



Join us on Friday, July 11, 11:00-7:00 at the museum for FREE immersive nature-based activities & music. No registration required

Summer Newsletter

July-August 2025

Details!

A Note from Our Director

As we close out our 2024-25 fiscal year, I am reflecting on the incredible generosity of the community that supports this programming and ensures our services remain free of charge and accessible to all families. We are proud to be a 100% grant and donation funded program. Our dedicated, all part-time, staff work hard year-round to ensure we can keep playing, singing, reading, and supporting families.

We have been a Mass. Dept. of Early Ed and Care grant holder since the inception of Coordinated Family and Community Engagement grants nearly 30 years ago. Our yearly grant amount has not increased in the past 10 years, and now only covers approximately 60% of our budget. We are grateful to the ongoing support of generous foundations and community partners including Nordblum Family Foundation, Concord Carlisle Foundation, Schrafft Charitable Trust, Sudbury Foundation, Acton-Boxborough United Way, Maynard Community Chest, Acton Congregational Church, Concord Trinitarian Congregational Church, and more.

This year our diaper pantry has received generous support through diaper drives from Emerson Hospital, State Rep. Simon Cataldo, The Discovery Museum, Acton-Boxborough Family Network, and Acton Cooperative School, a donation from Neighborhood Villages, and, most importantly, through the generous contributions of our devoted community members.

If you have benefited from First Connections' programs and are in a position to give back, please consider a donation today at the link below or mail: 179 Great Road, #104A, Acton, MA 01720

Ways to support First Connections

- Share your experiences with our programs and services with your local networks.
- Purchase diapers from our [Amazon wishlist](#) donate unused diapers, or sponsor a local family with a box of diapers each month (approximately \$28, email lmattews@jri.org for details).
- [Donate to our General Fund](#) or become a monthly supporter
- Think of us if your company matches donations.

With gratitude
Emily Fiorini, LMHC
First Connections' Program Director

Our annual "Free and Low-Cost Things to Do List"

- gathers family events in and near our 11 towns taking place in July and August into chronological order with registration information (if needed) and cost (if applicable)
- includes museum passes available at libraries
- includes a link to find places you can go at reduced/no cost with an



- EBT or WIC card
- includes museums that waive entrance fees for military families during summer

0-12 Months Activities
0-6+ Years Activities

If you'd prefer it to be emailed to you, just let Linda know and she'll send it directly to your email as an attachment: [Linda Jensen](#)



Social Emotional Skills: Sorry, Not Sorry

presented by Ellie Springer, M.Ed.

Go to any playground, story time, or playgroup, and you'll hear adults saying, "Say you're sorry!" to young children. And you may hear some very savvy children quickly say, "Sorry," and run off. But are they really sorry? What is the right thing to do when your child takes a toy or hits someone? If you have a toddler or preschooler and are wondering about this topic, come hear some of the reasoning behind not always making your child say they're sorry and what to do when your child hurts someone else - adult or child - on purpose or by accident.



Held: Thursday, July 31
7:00-8:00 pm

Email lmattews@jri.org for the link

First Year of Life Parent Group



The First Year of Life Group is facilitated by Emily Fiorini, LMHC, a mental health counselor specializing in infant-parent mental health. Parents in the postpartum year can join this free weekly group to get support for their own emotional wellbeing, recovery and transition into parenthood. Baby's development, feeding and sleep support, and community resources will also be provided. Email efiorini@jri.org for the zoom link.

Summer Schedule

In Person Dates: July 3, August 7 at Emerson Wellness Center, Concord

Zoom Dates: July 10, 17, 24, 31, August 14, 21, 28

Navigating the 4th Trimester

This quarterly workshop offers a supportive place for expectant parents to explore the physical, emotional, and relational challenges that accompany the first 3 months after birth. In this program you will learn evidence-based strategies to support your postpartum plan that include practical strategies for adjusting to life with a newborn, coping with challenges related to sleep and feeding, managing changes in your relationships, and nurturing your own wellbeing during this transformative time. Join us for this interactive session facilitated by lactation counselor and infant sleep consultant, Mary Beilman, who draws from over 20 years supporting new parents; and Emily Fiorini, LMHC, who specializes in infant and parent mental health and is First Connections' program director. Helpful postpartum community resources are included. Birthing person and a support person are welcome to attend free of charge. Register through Emerson Health, which provides space and registration free of charge.



September 24
6:30-8:00 p.m.

Held at Steinberg Wellness Center for Mind & Body in Concord

Register for the next class [here](#)

Summer Storywalks

Great Brook Farm, 165 North Road, Carlisle Saturday July 19 thru Tuesday, July 29

This is a great summer nature story with wonderful illustrations and a community-building ending.

Open sunrise to sunset, see the cows, goats, & chickens.

Robotic milking barn tours are free on weekends 1:00, 3:00, 5:00

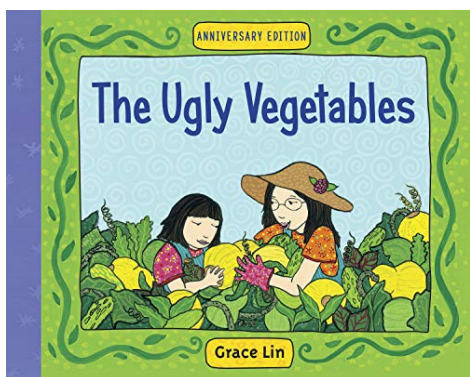
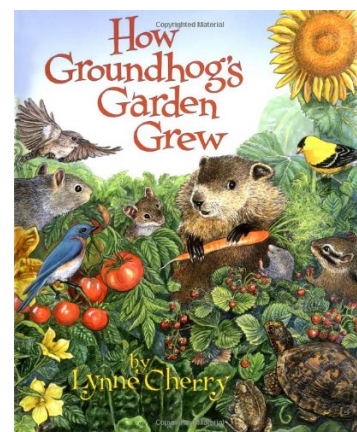
Ice cream stand is open 11-8:00

Rest rooms and picnic tables available.

[Great Brook Farm State Park | Mass.gov](http://GreatBrookFarmStatePark.Mass.gov)

Dogs are allowed, but not in the barn.

\$3 car parking fee, or check out a Mass. State Parks pass at your library and it's FREE!



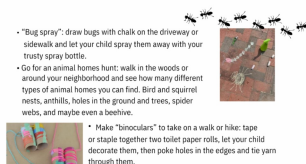
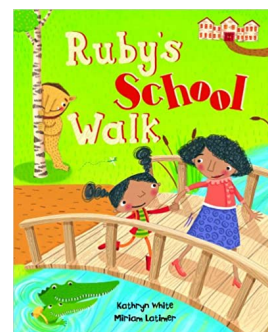
Hugh Cargill Community Garden, Concord Across from the Courthouse at 305 Walden Street Saturday, August 2 thru August 10

This bilingual English/Chinese story of a neighborhood of gardeners who realize the uncommon vegetables one family is growing can taste delicious! You can see all the different kinds of gardens growing here then get your coloring page and parent handout about the benefits of gardening with young children at the end of the story. A short distance down Walden Street (across from the High School) is Hapgood Wright Town Forest with free parking. You can visit **Fairyland Pond**, which is a 20-minute loop (yellow trail).

Reo Road Playground, Maynard Saturday, August 16 thru Monday, August 25

Ruby's a little nervous about school starting, but is able to work through some of those worries on her walk with mom.

This is a fenced free playground located at 23 Reo Road, with an off-street parking area in front of it. There's a grassy area, basketball hoop, large climbing structure and picnic table.



Summer Nature Books:

- *The Hike*, Alison Farrell
- *Over and Under the Pond and Up in the Garden and Down in the Dirt*, Kate Messner
- *Flowers are Calling*, Rita Gray
- *I Took a Walk*, Henry Cole
- *Some Bugs*, Angela DiTerlizzi
- *Mama Built a Little Nest*, Jennifer Ward

Summer Nature Activities

Ellie's list of Summer Nature Activities is now posted on our website, and copies are available 24/7 in the bin on our office door at 179 Great Road, Acton (opposite Dunkin' near Donelans and Trader Joe's).

There are indoor and outdoor things to do including projects and activities like making bird nests or binoculars, and also a great list of books to find at your library for summer adventures!

[Click Here for Summer Nature Activities](#)

To register for any group, please email

Imatthews@jri.org.

1) If this is the first time you are registering,

please let us know what town you live in.

2) Your child's age on the first day of playgroup should match the age range stated in your chosen playgroup.

3) Attendance at all dates is expected unless you tell us the specific dates you cannot attend when registering so a waitlisted family can take your place that day.

5) **Each child can only attend one playgroup.**



6-Wk Summer Playgroups Begin July 7



Ages and Stages Playgroup for Babies 6-15 Months

Held at Littleton Library, Wednesdays, 10:30-11:30

This group meets at the Discovery Museum on July 30

In this playgroup, babies will have the chance to play with some age-appropriate toys to support their development, based on the Ages and Stages Questionnaire. Caregivers will also have a chance to check in with one another and the facilitator to share wins, ask questions, and get support for challenges. We will also sing songs and read a book each week. All caregivers are welcome, but please make arrangements for older siblings to keep little ones safe.

Ages and Stages Playgroup for Ages 12-23 Months

Held at Maynard Public Library, Fridays, 10:30-11:30

This group meets at the Discovery Museum on August 1

In this group, children will have a chance to interact with one another and with materials and activities based on the Ages and Stages Questionnaire to support different areas of their development, as well as some of the library's new sensory play materials. We will have a circle time with songs and a story at the end of each meeting. Infant siblings in a carrier are welcome. Please make arrangements for care of older siblings to keep new walkers safe.

Ages and Stages Playgroup for ages 24-35 Months

Held at First Connections, Acton, Thursdays, 10-11:00

This group meets at the Discovery Museum on July 31

In this playgroup, children will be able to play with all the toys in our playroom, including a play kitchen and baby dolls. Each week we will have an activity that will support an area of development based on the Ages and Stages Questionnaire, including some art and sensory activities. At the end of each meeting, we will have a circle time with songs and a book. Please dress your child in clothes that can get dirty. Infant siblings in a carrier are welcome. Please make arrangements for older siblings to keep the room from being too crowded.

Book Bag Literacy Playgroup for Ages 3 thru 5

Held at First Connections, Acton, Tuesdays, 10-11:15

This playgroup will meet in our playroom and is designed to support preschoolers in developing their early literacy skills. Each group will end with a circle time with songs and a book. Each family will borrow a bag of books to take home and read, then return them the following week to exchange for different books. Younger siblings welcome but be aware that there will be toys with small parts in the playroom.

Science & Nature Outdoor Playgroup for Ages 4 thru 6

Held at Farrington Nature Linc, Lincoln, Mondays, 10:00-11:00

In this group, we will explore Nature Linc's trails and all the plants and animals that live there. Trails are not stroller friendly, and everyone should dress appropriately for walks in the woods. Siblings are welcome, but please let us know who will be attending so we know whom to expect. We are grateful for support from the Learning Ecosystems Northeast project, led by Gulf of Maine Research Institute, and through our friends at the Discovery Museum, for making our visits to Nature Linc possible.



Virtual Mandarin Story Times, ages 2-5 **Held Saturdays, 9:00-9:30, July 12-August 30**

Ms. Jasmine's popular program includes read aloud stories, language facial exercises, introduction to Chinese characters and pronunciations, and virtual activities. Jasmine Wang graduated from Communication University of China with a Master's Degree in Language Arts and a Certification of Mandarin Grade A. She has five years of experience teaching Mandarin, specializing in teaching vocalization, speech, recitation, and debate. This is a Mandarin immersion experience. One-time registration and weekly zoom sign-ins will be used to track attendance. This group may occasionally meet in person. To register, email

Free "In Kindergarten" Book

If your child will be entering kindergarten this coming Fall, this free book can help make that transition more familiar by doing activities during the summer to get ready! If you have not received one of these books from your local Parent Association Event (Harvard, Acton & Boxboro), you can pick it up at our office in Acton. **Email Linda** and we will let you know when it's ready for pickup any time from the basket on our door.

First Connections is located at 179 Great Rd., Acton. We're opposite Dunkin Donuts, in between Donelan's & Trader Joe's



ParentChild+

Equal Possibilities From The Start



2025 Graduation Event

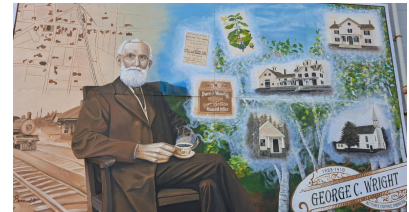
On June 1st, families enrolled in our ParentChild+ home visiting program gathered to celebrate another year of play, development, and the strong relationships caregivers have built with their children and their home visitors. It was wonderful to see how much the children had grown and the pride their caregivers feel in them! We played, snacked, and sang together. We also presented four families with graduation certificates for completing the full 92-visit program. It was a wonderful way to honor the growth and connections nurtured throughout the year!

Jasmine and Ellie, PC+ Co-Coordinators

Thanks to Jenny, one of our Early Learning Specialists for this new PC+ bulletin board in our office!! She combined her quilting and artistic skills for this project.

Another talented member of our PC+ team, **Ellie B**, graduated from Mass. College of Art this spring, received a Fellowship, and continues in the process of becoming an art teacher. She is one of our bilingual Spanish Early Learning Specialists **and** the creator of this new mural on the side of Acton Pharmacy!!

[Watch on YouTube!](#)



If you have an 18-36 month old child and want to learn more about this home visiting program, call or text First Connections at 978-505-4227. (Space limited, some eligibility restrictions apply).

THANK YOU to the PARENTS of Acton Co-operative School and Acton-Boxborough Family Network

for your donations of 1,657 diapers and wipes this spring to help families using our diaper pantry! Your efforts are incredibly helpful in assisting families in our community make ends meet!

If your Company, School, Parent or Scout Group needs a Community Service Project, please think of us. There are many families in financial need in the communities we serve who could use your help. We cannot use EEC grant funds to purchase diapers, so are reliant on community donations. And if you just



COMMUNITY RESOURCES

FREE 4-Session Parenting Class

Your child's first few years are so important! This program, written by Dr. Michael Popkin, shows you how to nurture your child with a "just right" combination of freedom and limit setting to help your kids start strong, such as:

- *Effective discipline young kids can understand
- *Explaining choices and consequences
- *Building strong bonds with your children
- *The ages & stages of your child's growing brain

Begins Thursday, June 26, 10-12 virtually

Contact Jill, 508-469-3214 or
jill_lofchie@waysideyouth.org

Acton-Boxboro Family Network
Bedford Family Connection
Carlisle Family Connection
Concord Family Network
Harvard Family Association
Lincoln Family Association
Littleton Parents Association
Maynard Family Network
Sudbury Family Network
Westford Young Child Network
Central Mass Mom

Learn about common fears in children with Jacqueline Sperling, Ph.D., as well as strategies for parenting children who are feeling scared. Q&A and phobia treatment info included.

Acton Memorial Library
Bedford Public Library
Sargent Memorial Library, Boxboro
Gleason Library, Carlisle
Concord Free Public Library
Harvard Public Library
Reuben Hoar Library, Littleton
Lincoln Public Library
Maynard Public Library
Goodnow Library, Sudbury
J.V. Fletcher Library, Westford
Silver Unicorn Bookstore



Sign up for reading challenges, games, raffles and prizes



OPEN TABLE FREE LUNCH PICKUP 2025

If you are finding it financially difficult to provide daily nutritious lunches and snacks this summer, Open Table can provide 3 lunches, snacks and drinks each week including a sandwich or wrap and vegetable or salad.

Pickup at 33 Main Street, Maynard, on **Tues. 3:00-6:30 or Thurs. 11:00-4:30.**

Order: Online by Monday at Noon.

[Details Here.](#) Call 978-369-2275 or email orders@opentable.org

No photo ID or proof of financial need required.

Questions? Order forms are available in English, Portuguese & Spanish.

FREE LUNCH FOR AGES 18 & UNDER

Weekly Theme & Daily Activity Calendar

No sign-up required. No questions asked.

You can live in any town.

Meals must be eaten on site - no pickup.

Does not meet July 4th.

Lunch served 11:30-12:00

53-55 Brook Street (corner of Brook St & Great Rd, Acton)

Acton Coach Estates, beside Donelan's. Park at Donelan's and use the crosswalk to Coach Estates if driveway is crowded!

Walk the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail or rent bikes there afterwards!



FreeBee Network & Market



Volunteer-powered Food Rescue

Collecting poised-for-waste resources to share



All Welcome ~ All FREE!

2025 Season Community Market Dates

MONTHLY

Community Markets

10:30am – noon* (*or till food is gone)

30 Middle Road, Boxborough
across from Town Hall

Rescued fresh fruit, vegetables & baked goods

**PLUS: craft and art supplies,
books, community booths
& kids' activities!**

May 17 – plants, seeds, and seedlings

Jun 28 – *community (free) yard sale

July 19 – *community (free) yard sale

Aug 16 – school supplies

Sept 13 – harvest/agriculture theme

Oct 18 – costume exchange

**only if new volunteers offer to organize!*

NEW! Come GROW with us!

To help promote more local food growing, generous donors have partnered with the **Boxborough Ag Comm and Grange** to provide extra garden plots.

You can claim one for yourself,
or join the **FreeBee garden team**.

WE supply FreeBee gardens with seedlings & tools.

YOU tag-team to plant, water, weed,
harvest, share, and EAT!

email FreeBeeCommunity@gmail.com for info / to join!

FOOD RESCUE

Saturdays?

DATES STILL TBD
(Pending available
gleaned food)

ONLY rescued food:
fresh fruit, vegetables
& baked goods

VOLUNTEER?

Be a **FREEBEE!**

2025 Survey for
new & returning:



We are **FreeBee** because we are from **Boxborough** – with a 'B'!

<http://bit.ly/FreeBeeMarket>

@FreeBeeCommunity   



INCOME ELIGIBILITY HAS INCREASED FOR WIC as of June 5, 2025

New Income Guidelines

WIC provides fruits, vegetables, milk, cheese, cereal, bread, juice, eggs, canned fish, baby food, peanut butter, beans

PICK UP YOUR \$30/PERSON FARMER'S MARKET COUPONS

If you already receive WIC, we encourage you to pick up your additional summer benefits that allow you to receive food at Farmer's Markets. The coupons can be used at Farmer's Markets in West Acton, Carlisle, Concord, Maynard, Westford, Drumlin Farm and Codman Farm both in Lincoln.

Contact your WIC office to apply to receive these coupons.

Summer Community Parent Support & Education

NAMI Support Groups for Family & Friends of Individuals with Mental Health Conditions

FREE support provide comfort, hope and a sense of community in a nonjudgmental environment to discuss concerns, learn about local resources and benefit from one another's collective knowledge and experience.

Pre-register before attending: **Nami Central Mass**

Bedford - Last Tuesdays of each month, 7-8:30 online, ivypompei@comcast.net

Acton - 2nd Tuesday in person & 4th Tuesdays online, 7-8:30, mcdougalletal@aol.com

Parent Groups Held by the Center for Early Relationship Support (FREE). [Info here](#)

If you have any questions, email dgardner@jfcsofboston.org

Fragile Beginnings is for parents of babies who have spent time in the NICU, Thursdays, 10:30-11:30

Newly Adoptive Parents meets on 1st & 3rd Fridays from 10-11:30 in Belmont

Parents of Toddlers (1-3 yrs) meets from 1-2:30 on Wednesdays.

In-person weekly new parent support groups take place in Arlington, Brookline, more.

Parents Helping Parents Virtual Support Group (FREE) [Schedule Here](#)

Speak with other parents who share the joys and struggles that most parents have. Get advice, feedback, and resources to help you manage day-to-day challenges. PHP has groups for

Parenting Preschoolers

Parenting Neurodivergent Children

Parenting Children with Anxiety or Depression

Single Parenting Group, or Fathers Parenting Group, or Mother's Support Group

Infant and Pregnancy Loss Support Group (FREE)

This ongoing virtual monthly group sponsored by Emerson Health is for those who have experienced the loss of a pregnancy during the 2nd or 3rd trimester or shortly after birth and are looking for support from others with shared experiences. A partner or friend is welcome to attend with you. The group is facilitated by an advanced practice nurse with experience supporting families whose pregnancies have ended unexpectedly or whose infants have died. Individuals are encouraged to contact the facilitator, Katie Stockman, NP, for the connecting zoom link. Held on 2nd Mondays, 7-8:30 p.m. [Website registration information](#)

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Support Group

Come share the rewards and challenges of raising your grandchildren. Learn from and support others in similar circumstances. Discover ways to relieve stress. Benefit from the resources available from the Commission on the Status of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, and hear about State agencies which can provide assistance. If you are interested in joining the Acton-based group, which meets on the 3rd Tuesday of each month, 11-12:00, 30 Sudbury Road (Acton Senior Center), contact Joe O'Leary at 978-760-0360 or j.j.oleary@comcast.net. For additional statewide resources, workshops, & evening groups, contact colleen.pritoni@state.ma.us, 617-748-2454. All programs are FREE of charge. [Website](#)



Denotes funding for this program provided by Mass. Dept. of Early Education & Care CFCE Grant

First Connections, a program of Justice Resource Institute, Inc, is a Coordinated Family and Community Engagement (CFCE) grant recipient through the MA Department of Early Education and Care. We offer free services to families residing in Acton, Bedford, Boxborough, Carlisle, Concord, Hanscom AFB, Harvard, Lincoln, Littleton, Maynard, Sudbury, and Westford. In addition to state funding, we rely on the generous support of local partners to fund these programs and expand the geographic reach of our First Year of Life programs to families in neighboring towns. We also appreciate private donations from individuals and families that help make this work possible. Thank you for your support!

[Visit our website](#)

First Connections | 179 Great Road Unit 104A | Acton, MA 01720 US

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Try email marketing for free today!