play Objects

Choose a safe, accessible outdoor playspace with ample space to move, and equip it with materials that children can use creatively. Possibilities include, but are not limited to, large cardboard boxes, milk crates, tarps, oversized building blocks, traffic cones, and/or tires. You can see this sort of playspace in action [here](#) and [here](#).

Carefully check materials for safety hazards, such as staples or sharp edges, before sharing with children for open-ended play.

Consider taking photos of children's play to share with families. It may look like "just a mess" at first glance, but when we look more closely, we notice creativity, problem-solving, social navigation, and more!

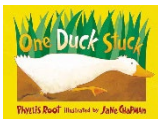


StoryWalk

A StoryWalk is a story-sharing event held 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. Find more tips for a successful StoryWalk at <https://letsmovelibraries.org/storywalk/>

To support this year's topic, *Learning Comes Alive Outdoors*, consider a book that features familiar wildlife and/or an outdoor setting. Here are a few to consider.



One Duck Stuck: A Mucky Duck Counting Book by Phyllis Root and Jane Chapman



Look and Listen by Dianne White and Amy Schimler

Hint: Use laminated file folders and Velcro to create an interactive lift-the-flap feature for each riddle!



One Small Place in a Tree by Barbara Brenner and Tom Leonard

Ideal for older preschoolers and schoolagers.

Kite Festival

Make or purchase kites, or invite families to bring their own for some old-fashioned fun. Pick a wide-open space, well away from trees and powerlines. To launch a kite, stand with your back to the wind. Unspool some line (string) and have a helper stand some distance away, holding the kite and facing you. At your signal, the helper can release the kite into the wind as you pull the line to lift it.



Consider offering snacks and drinks in a watching spot for families who are taking a break or waiting for a turn.

Nature Scavenger Hunt

Create a picture-and-word scavenger hunt sheet that children and adults can use together. For example, preschoolers might search for things like these:

- ▶ *A smooth, round stone*
- ▶ *Something yellow*
- ▶ *Something that feels warm in the sun*
- ▶ *A leaf with pointy edges*
- ▶ *A small twig*

You can find many printable scavenger hunt examples online. Older schoolagers might search for more complex things, such as *something symmetrical*, *evidence left by an animal*, and *an unusual rock*.

Your scavenger hunt could take place during your program day, or you could send a list or daily challenge home for families. Invite them to share pictures of their discoveries for a collaborative photo collage.

Playspace Update

Plan, develop an action plan, and host a workday to create or renovate an outdoor play space. Possibilities include an infant patio, a sand or mud play area, an outdoor music area, or a tricycle track, nature trail, or sensory pathway. Or, how about a playhouse or storage shed clean-up and makeover? Projects like these offer a great opportunity to share with families about the value of specific outdoor play experiences.

Meet the Experts

Plan a field trip or invite special guests to visit you. Here are a few possibilities.

Active Play Experts

- Older student athletes
- Jump rope team or another skills exhibition
- Elementary school P.E. teacher
- Bicycle safety presentation and “bike rodeo”



Nature Experts

- Park ranger
- Wildlife rehabilitation specialist
- Scouts (buddies for a project or activity)
- Gardener, birdwatcher, or other nature hobbyist

Mini Meadow

Mark off a sunny area that can be preserved throughout the spring and summer. Till the ground and plant native [wildflower seeds](#). If desired, you can mow and maintain a pathway through the middle of your meadow for immersive nature walks. Or, create a wildflower patch near an existing sidewalk or just outside your playground fence.

Involve children in observing and caring for their mini meadow by noting how it grows and changes. Keep an eye out for butterflies, bees, and other pollinators, as well as for songbirds and other creatures that use your meadow for food and cover.

Picture Us Outdoors!

Enlist a volunteer photographer or take photos of your own to capture children's outdoor experiences. Curate specific sets of photos, such those outlined below.

- ▶ Sensory experiences
- ▶ Active, physical play, such as climbing, crawling, and chasing
- ▶ Mathematical experiences, such as measuring rainfall or searching for shapes
- ▶ Observing and caring for plants and animals
- ▶ Representations of rich, interesting vocabulary words related to nature or sports
- ▶ Pretending and engaging in imaginative play

Pair your photos with information about the benefits of outdoor play, and share them with others. For example, you might create a hallway display at your school, local library, or community center. Or, you might create a digital slideshow for families. Safety note: Ensure that proper photo releases are received, and avoid using children's names or other personal information in your display.



Rock Garden or Rock Snake

Invite children and/or families to paint large, round rocks that can be added to a collaborative rock garden. Or, work together to build a long rock snake along a walkway. Activities like these can help connect children to their community.

Art in the Park

Set up several open-ended outdoor art stations at a local park or on your playground. Families and community members can be invited to join in the fun. Here are some possibilities.

Paint with Water

Offer no-spill paint cups, chunky paintbrushes, and plain water that the youngest artists can use to paint anything they please.

Outdoor Easels

Bring your easels, smocks, and washable paint outdoors. Wet wipes are useful for cleaning hands.

Spray Bottle Painting

Clip a white sheet to the fence. Invite children to “spray paint” with spray bottles of colored water.

Chalk the Walk

Offer each family a square of sidewalk to decorate in their own way.

Clay Station

At a picnic table, offer air-drying clay alongside natural materials like twigs and leaves. Squares of cardboard can be used as work surfaces that will make it easier for children to take their creations home, if desired. Wet wipes are useful for cleaning hands.



Evening Adventure (Schoolagers)

Invite young people to come back after dark for some family fun! You might take a nighttime nature walk, play flashlight tag, dance with glowsticks, make s'mores, or set up a telescope for stargazing.

Family Read-and-Explore Lending Library

Pair a favorite children's book with materials to support an outdoor experience. Place materials in boxes or tote bags that families can borrow and use at home. Here are a few ideas to get you started.

► Birdwatching Box

A Busy Day for Birds by Lucy Cousins, an [Arkansas Birds guide](#), and child-safe binoculars. You might also include instructions for homemade birdfeeders.

► Busy Bunnies Bag

Peek-a-Boo Bunny by Holly Surplice, portable hopscotch mat and/or tunnel, and information for families about the value of imaginative play

► Cloud-Spotting Box

Shapes in the Sky by Josepha Sherman, a waterproof picnic blanket to spread on the ground, and a [simple guide to different kinds of clouds](#).

► Colorful Flowers Bag

Planting a Rainbow by Lois Ehlert, color swatches to match to flowers, and clipboards and crayons for drawing or tallying flowers found in the yard or around the neighborhood.

► High Flying Fun Box

Planes by Byron Barton, a sturdy foam glider (airplane) toy to toss and catch, and paper with simple instructions for folding paper airplanes.



Program Parade

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, waving or playing rhythm instruments. School-agers might lead the parade on bicycles and kick-powered scooters.

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!



Even More to Consider

Here are over a dozen additional activities and experiences that may be a good fit for your group.

- ▶ Composting project
- ▶ Family day at the ball park
- ▶ Family fun run
- ▶ Farm animal visit
- ▶ Homemade birdfeeders
- ▶ Musical guest or storytellers in an outdoor setting
- ▶ Naptime “camp out” with cots in the shade
- ▶ Outdoor clean-up event
- ▶ Sculpture garden with concrete sculptures that children can paint again and again
- ▶ Swap or drive to collect boots, raincoats, and other gear
- ▶ Treasure hunt
- ▶ Tricycle and Cozy Coupe car wash
- ▶ Warm-weather water play

Celebrating Educators

Many programs view Arkansas Children's Week as an opportunity to celebrate program staff. Here are some 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, nature-inspired space to recharge. Or, how about an updated outdoor staff break area featuring a gazebo or patio swing?
- ▶ 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 hanging basket or bouquet of flowers representing the ways they help each child bloom and grow
 - A tree decoration in your lobby that features leaves with handwritten notes of appreciation from administrators and families.



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, and after Arkansas Children's Week. Write a newsletter article for families, send a letter to the editor of your local newspaper, or design 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, *Learning Comes Alive Outdoors*, and the importance of ongoing outdoor experiences for health, wellness, learning, and development. Arkansas Children's Week can also provide an opportunity to highlight the importance of high-quality early learning 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 CHS@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

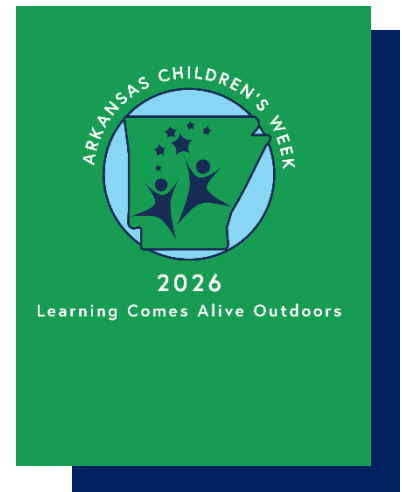
- ▶ Brainstorm partners for planning.
 - Make a list of program staff, family members, and other program friends who might want to help with planning. If you are planning a collaborative community-wide or regional event, your planning team might also include partners from child care and early learning programs, schools, and support agencies in your area. Think about the knowledge and skills that each 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 to the ideas that feel most appropriate and feasible.
- ▶ Determine a budget or funding sources.
- ▶ 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 subcommittee might create flyers, while another group collects necessary supplies. Plan ways for groups ask questions and provide updates.
- ▶ 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 2026 Arkansas Children's Week t-shirt is green with a three-color logo. Click [here](#) or go <https://bit.ly/ACW26logo> 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 16, 2026.

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 2026 workshop. The workshop will be available in March in communities around the state! **You can view our workshop schedule at <https://bit.ly/ACW26WS>.**
- ▶ 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 11 - 17, 2026! 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)!

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 2026 stories! You can share your experience with us by emailing MWhite@AState.edu.



During Arkansas Children's Week and throughout the year, you and your program help learning come alive outdoors. Thank you for all you do!



Childhood Services



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