

Sun Safety Activities for Preschool-Age Children



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Preschool Activities

Sun-safety education should be integrated with existing curriculum and daily activities and routines. Use simple activities that rely on materials commonly found in early care and education (ECE) classrooms or home-based settings.

The following learning activities are included in this section:

- Checking Clothing
- Hats Galore
- Fun and Sun Glasses
- Shade Play
- Spreading Sunscreen
- Sun Safety Song

The main message for young children is “Your skin protects you. You should protect your skin.” However, these activities promote more than just cognitive learning about sun safety. Teaching sun safety provides a wonderful opportunity for children to practice skills such as decision making, self-help, and communication.

With young children “play is learning,” so the best activities are those that allow children to explore, create, communicate, interact, question, solve problems, think, reason and have fun with one another.

These activities were developed for the Sun Safety Alliance by Dr. Connie Jo Smith, Consumer and Family Sciences Department, and Dr. Amy Hood-Hooten, Training and Technical Assistance Services, Western Kentucky University.



Checking Clothing

- Gather a collection of children's clothing including some in dark and light colors, some made of light-weight material and others made with a heavier material, and both tightly-woven and loose-weave cloth.
- Enlist two children to hold a garment between them stretched out (or hang garments on a line).
- Place all children in front of the clothing so they can see it well.
- Next, ask one child to go to the opposite side of the garment and shine a flashlight at it. Look with the children to see if they can see the light through the clothing.
- Try several different pieces of clothing each time utilizing different children to hold the clothing and shine the flashlight.
- Discuss the results. Talk about how the sun can shine through some clothes and hurt the skin.

Materials:

Clothes basket or other container; a wide variety of children's clothing; and at least one flashlight.

Other Ideas:

- Try the above activity using different strengths of flashlights. Discuss how the sun is sometimes hotter than at other times.
- Add a wide range of clothing to the dramatic play area and encourage conversation about which garments protect the skin better.
- Show children clothing and accessories (umbrellas, boots, rain coats, ear muffs, etc.). Ask if each item would help protect them from the sun.

Family Involvement:

Inform parents and guardians about the importance of "cover-up" clothing in protecting skin from the sun. Invite them to loan you a garment to use in the flashlight test. Be sure garments are labeled, cared for, and returned unharmed.

Additional Information:

Be sure to launder clothing from the community chest each time it is worn. Also, clothing in the dramatic play area should be washed regularly.





Hats Galore

- Gather a collection of hats; some that are wide-brimmed and some that are not.
- Show the children the hat collection and discuss how some hats protect people from the sun better than others.
- Have children sort the hats into two piles (good protection versus poor protection).

Materials:

Collection of washable hats and container for storage

Other Ideas:

- Read and discuss one (or more) of the many great children's books about hats. *Miss Fannie's Hat* by Jan Karon; *Madeline and the Bad Hat* by Ludwig Bemelmans; *Old Hat, New Hat* by Stan Berenstain and Jan Berenstain; or *Hats, Hats, Hats* by Ann Morris.
- Provide a wide range of baby doll hats in the dramatic play area. Encourage children to use hats to protect the dolls from the sun.
- Take photographs of the children (individual or group shot) in your class wearing wide-brimmed hats. Display them to encourage conversation.

Family Involvement:

Inform parents and guardians about the importance of hats to protect against the sun. Suggest that they help their children examine hats for their sun protection quality the next time they go shopping or look at catalogs.

Additional Information:

When using hats in the classroom, make sure that safety and sanitation measures are used to prevent spread of communicable disease such as ringworm or lice. All hats should be washable. If children try on hats, they should be washed at the end of the day.





Fun and Sun Glasses

- Show children a box of sunglasses and encourage them to look, touch, and talk about them.
- Tell children that sunglasses can help protect their eyes from the sun and it is a good idea to wear them when outside.
- Add the sunglasses to the dramatic play area where children can try on the glasses and look in a mirror.

Materials:

Box or other container; a wide array of sunglasses.

Other Ideas:

- Encourage children to sort sunglasses according to size, color, shape, and style.
- Purchase or get donations of children's sunglasses so that each child can have a pair of his or her own. Check labels on sunglasses to be sure they provide 100% UV protection and have safety (polycarbonate) lenses. Encourage children to wear their sunglasses when playing outdoors.
- Provide magazines for children to look through and find pictures of people wearing sunglasses. Invite children to cut or tear pictures out and paste them on a large sheet of paper with other sunglass pictures found by their classmates.

Family Involvement:

Inform parents and guardians about the importance of sunglasses to protect eyes. Provide information on appropriate types of sunglasses, including 100% UV protection and safety (polycarbonate) lenses. Encourage families to help children look for people wearing sunglasses during outside routines, such as going to the grocery store.

Additional Information:

When using sunglasses in the classroom make sure that safety and sanitation measures are followed. All sunglasses should have plastic or unbreakable lenses. If children try on sunglasses, they should be sanitized at the end of the day.

Shade Play

- Take children to an outside area that has both sun and shade. Walk from one area to another and talk about the differences in how the space looks (darker or lighter) and feels (warmer or cooler).
- Next, play a game where you call out “shade” or “sun” and have children run from one to another based on what you call out.



Materials:

Outdoor space with both sun and shade.

Other Ideas:

- Go for a shade walk with the children. Look for shady areas including small areas created by shadows of signs, fences, buildings, trees, and other objects.
- Engage children in helping to create temporary shade spaces by using blankets, sheets, parachutes, tarps, or other available materials.
- Add props to the block center to allow children to create shade during their role play with blocks. Examples could include handkerchiefs and small pieces of cardboard.

Family Involvement:

Inform parents and guardians about the importance of shade in sun protection. Encourage them to play outdoors with their children, and to seek shady areas, especially during midday activities. Encourage families to help children distinguish between shady and sunny areas.

Additional Information:

If the outdoor area has no shady area, caregivers can create temporary shade spaces by using blankets, sheets, parachutes, tarps, or other available materials.

Spreading Sunscreen

- Tell children that it is important for everyone to protect themselves by using sunscreen to help keep them from getting burned by the sun.
- Provide each child with a doll dressed so that the arms and legs are exposed. Give each child a small amount of sunscreen and encourage them to rub the sunscreen on the doll's skin.
- Talk about protecting each exposed body part as children apply the sunscreen. Remember to include the ears, neck, and top of the head if doll does not have hair.
- After the activity take children to wash their hands so that the sunscreen does not get into their eyes if they rub them with their hands.
- Wash the dolls at the end of the day.

Materials:

Non-toxic sunscreen; plastic dolls.



Other Ideas:

- Shake the bottle and squirt a small amount of sunscreen into each child's hands for them to smell and feel. Have children wash hands after this activity.
- Provide empty clean sunscreen containers and lids for children to match and practice putting on and taking off lids.
- Encourage children to interview adults about their use of sunscreen.

Family Involvement:

Inform parents and guardians about the importance of using sunscreen on children. Request their assistance in gathering empty sunscreen containers for classroom use.

Additional Information:

Make sure you have written parent/guardian authorization for use of sunscreen. Check children's files for known allergies or sensitivity to ingredients or fragrances. These activities require close adult supervision.



Sun Safety Song

- Ask children what they can do to practice sun safety (wear a hat, wear sunglasses, play in the shade, wear sunscreen, etc.).
- Help them make up words for a sun safety song that can be sung to a familiar tune (If I Had a Hammer; Mary Wore a Red Dress; BINGO, Old MacDonald Had A Farm, etc.).
- Continue to add words or verses to the class song that describe sun-safe practices.

Example: (sung to “Old MacDonald Had a Farm”)

*I am sun-safe all day long, Ee ii ee ii oo
I wear a hat to shade my face. Ee ii ee ii oo
With a floppy hat here, and a floppy hat there,
here a hat, there a hat, everywhere a floppy hat,
I am sun-safe all day long, Ee ii ee ii oo*



Other Ideas:

- Each month take a picture of children practicing sun safety. Add it to a class book along with any stories children share about the protection activity. At the end of the year, there will be a class picture book of sun safety throughout the year. For example, you may have pictures of children wearing sunglasses when there is snow on the ground.
- Tell children that it is important to tell others how to practice sun safety. Invite them to make a commercial as you videotape it. Show it to the children, show it at parent meetings, and loan it to other classes to use.
- Encourage children to draw pictures and tell stories about sun safety. Provide materials for their work and print their stories word for word.

Family Involvement:

Print or type the class sun-safety song and send a copy to families so they can sing it at home. Encourage families to make up new songs and send them to the classroom. Provide families with information on a regular basis about sun safety for all children. Sun-safety information can be shared in weekly notes sent home, newsletters, and parent conferences, etc.