

Early Childhood Ally

In Memory – bell hooks

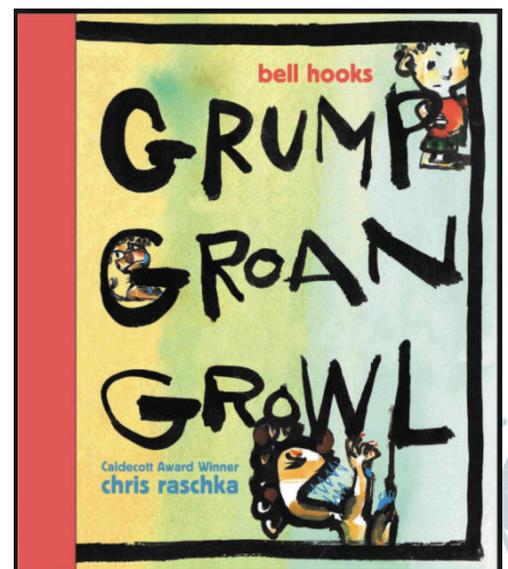
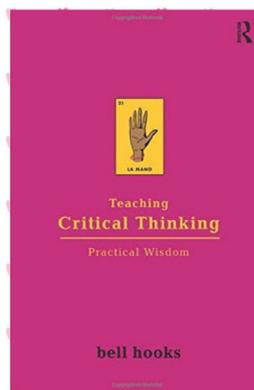
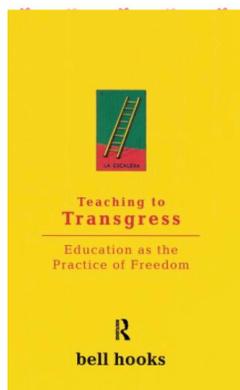
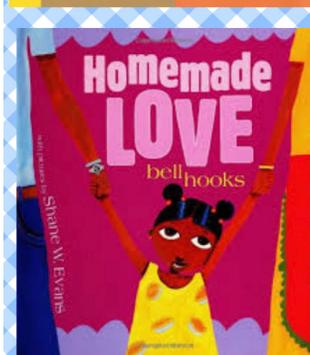
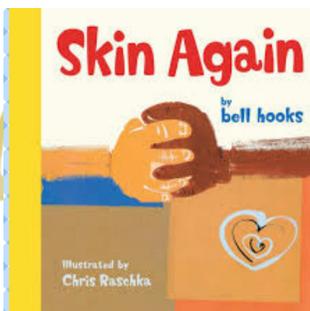
“What we do is more important than what we say or what we say we believe”.

I was saddened in December with the death of bell hooks. I first became aware of her work many years ago when I read “Teaching to Transgress” and “Teaching Critical Thinking”. She was an author, professor and feminist who frankly made me uncomfortable and pushed me to grow. I believe I became a better teacher of children and adults because of her wisdom.

If you aren’t familiar with her children’s books I encourage you to check them out. I was introduced to them this past year. I was delighted by them as they mirrored her perfectly.

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New Year Reset - Engagement with families



I was talking to my online instagram colleague and peer Kiah Price (Social Media Specialist) at Himama about how more than ever engaging families is critical. She shared this new article they developed on the topic.

An educator in a professional learning environment quickly learns that taking care of the children also means taking care of their families. This is easier said than done, however, because modern parents have identified that they are experiencing burnout, largely through working between 40 to 50 hours per week. So how can we engage the children's families when the last thing they need is to do more?

Individual Families; Individual Needs

Educators are trained to treat each child individually, regardless of expected developmental levels in the child's age group. Since the traditional construct of a family is ever-evolving, they need to be treated similarly. Educators must have a variety of methods to keep different families engaged.

- In-person meetings – These are currently the standard for best practices. Some families have a larger capacity for being involved in their child's learning, and appreciate a reciprocal involvement from the educator.
- Digital communication – Sometimes, this is all a family has the capacity for. Whether you choose a digital communication platform, or a type of online survey/questionnaire, there must be a way to connect with families who are unable or reluctant to communicate in person.
- Following cultural expectations – Some cultures have a different set of expectations with how educators and families ought to interact. Understand what these are so that you can at least meet them halfway as a method of developing trust and engagement.

Click below to read the rest:

<https://www.himama.com/blog/how-to-engage-families-in-their-childs-learning/>



How to Engage Families in Their Child's Learning



Discovery Baskets on a Budget

with Julie Sizemore

Discovery baskets can be made up of anything! Rocks, grass, and toilet paper tubes can be a discovery basket.

Obviously this is a basket that would need to be supervised, but you get the point. This morning I did a quick search on the Dollar Tree's website. There are so many new items there that would make wonderful discovery baskets. Everything from pop-its to animals and dinosaurs to bracelets and pretend play food.

When money is tight, there are some options...

1. Give yourself a 10.00 challenge at the dollar tree. I do this a few times a year. I limit myself to 10.00, go through the whole store with the intent of building 2-3 new discovery baskets. My absolute favorite basket is my "round things" basket. Plastic bracelets, shower curtain rings, and toilet paper tubes. Recently I've started tying ribbons around some of the bracelets for an added sensory experience.
2. Ask your director if you can start a wish list to send out to families (if you are grant funded there may be restrictions with this).
3. Reach out to local community organizations and ask if they would be willing to sponsor a classroom.
4. If you have a specific project you want to fund, many teachers have been successful in starting a "go fund me" for that specific project. I've even seen teachers ask for funding to be able to buy things on Teachers Pay Teachers. This is another idea that you may have some red tape to get through in order for it to happen...however, if you don't ever ask the answer will always be no!
5. Social media. Reach out to your friends and family. Request that before they donate things that they are getting rid of to offer you a chance to go through toys and other household items for the sake of your classroom.
6. Facebook marketplace and/or garage sale sites. You can post something about "ISO" (In Search Of) and list the items you are looking for requesting them to be free or low cost as they are for your classroom.
7. Child Care Stabilization Grant - if you applied for this or your center did, ask if some of the funds can be earmarked for new materials.

People have big hearts when it comes to supporting children and care teachers. Sometimes you just have to be willing to put yourself out there and take the risk to ask.

Discovery Baskets cont.



Do you get twice weekly emails from Julie at RESPECT Care Teaching? She is in an Early Head Start mixed age classroom as a Faculty member at the Grand Rapids Community College Early Childhood Learning Laboratory. The emails often share the journey they are on in the classroom. It's delightful to get a peek into her room and how small everyday shifts make a huge impact. You can sign up for Julie Sizemore newsletter and see what professional development she is offering by visiting her website at www.careteaching.com .



10 Day Equity Challenge

In November, I actively participated in the United Way Equity Challenge. It was designed to take us through a state and local exploration of history and how racism impacts and shapes the lives of a community.

Although it was 10 days it took me all month to get through everything. One tool they used was a Habit Tracking Log. I have attached it because it really helped me. The chart had you diversifying how you engaged with the challenge. The categories were Read, Watch, Connect, Engage and Act with the goal to try consuming information in a variety of manners.

Housing Inequity was an area that I learned a great deal about. One data point from that section that has stuck with me is that in 2019, nearly one in six African American children in Kent County accessed the homeless system compared with one in 130 white children. That statistic made me pause.

I have also included the Diversity Opportunities for December since Kathleen included many of the links to articles and resources for those interested. I find participating in activities like this that have a wider scope than my early childhood lens help me to think more broadly. I often find similarities and new ways to think of things.



ECA 90 Day Challenge



Thanks to all of you who joined in the 90 Day Challenge! I appreciate all the messages, pictures and encouragement. I was surprised how the act of one easy intention helped me each week. The picture is of Rosalie and I making our famous Pumpkin Muffins.

Honestly, the challenges can be done any week out of the year. They are all stored as a highlight on Instagram. I have included the last few from December.



ECA 90 DAY CHALLENGE

WEEK 12

- Make a vision board.
- Use essential oils.
- Watch a sunrise and/or sunset.
- Read a book in bed.
- Try yoga or a new yoga class.
- Learn about/celebrate the winter solstice.
- Meditate for 4 days this week.

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ECA 90 DAY CHALLENGE

WEEK 13

- Watch a comedy.
- Volunteer with a friend or family member.
- Wear a new color you don't typically try.
- Pack a healthy snack in your car/purse/backpack for emergencies.
- Send a holiday card to someone who may be lonely.
- Make yourself a kit for sick days.
- Check out the holiday lights in your community.

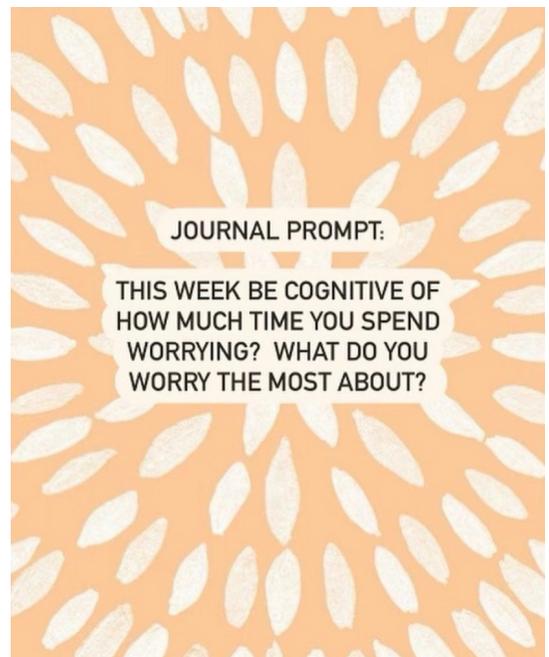
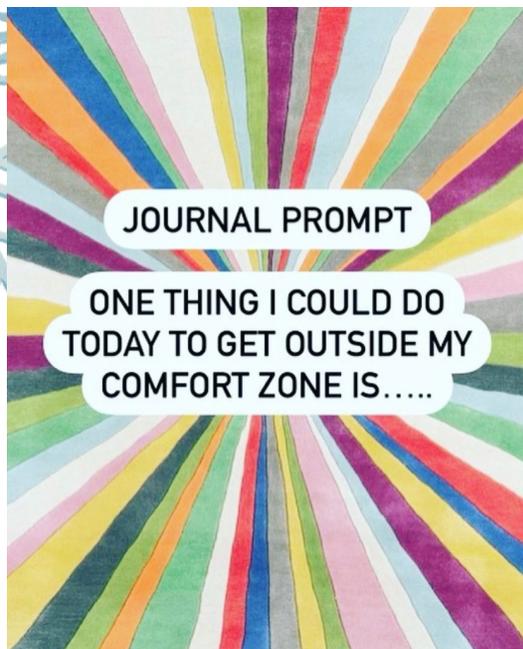
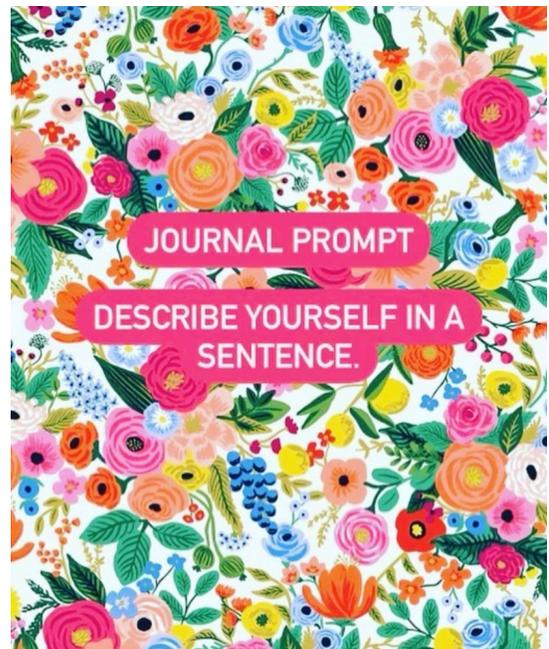
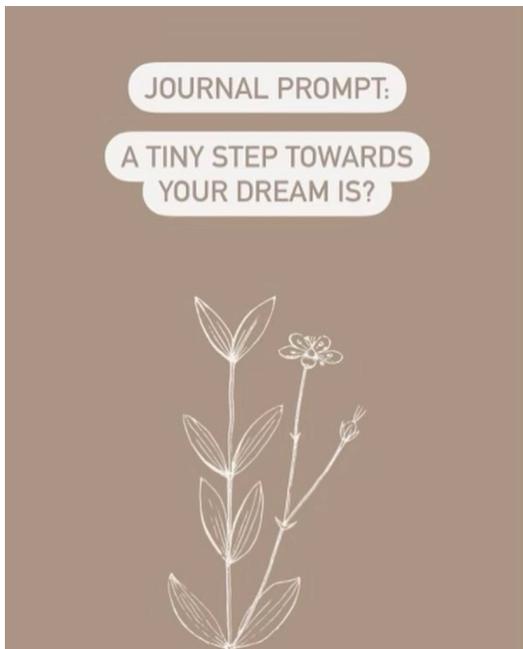
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Journaling in the New Year



I have attached the top 4 journal prompts from this year for those who might be jump starting their journaling this year. As a reminder in my stories each Wednesday I have a new journal prompt. They are also all saved as a highlight.

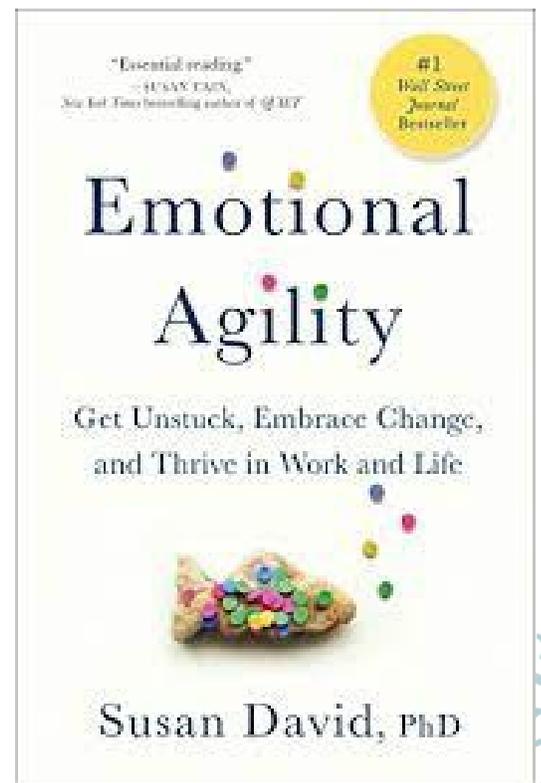


Emotional Agility: Get Unstuck, Embrace Change and Thrive in Work and Life

Really appreciated listening to this book last month. I also did find a free PDF of it online. It's been on many lists of coaches and leaders as a must read.

I would recommend taking her quiz and visiting her website if you want to learn more. I found the free report to be useful. It was several pages long and had many ideas to reflect on.

<https://www.susandavid.com/quiz>



Getting Outside in the Winter Support

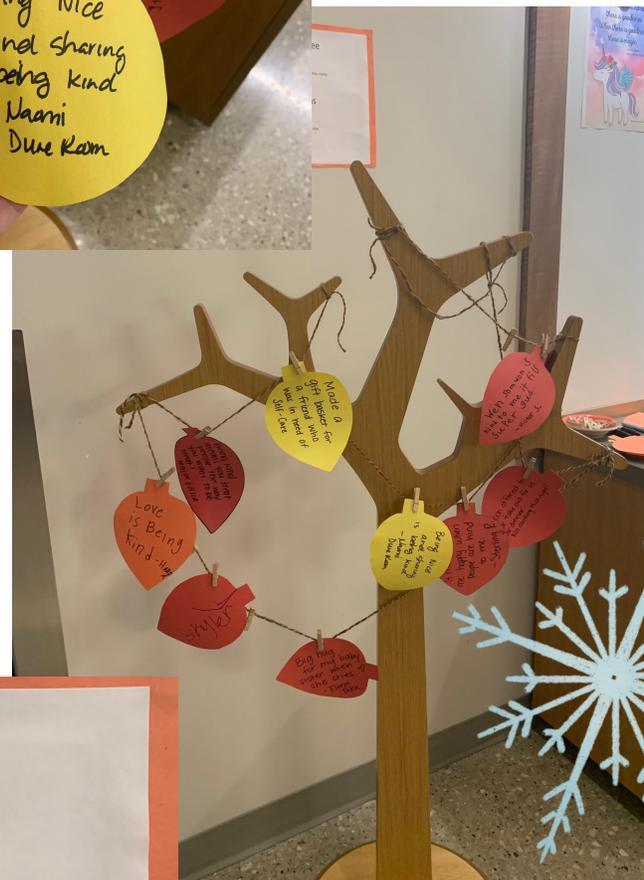
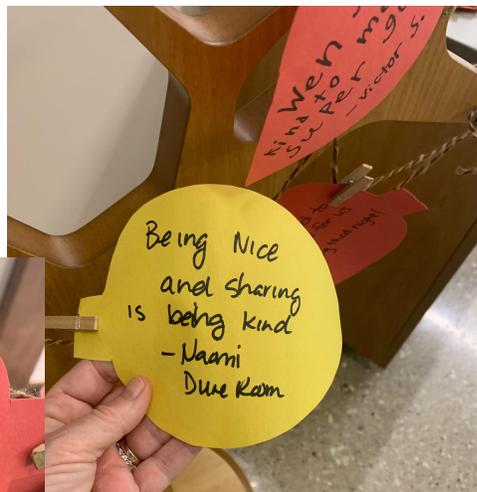
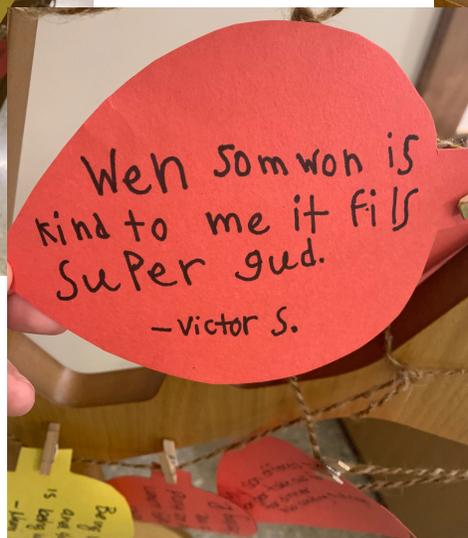
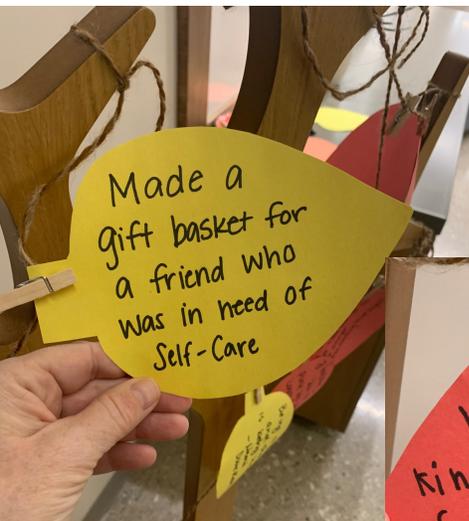
Of course, I am going to always advocate for getting outside but I understand the barriers. I am here to help you with brainstorming solutions to those challenges. I am not here to shame you or make you feel guilty.



Kindness Tree



Sometimes it really is the little things. This kindness tree is set up in an entryway for families, children and staff to add to. It takes just a bit of effort to make a big impact. It could be snowflakes or hearts if you wanted it more of a winter theme. Having each room intentionally plan to add to it throughout the month is a super way to work together as a community.



Kindness Tree

- Step 1: Pick a Leaf and a marker
- Step 2: Answer one of the questions below
- Step 3: Write the answer on the leaf and sign your families name
- Step 4: Clip the leaf to the tree

Questions

1. Ask your child what it means to be kind
2. Tell about a time when someone was kind to you
3. Tell about a time when you were kind to someone else
4. How does it feel when you are kind to someone?
5. How does it feel when someone is kind to you?

22 in 2022

If you have been around for a while you know that for the last several years I make a monthly list of things to try/do. I genuinely liked these monthly lists. I didn't feel pressured if I didn't do something. I just added it to the next month or let it fall off.

I have shifted gears and decided to do a 22 in 2022 year list. I find making tweaks to something that has been successful keeps it interesting and engaging. Here is an example of my prior years lists. I will finish the 22 in 2022 and share it next month.

If you haven't ever tried something like this I encourage you to give it a try. I think you could like it. Don't hesitate to reach out for questions about how it works!

1. Visit
2. Read
3. Eat
4. Volunteer
5. Watch
6. Do
7. Grow
8. Explore
9. See
10. Travel
11. Make
12. Enjoy
13. Try
14. Plan
15. Learn
16. Organize
17. Be
18. Create
19. Play
20. Grateful
21. Cook
22. Celebrate



Welcome to the Early Childhood Ally Newsletter



Are you new here? We are so glad you have joined us!

A little bit about me, I am the founder of Early Childhood Ally (ECA) and have been in the field for 40 years as a teacher, coach, mentor and director. I started the Early Childhood Ally Instagram page just over two years ago with the support of my family and friends, especially my daughter Jazzy.

My partner Herm and I live primarily in our cottage in the Manistee National Forest after 30 years of living in Midtown Grand Rapids. I have two daughters Britany who works and lives in East Lansing with her partner Nick. Jazzy lives and works in Grand Rapids. I do travel into Grand Rapids often for work and to see my grandchildren Rosalie and Alex with my bonus daughter Ashleigh.



I spent over 20 years at Grand Rapids Community College leading and directing the Early Childhood Learning Laboratory, an accredited, star rated program in the heart of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Over the past year I transitioned to semi-retirement and am loving working as the Lead Coach for our Play and Learn grant. If you are interested in following along with that work you can check it out on Instagram through Play and Learn GRCC. I coach and mentor a handful of Directors which is incredibly rewarding.



As a long time advocate of all issues impacting the field of early childhood I have more time to devote to my passion. If you are interested in specific content don't be shy and reach out and let me know. I am always eager to hear what you all need.

