Little steps toward kindergarten

Your October family guide: playful readiness ideas for toddlers and VPK children, plus pumpkin patch outings around the First Coast.

Start with connection, not a test

School preparation can happen in everyday moments: a shared story, a turn-taking game, or putting a bag by the door. Keep activities short and joyful, adapt them to your child, and celebrate effort rather than perfect answers.

For toddlers: explore together

Talk: Name what you see on a walk. Give your child time to respond with words, gestures, or sounds.
Read: Enjoy a picture book together. Point to familiar objects and let your child help turn the pages.
Play: Stack blocks, sing a song with movements, and practice taking turns rolling a ball.
Try: Invite small acts of independence, such as putting a toy in a basket or choosing between two shirts.

For VPK children: build confidence

Tell a story: Ask what happened first, next, and last in a favorite book.
Notice print: Look for the first letter of your child's name on a sign or package. Draw and make marks together without pressure.
Use numbers: Count a few large objects, compare groups, and talk about more, fewer, bigger, and smaller.
Practice routines: Try opening a lunch container, packing a backpack, washing hands, and asking an adult for help.

Partner with your child's VPK teacher about activities that fit their interests and current learning. These ideas are not a readiness assessment or a guarantee of school outcomes.

A little learning, every week

Choose one idea at a time. Repeat favorites, follow your child's curiosity, and stop when play stops being fun.

Week 1 | Autumn stories

Read an autumn picture book. Toddlers can point to colors and pictures. VPK children can describe a character or predict what happens next. Invite everyone to draw their favorite part.

Week 2 | Pumpkin detectives

Compare pumpkins by size, shape, and texture. Toddlers can use words like smooth, bumpy, big, and small. VPK children can count a small group or explain how they sorted it. Use whole pumpkins or pictures rather than small seeds.

Week 3 | Taking turns

Build a pretend pumpkin stand. Practice greetings, choosing a pumpkin, and taking turns. For toddlers, model a short exchange. For VPK children, add a simple request such as "May I have the small pumpkin?"

Week 4 | Ready for the day

Make a simple picture routine: get dressed, eat breakfast, gather belongings. Toddlers can choose one step to help with. VPK children can rehearse packing a bag and asking for help when something is tricky.

Make your outing a learning moment

Before a pumpkin patch visit, explain what will happen and choose a meeting point with your family. During the visit, describe colors, compare pumpkins, and practice waiting. Afterward, ask your child to tell or draw a favorite moment.

Keep adult supervision close. Adults handle carving tools; children can decorate with age-appropriate supplies. Keep small objects away from children who may put them in their mouths.

More family learning ideas

Florida Department of Education: Just Read, Families!

University of Florida: Kindergarten Readiness

First Coast pumpkin patches

October 2026 | Jacksonville, St. Johns, and St. Augustine. Confirm hours, weather updates, accessibility, pumpkin availability, and any admission costs before leaving home.

Jacksonville | Southside Methodist Church

3120 Hendricks Ave., Jacksonville, FL 32207.
The 2026 patch is listed as open daily from September 26. Sunday-Friday: noon-8 p.m.; Saturday: 10 a.m.-8 p.m. A neighborhood pumpkin stop with October family events.

Southside pumpkin patch details

St. Johns | River of Life UMC

2600 Race Track Road, St. Johns, FL 32259.
The church lists its 24th annual patch for September 28-October 30, 2026. Monday-Friday: 2-8 p.m.; Saturday: 10 a.m.-8 p.m.; Sunday: 11 a.m.-8 p.m.

River of Life event details

St. Augustine | First United Methodist Church

118 King St., St. Augustine, FL 32084.
A downtown pumpkin patch listed from October 8, 2026, until pumpkins are gone. Daily: 11 a.m.-7 p.m.

St. Augustine | Shores United Methodist Church

724 Shores Blvd., St. Augustine, FL 32086.
Listed for October 12-31, 2026. Weekdays: 2-6 p.m.; Saturday: 11 a.m.-6 p.m.; Sunday: noon-6 p.m.
Patch admission is listed as free.

St. Augustine patch dates and details

Listings checked October 11, 2026. Event plans can change. These independent venues are not operated by Ivy Lane.

A thoughtful village for your family

Questions about care or early learning support? Reach THE IVY LANE NANNY AGENCY CO. at info@theivylanenannyco.com.