

The Caring Center
Staying Connected with Children and Families during COVID-19

Background:

The Caring Center in Philadelphia is an independent, not-for-profit organization formed by parents and professional staff to deliver exemplary early childhood education and promote family and community development. A NAEYC accredited, Keystone STAR level four program, The Caring Center serves children from six weeks to eight years old. Staff work with diverse populations and prioritizes an intentional focus on embracing/celebrating cultural differences. Staff work hard to established partnerships and view parents as partners.

Best practice:

Utilizing creativity and innovation, dedicated staff found ways to connect and support families during the COVID-19 pandemic. In fall of 2020, staff from The Caring Center participated in a focus group to reflect on ways in which the COVID-19 crisis affected the obesity prevention goals set by their program prior to the pandemic. The program quickly adapted to provide virtual delivery of children's educational programming and family outreach during the state-wide shut down. Childcare staff reinforced the importance of obesity prevention by promoting healthy eating, consistent movement and social-emotional development. Linda Li, The Caring Center's Education Manager shared several examples of virtual outreach activities. These activities included hosting two cooking lessons monthly which allowed parents and children to actively engage in the lessons using healthy, fresh ingredients (Cooking with Miss Erica); live physical activity sessions for parents and children to engage in virtually (Hokey Pokey Remotely with Miss Deanna and Dancing with Miss Marisol); and social-emotional skill building activities (Mindful Moments during the Quarantine with Miss Raina). The teachers also pre-recorded many more movement activities for families to practice at home.

Photos illustrate efforts made to thoughtfully engage families during the pandemic. Virtual activities were so well received, that they continue even though in-person activities have resumed. Visit The Caring Centers Facebook page for more examples at:

<https://www.facebook.com/thecaringctr/>.

In addition to adaptations made to support children's learning during the pandemic, The Caring Center continued and expanded their Farm to Early Childhood Education activities to include a unique partnership with [KidsGardening.org](https://www.kidsgardening.org), [DreamWorks Animation](https://www.dreamworksanimation.com), [Terren Landscapes](https://www.terrenlandscapes.com) and [Tiny WPA](https://www.tinywpa.com) to install a new edible garden including three new apple trees. The children have already begun growing (and sampling) fruits and vegetables from the garden.

Be sure to view their photos and video on the PA NAPSACC page of the Keystone Kids Go website, and share your creative best practices with us by contacting Lori McMonigal at lmcmonigal@tiu11.org.