**Counting in Diné Bizaad**

**Items needed:**
- Dry beans or another bean sized object such as pebbles.

**Instructions:**
- Parents—say any number in Navajo. You may start at “t’ááłá’í – one” and go through the numbers in sequence. Or you may mix up the numbers.
- Children—place the number of beans in the corresponding area. Example: For “táá,” they would place three beans in the corresponding area labeled “táá– three.”
- You may count the beans together as the children are placing the beans in the corresponding area.

Doing this activity encourages speaking and learning in Diné Bizaad. In addition, children are building their motor and learning of Arizona’s young children from birth to age 5.

First Things First is committed to supporting the healthy development and learning of Arizona’s young children from birth to age 5.

**What Can I Do?**

**Observe.** Notice when the behaviors are happening and if it is during a specific time of day. Does the behavior happen around specific people or places? If so, what does it look like? What does it feel like to you? What is the child experiencing? If you notice a pattern, make a note of the environment. This information may allow you to modify something in the environment to support children.

**Check in.** Notice how you are feeling when challenging behavior happens. Are you frustrated? Are you anxious? Take a deep breath to regulate yourself before responding and engaging.

**Comfort.** It can be difficult to comfort children with big feelings. Get down to the child’s eye level and use a comforting tone. This demonstrates you are available for them.

**Narrate.** Children learn from what we do. Narrating is simply labeling what we see. “I saw you throw the block, and you look frustrated!” Narrating is the beginning of teaching children about feelings and emotions.

**Model.** As adults, we are always modeling for children. Being intentional and aware of our tone, posture and words shows children how we hope for them to communicate. Engaging children with a calm tone helps children feel safe. Children must feel safe and calm to learn new ways of responding.

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**Supporting the Social and Emotional Health of Young Children During Challenging Times**

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Once COVID-19 began to impact the Navajo Nation, the FTF Navajo Nation Region partnered with Project Indigenous LAUNCH and the Navajo Nation Department of Education to co-host a virtual Early Childhood Wellness Day to learn from experts.

Systems coordination around infant, toddler and early childhood mental health was strengthened, and Navajo Nation First Lady Phellie Nez created initiatives within the President’s Office to continue moving this work forward. She also recently hosted the “To Build a Resilient Child” virtual conference for the community.

It helped that FTF regional council member Dawn Yazzie, who was Chair at the beginning of the pandemic, is trained in early childhood mental health, said FTF Navajo Regional Director Memarie Tsosie. “She helped council members see how important mental well-being can be for young children,” Tsosie said. “What really helped the council understand was when she framed it from a cultural perspective. When we think of early childhood, the social-emotional piece is that we focus on relationships. By the time a child is born, they are given their four clans. They are taught how to relate to the world. Mental well-being is really important within the culture. We should be able to promote that in child care centers, as well.”

Having regional council members already familiar with early childhood mental health and the benefits it can provide was a huge help.

“I wasn’t something new to introduce to get people on board,” Tsosie said. “Everyone was in survival mode. You don’t want to bring on something new or learn something new. It really helped. Some providers or child care centers really needed support. They knew they had an early childhood mental health consultant. They knew who to ask to help support some of these families and children.”

This year, changes feel even bigger, as we’ve all been through a pandemic and felt the effects in different ways. Young children have the same feelings as adults, but don’t have the words or language to express themselves like adults. As a result, we often see big feelings in their behavior. Some of these behaviors include crying easily or frequently, screaming or yelling, clinging to adults, rough contact or play with others and isolating or playing alone.

There are many reasons children may show challenging behaviors. As adults, we might not have all the details of a child or family to fully understand. However, we can be hopeful in understanding that children express themselves through behavior and we have the ability to support them through their big feelings.

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**Children Adjusting to Change – Big Feelings, Common Behaviors and How Families Can Help**

**by Laura Scott, Southwest Human Development**

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There are many reasons children may show challenging behaviors. As adults, we might not have all the details of a child or family to fully understand. However, we can be hopeful in understanding that children express themselves through behavior and we have the ability to support them through their big feelings.
Rhonda Entity recently celebrated 10 years on the First Things First Navajo Nation Regional Partnership Council. Entity, began her service with First Things First in 2011 and is currently the vice chair on the FTFF Navajo Region Council, where she holds the at-large representative seat.

Entity is a Quality First coach with Candle~ where she provides onsite coaching and mentoring to early education programs participating in the quality improvement program First. As an early childhood professional for many years, she has extensive knowledge in early childhood support and classroom instruction having served as an administrator and educator. Entity earned her associate degree in pre-education from Coconino Community College and a Bachelor of Science in elementary education, with an emphasis in early childhood from Northern Arizona University.

“As an educator, I believe all children should have the opportunity to experience and learn in a positive, safe learning environment with developmentally appropriate activities dedicated to meeting the needs of all types of learners,” Entity said.

You can make a difference in the lives of young children by volunteering to serve your Arizona community by joining a First Things First regional partnership council. For more information, visit FirstThingsFirst.org or call the FTF Navajo Region Office at 928-810-4306.

Supporting the Social and Emotional Health of Young Children During Challenging Times (continued)

Early childhood mental health consultation is designed to help adults identify and address the mental health struggles or challenges of individual children that they work with in child care, preschool or other group settings.

Research shows that 17% to 18% of young children struggle with mental health early in life in a significant way.

“It’s hard to overstate the impact that COVID has had on young children’s development and stress levels on adults,” said Alison Steier, director of Southwest Mental Health Development’s Harris Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Training Institute. She’s also in charge of Southwest’s Smart Support, the largest early childhood mental health consultation program in the country.

“Many children that we are seeing have suffered actual losses of family members and important people. The teachers have, also,” Steier said. “When adults are affected, young children are affected. Children are impacted by adult stress in clear and obvious terms of school and child care closures, returning, that requires adjustments. Young children don’t have the linguistic capabilities, but they have very rich experiences. And we see those in behavioral challenges.”

Early childhood mental health consultation works on a number of levels. It can be at the teacher-child relationship, where a child feels valued or, for example, helping a teacher with transitions within the classroom.

“Having a mental health professional in a (child care) setting is very helpful,” Steier said. “It helps with transitions, e.g., where developmentally appropriate activities dedicated to meeting the needs of all types of learners.” Entity said.

Many regular routines at home can become a learning experience for babies, toddlers and preschoolers. Child Care Resource & Referral shared the following tips from Vroom® — an early learning initiative that empowers parents, families and child care providers to make everyday moments into brain building moments with children from birth to age 3.

Try the following activities with your young child:

• The Hand Wind: Let your child be your partner as they put their hands up to make a "wind." Ask what the hands touch, hands and wind. "The magic touch your hands make..." This encourages your child to think of words together. Shake your hands. Touch the hand made up of a six word poem. Design: Background: let your child make their hand wind. Encourage your child to use the appropriate vocabulary. Have activities with themes and genres based on your relationship.

• Clink From Far: Use an empty jar and a string to make a “Clink” out of a jar with your child. Have the child find objects from the house or the yard that they can clink. The activities with themes and genres based on your relationship.

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Recipes

Neeshjizhii (Steamed Corn) Banana Bread

Prep time: 5 mins Cook time: 45 mins Total time: 50 mins

Ingredients:

• 2 cups mashed bananas
• 1 cup all-purpose flour
• 1 cup milled dried steamed corn (Bidii Baby)
• 1 tsp baking powder
• 1/2 tsp baking soda
• 1/2 tsp salt
• 1/2 tsp cinnamon
• 1/4 tsp nutmeg
• 2 tsp all-purpose flour
• 1/4 cup applesauce

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. Mix dry ingredients in a bowl. Add all wet ingredients and mix well.
3. Pour mixture into a loaf pan and bake for 45 minutes.

Chííłchin Neeshjizhii (Sumac Berry & Steamed Corn) Hot Cereal

Prep time: 3 mins Cook time: 15 mins Total time: 15 mins

Ingredients:

• 1 cup milled dried steamed corn (Bidii Baby)
• 1/2 cup dried sumac
• 1/2 cup water

Instructions:

1. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, and simmer.

Bidii Baby Foods invites all families to try these recipes at home and share recipes for using Neeshjizhii and other Navajo crops to make traditional and modern meals.