

The Virgin Islands Consortium

The VI Children Museum and Dept. of Health Partner to Distribute At-Home Discovery Kits That Explore Mental Health

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To encourage family conversations around children's mental health and well-being, the Virgin Islands Children Museum, in partnership with the Maternal Child Health (MCH) – Project LAUNCH Program, is distributing their 5th At-Home Discovery Kit since the global pandemic began, a release issued Tuesday has made known.

The At-Home Discovery Kit is designed to help recipients support their children's physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral well-being with an invitation to "spring into measuring your mental health," stated the release. Mental Health Awareness

Month is recognized in May, however, this kit aims to encourage parents to continue the conversation with kids about these important topics throughout the year.

The kit was curated for ages 2 to 8 but all children are invited to increase their understanding of units and measurements in a way that allows families to have fun together. Kids will gain a frame of reference that is always with them by taking length measurements of their own body, creating planters from items inside the home to grow their own food-bearing plants, and through tracking both the growth of their plant and their mental health.

“As the Territory continues to endure the effects of COVID-19 within our community, we are encouraged to remain steadfast and creative in our delivery of engaging activities for children and families” stated Project LAUNCH Program Manager Sakile Braithwaite-Hall. The goal of the Project LAUNCH (Linking Actions for Unmet Needs in Children’s Health) Program, under the Maternal Child Health Division at the USVI Department of Health, is to support a deeper attention to children’s mental health and emotional well-being.

The At Home Discovery Kit includes school supplies and a colorful 12-page activity booklet with options for independent discovery as well as the opportunity to interact with a parent, adult, and/or guardian to support engagement and learning. Games and guides to emergency preparedness are also included to get children involved in planning for a natural disaster. The book encourages open communication about extreme events which can help children express their emotions and be mentally prepared for difficult times.

“We were excited to collaborate with the Department of Health to have an even greater impact on the community and to encourage more family engagement and life-long learning” expressed museum director, Chantel Hoheb.

Here are some tips to keep your children engaged while they’re learning.

- Check-in with the kids in your care regularly by asking open-ended questions.
- Share your feelings with them and ask them what emotions they experienced during their day or as you work on projects together.
- Also, remember conversations do not always have to be verbal! Take opportunities to encourage children to draw pictures, use objects that represent how they feel, or find a book/story theme they can connect with.

The latest is the largest disbursement of VICM Discovery Kits to date with 2,000 kits available for territory-wide distribution beginning the last week of August, according to the release.

Kits will be delivered to families through partners such as the Boys & Girls Clubs of St. Thomas/St. John Inc., Catholic Charities of the Virgin Islands St. Thomas/St. John/St. Croix, Department of Health MCH Clinics, Head Start and Human Services St. Thomas/St. Croix, and the Salvation Army. Visitors to the VI Children’s Museum can also pick up their free discovery kit while supplies last.

This kit was made possible through the Virgin Islands Children's Museum's partnership with the USVI Department of Health Maternal Child Health Division Project LAUNCH Program, USVI Department of Agriculture, Storm Strong VI and Dr. Adam Parr of the University of the Virgin Islands, the Children and Youth Task Force, and through generous donations from the public via the ongoing GlobalGiving.org fundraising initiative: [At Home Discovery Kits for VI Families \(47832\)](#).

"We hope the projects in this discovery kit help you and your children develop healthy mental and behavioral habits while you explore, play, and discover together," stated the release. Recipients are encouraged to share photos of your family enjoying the Discovery Kits with us via email at: discover@vichildrensmuseum.org

The Virgin Islands Children's Museum is currently open for scheduled visits between Tuesday and Thursday, during which family and friend groups can come and play together privately for 1½ hour blocks of time. Book a visit at www.vichildrensmuseum.org/book-online. Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays are open days at the museum in which bookings are not required; 10am - 5pm.