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PUBLIC LIBRARY**

Early Childhood Matters programs gearing up for virtual fall sessions

Typically this time of year, Early Childhood Matters staff are preparing to take their programs to libraries and community centers across Fort Worth to share with young children and their families.

But 2020 has been far from typical, with the need to control the spread of COVID-19 requiring in-person programs to move online. Early Childhood Matters (ECM) programs have found success in virtual form during the past few months.

Minerva Gates, who manages the ECM program for the Fort Worth Public Library, said there have been a few challenges.

Usually, childcare is provided so that parents can focus on the learning programs, but now families are most often together at home. Gates said it has also been harder to communicate that the programs have moved online. The situation has made ECM change the way it operates, she said, finding innovative ways to collaborate with its existing partners and finding new ones. Staff asks families what they specifically would like to learn, and they've increased their collaboration with school districts.

Fall programming includes three recurring weekly programs to be conducted live via Zoom in English and Spanish, starting the week of Sept. 14. Parents who wish to participate in the weekly programs via Zoom may send an email to EarlyChildhoodMatters@fortworthtexas.gov for log-on information.

The eight-week Kinder 101 program is designed to prepare children for kindergarten and happens at 1 p.m. Mondays (Spanish) and 1 p.m. Wednesdays (English).

Book Talk, which helps parents get the most out of reading to their children, includes interactive book reviews and recommendations. That program happens at 1 p.m. Tuesdays (English) and 2 p.m. Tuesdays (Spanish).

Library Tutorials, which teach parents about Library programs and services such as how to get a library eCard and how to navigate them, are set for 1 p.m. Thursdays (English) and 2 p.m. Thursdays (Spanish).

In addition to the weekly programs, three videos will be available on the Library's Facebook page (facebook.com/FortWorthLibrary).

The videos include Teach My Child to Read 101, which will explore the basics of reading to help babies and toddlers become pre-readers. The presentation will include book



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selections, reading routines, incentives and other activities parents and children can do at home. The video will be available starting at 6 p.m. Sept. 11 on Facebook.

With Teach My Child Math 101, parents can learn how to incorporate math-skills learning into fun and engaging activities. That video will be available starting at 6 p.m. Oct. 16.

The final video for the fall will be Teach My Child to Read 102. The presentation will help parents find out how to help their child make the jump from pre-reader to reader through the use of learning letters, sounds, reading routines and more.

The virtual meetings and videos will present a wealth of information, but the process isn't quite the same as in-person programming.

Gates said she misses having the face-to-face connection with the parents and their children, and she misses working closely with her colleagues. Still, offering the program online can be a way to reach more families.

That includes the growing relationship among the family members, and seeing the children reach milestones along the way. "This is a unique opportunity we have to offer this service to the community," she said. "We love seeing the growth of both the adult and child."