

t'ááłá'í - one	naaki - two	táá' - three	djǫ' - four	ashdla' - five
hastáá - six	tsosts'id - seven	tseebíi - eight	náhást'éi - nine	neeznáá - ten

## Counting in Diné Bizaad



### Items needed:

- Dry beans or another bean sized object such as pebbles.

### Instructions:

- Parents- say any number in Navajo. You may start at “t'ááłá'í – one” and go through the numbers in sequence. Or you may mix up the numbers.
- Children- place the number of beans in the corresponding area. Example: For “táá,” they would place three beans in the corresponding area labeled “táá'- three”
- You may count the beans together as the children are placing the beans in the corresponding area. Example: For “táá,” you may count together, “t'ááłá'í, naaki, táá.”

Doing this activity encourages speaking and learning in Diné Bizaad. In addition, children are building their motor skills by exercising their hand muscles when they are picking up and placing the beans. Counting helps to build their cognitive and reasoning skills.



Scan to learn how to say numbers in Navajo

### First Things First Navajo Nation Regional Partnership Council

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### Supporting the Social and Emotional Health of Young Children During Challenging Times

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed renewed focus on the mental health of young children. Luckily, the First Things First Navajo Nation Region has funded early childhood mental health through a handful of strategies for the past few years.

Once COVID-19 began to impact the Navajo Nation, the FTF Navajo Nation Region partnered with Project Indigenous LAUNCH and the Navajo Nation Department of Education to co-host a virtual Early Childhood Wellness Day to learn from experts.

Systems coordination around infant, toddler and early childhood mental health was strengthened, and Navajo Nation First Lady Phefelia Nez created initiatives within the President's Office to continue moving this work forward. She also recently hosted the “To Build a Resilient Child” virtual conference for the community.

It helped that FTF regional council member Dawn Yazzie, who was Chair at the beginning of the pandemic, is trained in early childhood mental health, said FTF Navajo Nation Regional Director Memarie Tsosie.

“She helped council members see how important mental well-being can be for young children,” Tsosie said. “What really helped the council understand was when she framed it from a cultural perspective. When we think of early childhood, the social-emotional piece is that we focus on relationships. By the time a child is born, they are given their four clans. They are taught how to relate to the world. Mental well-being is really important within the culture. We should be able to promote that in child care centers, as well.”

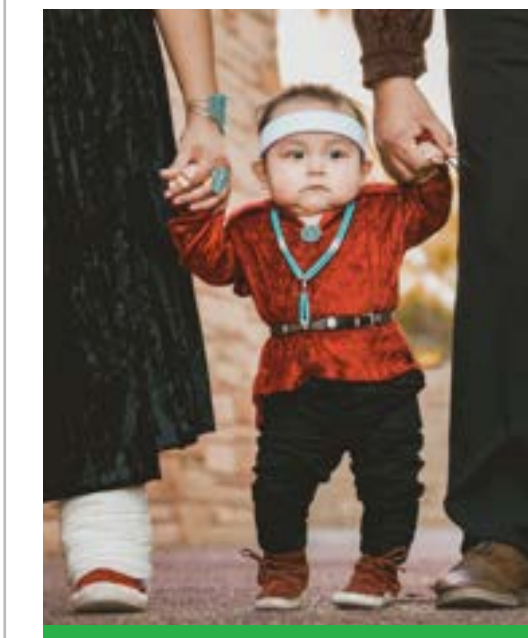
Having regional council members already familiar with early childhood mental health and the benefits was helpful.

“It wasn't something new to introduce to get people on board,” Tsosie said. “Everyone was in survival mode. You don't want to bring on something new or learn something new. It really helped. Some providers or child care centers really needed support. They knew they had an early childhood mental health consultant. They knew who to ask to help support some of these families and children.”

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### Children Adjusting to Change – Big Feelings, Common Behaviors and How Families Can Help

by Laura Scott, Southwest Human Development



This year, changes feel even bigger, as we've all been through a pandemic and felt the effects in different ways.

Young children have the same feelings as adults, but don't have the words or language to express themselves like adults. As a result, we often see big feelings in their behavior. Some of these behaviors include crying easily or frequently, screaming or yelling, clinging to adults, rough contact or play with others and isolating or playing alone.

There are many reasons children may show challenging behaviors. As adults, we might not have all the details of a child or family to fully understand. However, we can be hopeful in understanding that children express themselves through behavior and we have the ability to support them through their big feelings.

#### What Can I Do?

**Observe.** Notice when the behaviors are happening. Is it during a specific time of day? Does the behavior happen around specific people or peers? Having this information may allow you to modify something in the environment to support children.

**Check in.** Notice how you are feeling when challenging behavior happens. Are you frustrated? Are you anxious? Take a few deep breaths to regulate yourself before responding and engaging.

**Comfort.** It can be difficult to comfort children with big feelings. Get down to the child's eye level and use a comforting tone. This demonstrates you are available for them.

**Narrate.** Children learn from what we say. Narrating is simply labeling what we see. “I saw you throw the block, and you look frustrated.” Narrating is the beginning of teaching children about feelings and emotions.

**Model.** As adults, we are always modeling for children. Being intentional and aware of our tone, posture and words shows children how we hope for them to communicate. Engaging children with a calm tone helps children feel safe. Children must feel safe and comforted to learn new ways of responding.



## Vice Chair Celebrates 10 Years with FTF

Rhonda Etsitty recently celebrated 10 years on the First Things First Navajo Nation Regional Partnership Council. Etsitty, began her service with FTF in 2011 and is currently the vice chair on the FTF Navajo Nation Regional Council, where she holds the at-large representative seat.

Etsitty is a Quality First coach with Candelen, where she provides onsite coaching and mentoring to early education programs participating in the quality improvement process of Quality First. As an early childhood professional for many years, she has extensive knowledge in early childhood support and classroom instruction having served as an administrator and educator. Etsitty earned her associate degree in pre-education from Coconino Community College and a Bachelor of Science in elementary education, with an emphasis in early childhood from Northern Arizona University.

“As an educator, I believe all children should have the opportunity to experience and learn in a positive, safe learning environment with developmentally appropriate activities dedicated to meeting the needs of all types of learners,” Etsitty said.



You can make a difference in the lives of young children by volunteering to serve your Arizona community by joining a First Things First regional partnership council. For more information, visit [FirstThingsFirst.org/serve](https://FirstThingsFirst.org/serve) or call the FTF Navajo Nation Regional Office at 928-810-4306.

## Supporting the Social and Emotional Health of Young Children During Challenging Times (continued)

Early childhood mental health consultation is designed to help adults identify and address the mental health struggles or challenges of individual children that they work with in child care, preschool or other group settings.

Research shows that 17% to 18% of young children struggle with mental health early in life in a significant way.

“It’s hard to overestimate the impact that COVID has had on young children’s development and stress levels on adults,” said Alison Steier, director of Southwest Human Development’s Harris Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Training Institute. She’s also in charge of Southwest’s Smart Support, the largest early childhood mental health consultation program in the country.

“Many children that we are seeing have suffered actual losses of family members and important people. The teachers have, also,” Steier said. “When adults are affected, young children are affected. Children are impacted by adult stress. What they’ve had to endure in terms of school and child care closures and returning, that requires adjustments. Young children don’t have the linguistic capabilities, but they have very rich experiences. And we see that in their behavioral challenges.”

Early childhood mental health consultation works on a number of levels. It can be at the teacher-child relationship, where a child is struggling with behavior. Or, it can be at the classroom level, for example, helping a teacher with transitions within the classroom.

“Having a mental health professional in a (child care) setting is very helpful,” Steier said.

Mental health consultants can also help the center director at the programmatic level to make adjustments.

“There’s lots of collaboration and problem solving,” Steier said. “And slowing things down. When things slow down, people think better.”

## Early Childhood Speaker Series

Make sure to keep a listen for the Early Childhood Speaker Series airing monthly on KTNN 660AM or [ktnnonline.com](https://ktnnonline.com). The series is designed to give parents and caregivers of young children an opportunity to increase their awareness of relevant early childhood topics and remind us about the important role we have for our young children.

The Early Childhood Speaker Series is sponsored by Navajo Project I-LAUNCH in partnership with the First Things First Navajo Nation Region and Navajo Nation Department of Behavioral and Mental Health Services. Announcements are posted on the Navajo Project I-LAUNCH Facebook page.



## Learning Begins at Home

by Sarah Monassa, Child Care Resource & Referral

Many regular routines at home can be a learning experience for babies, toddlers and preschoolers. Child Care Resource & Referral shared the following tips from Vroom® – an early learning initiative that empowers parents, families and child care providers to turn everyday moments into brain building moments with children from birth to age 5.

### Try the following activities with your young child:

- **The Hand Wash:** Let your child be your partner as you wash up before a meal. Say, “It’s time wash our hands, yours and mine.” Put soap on both your hands and lather up. Be silly as you dry your hands off together. Shake your hands, toss the towel back and forth, or make a hand jumble.

**Brainy Background:** Making your child your partner in hand washing helps them learn about this important routine. A back-and-forth conversation with words and gestures builds your relationship, too.

- **Calm Down Kit:** Use an empty box or a small bag to make a “Calm Down Kit” with your child. Have your child put special items inside that help them feel secure and relaxed. Some ideas include: a small stuffed animal, a special toy, a soft book, crayons, paper, bubbles or play dough. Ensure the items are age appropriate.

**Brainy Background:** It helps to make a “Calm Down Kit” before upset feelings happen. You’re helping your child plan for how to handle stress so they can take action in a difficult moment. This gives them more control. It also builds skills important to tackling challenges.

For more activities, you may sign up for Vroom® by Text at [vroom.com/](https://vroom.com/) sms or scan the QR code.



Arizona Child Care Resource & Referral, better known as CCR&R, is a statewide program of Child and Family Resources with funding from Arizona Department of Economic Security through the federal Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG). For more information call 1-800-308-9000 or visit [www.azccrr.com](https://www.azccrr.com)

## Diné Family Creates Age-Appropriate Traditional Baby Foods

A new baby food is now available using traditional foods found on the Navajo Nation.

Zachariah Ben created Bidii Baby Foods in 2021 out of concern for the low accessibility of healthy traditional foods for young children across the Navajo Nation. Ben’s family has had a farm and cornfields for many generations. Ben believes there is a direct connection between nurturing the land and nurturing our children.

“By understanding how to grow traditional crops and preparing them for young children, we are actively rebuilding indigenous food ways,” he said.

The foods that children between the ages of birth to age 5 consume have lasting impacts on their food preferences and overall health for the rest of their lives, Ben said. That’s why parents of young children can buy items like Neeshjizhii Bi’ Taa’ Niil, Navajo dried steam corn cereal under the Bidii Baby brand.

“We, as indigenous communities need to initiate a concerted effort to make locally grown and traditional foods available, accessible and affordable for young children,” Ben said.



Bidii Baby Foods invites all families to try these recipes at home and view more on their Instagram page (@bidiibabyfoods). They regularly share recipes for using Neeshjizhii and other Navajo crops to make traditional and modern meals.

## Recipes

### Neeshjizhii (Steamed Corn) Banana Bread

Prep time: 5 mins Cook time: 45 min Total time: 50 min

#### Ingredients:

- 1½ cup all-purpose flour
- ½ cup milled dried steamed corn or Bidii Baby Foods
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon baking soda
- 3 medium size over-ripe bananas
- ¾ cup sugar
- ½ cup vegetable oil
- 2 eggs
- 1½ cup all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon cinnamon (optional)



#### Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. Mix dry ingredients in a bowl. Add oil, eggs, vanilla and bananas. Stir until all ingredients have thoroughly mixed. Bananas can be mixed with small chunks or completely smooth based on your preference.
3. Pour mix into a nonstick bread pan. Bake at 350 for 40-45 mins.
4. Remove from oven when firm and lightly brown across the top of the loaf.

#### Nutrition Information:

Traditional foods can be served as first foods to provide optimal nutrition! Make sure breads are served with sources of micronutrients, protein and fiber, like dark vegetables, legumes, meats and grains.

### Chiiłchin Neeshjizhii (Sumac Berry & Steamed Corn) Hot Cereal

Prep time: 3 mins Cook time: 10 min Total time: 13 min

#### Ingredients:

- 1 cup milled dried steamed corn (Neeshjizhii Bi’taa’nil) or Bidii Baby Food
- 2 tsp Chiiłchin Powder (Sumac Berry)
- 3 cups of warm water or breastmilk



#### Instructions:

1. Mix Neeshjizhii Bi’taa’nil and Chiiłchin powder. Add water/ breastmilk to powder over low heat, stirring regularly to prevent clumps.
2. Allow for cereal to cool to room temperature before serving. This recipe will yield approximately 4 cups of cereal which can be canned or stored in a refrigerator to continue feeding over several days.

#### Nutrition Information:

Babies tend to start eating foods around 6 months old, and eat more complex foods (like pureed meats) around 9-12 months. Consider expressing/pumping breastmilk and mixing in with each puree. This will be a familiar taste to help baby transition to whole foods, and will add more nutrition and immune support to baby’s diet.