

## Ideas for Better Eating and Active Play with Young Children

70 Cottonwood St. Woodland, CA 95695  
530-666-8740

[www.yolonutrition.ucanr.edu](http://www.yolonutrition.ucanr.edu)  
[ceyolo@ucdavis.edu](mailto:ceyolo@ucdavis.edu)

### Benefits of Connecting Preschoolers with Nature

At preschool-age, children start exploring their physical environments with more independence. Also during this stage, they lack the ability to separate themselves emotionally from other people and things. This is the perfect time to encourage a sense of connectedness between children and nature. This will help preschoolers understand the concept that everyone is connected to everything!



*Adapted from [www.childrenandnature.org](http://www.childrenandnature.org)*

**Try the following nature-based activities to help your preschoolers focus attention, use working memory, and practice basic self-control skills:**

- **Storytelling & Songs:** Encourage relationships with animals, both real and imagined. This creates empathy during early childhood. Tell stories, sing songs, move like animals, and celebrate seasons. Choose related books to share with them. Encourage them to tell you stories and make their own story books!
- **Movement:** Let children free play in a natural area. Invite them to play hide and seek by hiding in nature. Set up an obstacle course path that encourages activities like balancing and ducking. Have preschoolers lead group hikes to build independence, decision-making, and teamwork skills!
- **Imaginary Play:** Invite children to create a house or habitat for fairies, elves, or their own creatures. Use sticks, rocks, and leaves to build structures and decorate them with flowers and other natural objects. Children can work together to build large structures for bears, dinosaurs, etc. This activity has few directions. It helps children let their imagination and hands work together!
- **Quiet Games:** Take a “listening walk” to different areas and stop and listen for a few seconds. Compare and contrast the different sounds heard at the different places. Can the child identify each sound? Why are the sounds different at each location? Which are the same? This is also a good exercise in listening, which is challenging at this age.

## Sticking to the Division of Responsibility at Mealtime

As teachers you create a healthy environment for your students' development, even at mealtime. Teaching your preschoolers how to control their emotions and behaviors while eating is a tough job, but we have some helpful tips!

Use the **'Division of Responsibility'** to separate teacher and child roles:

**\*It is the teacher's role to decide:**

- What to serve.
- Where to eat. When to eat.

**\*It is the child's role to decide:**

- Whether to eat.
- How much to eat of the food offered.

Even if your students agree to the mealtime roles ahead of time, they will test them! This table gives some ideas on how to stick to the division of responsibility when this happens.



<b><u>CHILD'S Move</u></b>	<b><u>TEACHER'S Move</u></b>
Child says, "I am not hungry."	You say, "You do not have to eat; just sit with us for 10 minutes."
Child is too worked up and busy to eat.	Spend a few minutes with child just before the meal reading a book or washing hands. Set a 5-minute timer.
Child cannot take time to eat.	Create and enforce a designated meal time.
Child is too hungry to wait for meals.	Have scheduled snacks throughout the day.
Child is messy. He drops, throws, or smears food for fun or to get a rise out of you.	Give child one warning, then have them leave the meal. Don't let them come back.
Child does not want to stay at the meal until you finish eating.	Let child leave after 10 minutes. They will stay at the table longer as they get older and learn to enjoy conversation.
Child is naughty or otherwise disruptive at the meal.	Have child leave. He/she is full or he/she would eat.
Child comes back right after the meal, begging for more food.	Don't give child food until next scheduled snack time. Ignore any tantrums. Remind child when the next snack will be served.
Child gets down, but wants your attention, to sit on your lap, to eat off your plate.	Hug child and give them a book or toy. Teach them to play quietly while you eat.
Child does not eat "enough" at mealtime.	Only he/she knows how much is enough. Don't let the child eat or drink, except for water in-between meals and snacks. Keep snack portions small.
Child says, "Can I get the peanut butter instead? I only want peanut butter."	You say, "No, this is what is served. You do not have to eat anything if you do not want to, but you do have to join us at the table." Try to always include a food that is well-liked, like fruit slices.

*Adapted from: [www.sccgov.org](http://www.sccgov.org)*

## Move and Play Every Day: Make a Shape with your Body!

Preschoolers love to play and be active! Being physically active every day is important for their growth and development. It can also promote social skills and improve self-confidence.

Physical activity for children includes both structured activities and unstructured free play. Use a combination of both to complete 60 minutes of moderate activity every day. Moderate activity means that the children are moving at the speed of a quick walk. Try this fun structured activity below! It can be done inside or out.



### NAME OF ACTIVITY: 'Make a Shape'

**EQUIPMENT:** None

**SKILL THEMES:** Bending and stretching, transferring body weight, muscular strength, and balance.

**ORGANIZATION:** Children are scattered throughout an activity area.

### DESCRIPTION:

1. Explain to the children that they are going to make shapes with their bodies.
2. Now ask the children to make themselves:

- As round as possible
- As flat as possible
- As wide as possible
- As narrow as possible
- As long as possible
- As short as possible
- As crooked as possible
- As straight as possible

### TEACHING SUGGESTIONS:

1. Allow the children to act out these shapes in any way they wish. Praise the different shapes you see.
2. Associate the shapes with familiar objects. Ask the children to make their body look like a table, a chair, a ball, a tree, and a pencil with a point at the end.
3. Ask the children to shape their bodies to make letters of the alphabet.

\* Need more physical activity ideas and materials? Talk with your nutrition educator to receive activities and equipment for free! \*

Adapted from [www.catch.org](http://www.catch.org) & [www.health.gov](http://www.health.gov)



## Preschools SHINE Recognition Program!



Preschool sites in Yolo County are joining the 'Shaping Healthy Impressions through Nutrition and Exercise' (SHINE) program! Preschools SHINE is a recognition and coaching program that highlights the outstanding work that many child care and development programs do every day to promote the health and well-being of young children. Your site can be one of them!

Preschools SHINE sites feature optimal policies and practices in the areas of nutrition and physical activity that support children's health and readiness to learn. The program recognizes elements that promote healthy habits during early childhood. These include:

**Meal Quality \* Mealtime Environment \* Nutrition Education \* Gardening \* Physical Activity**

We can help improve your nutrition and physical activity elements with our free curricula and resources! We can also help you create or update your site's wellness policies. Keep in mind that statewide recognition is a great way to advertise your childcare facility's service and boost enrollment.

For more information on the SHINE Program and how to apply and be certified visit:  
[www.healthypreschoolers.com](http://www.healthypreschoolers.com)

Adapted from [www.cde.ca.gov](http://www.cde.ca.gov) & [www.healthypreschoolers.com](http://www.healthypreschoolers.com)



## Activity Kits **Free** From the University of California

You can help impact childhood obesity, fitness, and malnutrition. Local, state, and federal initiatives (and funding) urge a coordinated approach to addressing these issues. The University of California has prepared **activity kits** to help you teach nutrition, health, and physical activity concepts to your children, while integrating math, language, and science concepts that address CDE standards.

**These lessons come “ready-made”** with all of the materials to teach a fun and interactive lesson. The curriculum was developed by the University of California.

**We will bring the materials to you, free of charge.** We can provide trainings and additional resources to increase your confidence in these topics. We can also plan classroom food-themed cooking clubs, special events, and other fun sessions.



Follow us at “uccalfreshyolo”



“Like” ‘UC-CalFresh Nutrition Education Program, Yolo County’ on Facebook to receive nutrition and wellness tips for you and your classroom daily!



This material was produced by the University of California CalFresh Nutrition Education Program with funding from USDA SNAP, known in California as CalFresh (formerly food stamps). These institutions are equal opportunity providers and employers. CalFresh provides assistance to low-income households and can help buy nutritious foods for better health. For CalFresh information, call 1-877-847-3663.



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## CONTACTS



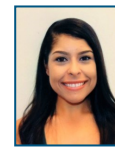
**Christie Hedrick**  
530-666-8740  
[chhedrick@ucanr.edu](mailto:chhedrick@ucanr.edu)



**Angela Asch**



**Mayra Diaz**



**Lisa Gonzales**



**Ruth Chun**



**Marcel Horowitz**

Do you have a question about food or nutrition? Ask our Nutrition Educators by emailing [ceyolo@ucdavis.edu](mailto:ceyolo@ucdavis.edu).



## Fuel Their Mind Nutrition Newsletter Enclosed

“Our mandate as a land grant institution ties us to the welfare, development, and protection of the state’s land, resources, and people. Our mission is to develop and extend the use of research-based knowledge to improve specific practices and technologies.”

Funded by USDA’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and University of California Cooperative Extension. The SNAP program provides nutrition assistance to people with low income. It can help you buy nutritious food for a better diet. To find out more, call 1-877-847-3663.

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UCCE Yolo County  
70 Cottonwood Street  
Woodland, CA 95695