

DECEMBER 2017



Play Centers at Sparks Elementary School

601 Belfast Road

Sparks, Maryland 21152

410.473.1400 ~ www.playcenters.org

Hours of Operation: 7:00 a.m. - 9:00 a.m. / 2:45 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.



This organization and its materials are not affiliated with, sponsored by, or endorsed by Baltimore County Public Schools, the Superintendent, or this Baltimore County public school or office.

FROM DIANE MELLOTT, CEO/COO

Temperatures continue to remind us that winter is almost here and, with it, the possibility of inclement weather of one sort or another. Please take a moment to get your plan set up in the event of early school closings or in the event the BCPS Superintendent cancels afternoon and evening programs, even if schools do not dismiss early on those days. The BCPS Offices of Purchasing and Facilities have remained extremely firm that after school child care providers are not permitted, *by BCPS Contract*, to provide child care at those times. This includes all Providers, in all Baltimore County Public Schools. Therefore, please be proactive with your child's teacher and school administration by letting them know, in writing, what emergency procedure your child should follow in the event that an unscheduled, emergency early school closing, or the cancellation of afternoon and evening activities, should occur.

Please be reminded that there are numerous sources of information and alerts regarding such closings. Play Centers sends email alerts to all of the email addresses we have on file via the *Play Centers' Email Notification Form* completed and submitted to us by the parent. (In some cases, handwriting is not clearly legible, resulting in an incorrect email address being entered into our system. Please take time to clearly and legibly identify/update the email address to which you want emergency email notifications sent.) In addition, we offer emergency text messaging alerts to your phone. Simply visit our website, click "Enroll in our Emergency Text Message Service" (located under "More Information") and follow the steps for sign-up. In addition, other alert systems such as www.schoolsout.com and the emergency alert programs offered by WBAL, for example, are options. Of course, school notifications are posted on the www.bcps.org website and the BCPS Now app as well. If your child's school is in the **Hereford Zone**, please also be aware of the closures and notifications that may only affect schools in that particular Zone of Baltimore County!

Take time now to get set-up for all of your preferred notification systems, communicate with your school as to the emergency plan your child should follow, and talk to your child so he/she knows what to expect should a closing/cancellation occur. Planning and practicing with your child should alleviate most of the stress associated with these unexpected emergencies.

We wish for you and yours a peaceful holiday season filled with family and fun as well as a joyous and bountiful Happy New Year!

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Melissa Barnes

Happy Holidays!

STAFF

Ms. Melissa, Ms. Kay, Mr. Palmer,
Ms. Gabbi, and Ms. Taylor

THEMES

Winter

Snow

Christmas Around the World

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

- Brendan C. 12/21 ■ Wyatt P. 12/27
- Molly J. 12/15 ■ Shea K. 12/7 ■ Skander K. 12/15
- Avery J. 12/28 ■ Pia R. 12/7
- Nathan M. 12/5 ■ Amelia M. 12/30 ■ Linden M. 12/28
- Alexander P. 12/5 ■ Grace S. 12/23

FROM ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLE (AR)

Questions about your account? Please contact
Sharon Gunther, AR Coordinator, at 410.296.4880, ext. 106.
Questions about Subsidy? Please contact
Kari Thomas, Subsidy Specialist, at 410.296.4880, ext. 111.

IMPORTANT DATES:

December 25th thru January 1st

Holiday/ Winter Break

School and Play Centers are **CLOSED!**

School re-opens Tuesday, January 2nd

**Play Centers' Administrative Office will be closed
December 25th - January 1st.**

Our office will re-open Tuesday, January 2nd.

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~ PARENTS' CORNER ~

Holiday Cheer

(By: David Lowenstein, PH.D.)

Teaching your children about the real meaning of the holidays.

<http://www.parentguidenews.com/Articles/HolidayCheer/>

Most Americans agree that the holidays have become too commercial and too hectic. We rush around, trying to make sure everything is accomplished. We get sucked into the gift buying trap. What we do never seems to please everyone or be quite good enough, causing us to lose the joy of the season in the process. One day you may look around and realize that the true meaning of the holidays has been missed. You're missing it and, more importantly, your kids are missing it. But no matter how old your children are, it's never too late to develop new traditions and find ways to emphasize what the holidays are all about to your family.

Set an Example

It's up to you as a parent to instill the importance of the holidays in your own family. Whether you place emphasis on the religious significance of the holiday, spending time together or giving to charity, your children take cues from you. If they see you rushing around, madly trying to buy presents for everyone, missing out on the joy of the season, they will note the significance of this. Conversely, if you slow down and make sure to spend time enjoying the things you'd like to emphasize, this will send a strong message to your kids about what's important.

Promote Family Togetherness

Spending time together as a family will reinforce that it's important to be with your loved ones. One way to do this is to get your kids involved in the holiday preparation process—have them wrap presents, clean the house for guests, bake cookies, plan activities. This will help them establish an important role for themselves in the family holiday preparations for years to come. Create your own family traditions that don't focus on gift-giving. Plan special outings, make holiday cards together for nursing home residents, or pop popcorn and play board games.

Perform Acts of Charity

Engaging in charitable activities is one of the most powerful things you can do to remind your children of the purpose of celebrating the holidays. Serve meals together at a local soup kitchen or shelter. Collect toys for a toy drive. "Adopt" a needy family and buy food and gifts for them. Ask your children to donate old toys they no longer use to a local organization. Suggest that your children visit with an elderly neighbor or take care of a friend's home while they are traveling during the season. Some families make it a practice to purchase a certain number of gifts each year from organizations that support various charitable causes. Whatever you do together to help others, no matter how big or how small, is certain to bring joy to both you and your children.

Learn About Different Religions and Cultures

America is a melting pot of different religions, cultures and traditions, so learn about how others celebrate the holidays. What do different traditions mean for different cultures, what is the history, how do they celebrate? There are many terrific children's books that explain the history and significance of different holidays. Take time with your children to learn about different customs together and discuss how they are similar to yours and how they vary. Remind your children that virtually every holiday celebrates gratitude, good will and peace, no matter what culture.

Encourage Giving

We are programmed to ask our children to make out their gift lists. This year, why not have your children make up a list of gifts they are planning to give to others? You can help them finance the gifts, but they don't have to be things that cost money—perhaps a handmade card, a plate of cookies' or a helping hand to a neighbor. This will reinforce the idea of giving during this season, not just receiving.

Manage Gift Expectations

If you want to begin to scale back on gift-giving and emphasize other important aspects of the holidays, make sure you let your family know ahead of time so you can set expectations. Sit them down and explain to them that you'd like the holidays to be a bit different this year and why. If they know what to expect, they will accept and even embrace your new way of doing things.

Make special efforts with family

Spending time with family is very important. But appreciating your family is perhaps more so. Ask your children to think about ways they can show their siblings and the rest of the family how much they appreciate them. Make a game of it, challenging your children to do one nice thing for someone in the family each day during the season. Over dinner, vote on whose "act of kindness" was the most helpful, funniest or most creative. This is a great way to encourage your family to be kind to one another, and often it becomes a habit that lasts all year long! Too often, the anxiety of the holidays far outshines the true reasons why we celebrate them. This year, consider what the holidays mean to you and what you want them to mean to your children. You'll be happy to find that your family's religion, charity, good will, togetherness and love for each other will create more lasting memories than elaborate feasts and breakable toys.