

WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT **QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

GENERAL QUESTIONS ON THE CONFERENCE

Q. What was discussed at the conference?

The conference highlighted new research on brain development in very young children and discuss what it means for parents, caregivers and policy makers. We now know that children's earliest experiences actually affect the development of their brains and are essential to their ability to learn, develop, and reach their full potential. This conference was a call to action to all members of society -- including the business, faith and health communities, the media, child care providers and government -- to use this information to strengthen America's families.

Q. What kind of impact do you expect this conference to have?

We hope that this conference marks the beginning of a national dialogue on how best to support, stimulate, and nurture children in the first years of life. That means a national dialogue on how to provide high quality, affordable child care; how to make sure children have health insurance; and how to give them early educational opportunities. We also hope to send a simple message to parents and caregivers: that they should read to, sing to, play with and talk to children in the earliest years.

Q. What next steps is the Administration planning to build on the conference and to target early childhood development?

The Administration will continue to work to enhance early childhood development and strengthen families, by both reaching parents and caregivers with the best information on early development and by working on policies that support parents. For example, through the Early Childhood Development Kits that the President launched at the Conference, the Administration will continue to work to equip parents with the best information about their children's development. Additionally, the President announced at the Conference that the Administration will over the next few months consider ways to improve the quality, affordability and accessibility of child care in the United States and that he will convene a White House Conference on Child Care before the end of the year.

Q. How can the President reconcile his interest in early childhood development with the fact that he signed a welfare bill that will throw over a million children into poverty?

The President signed welfare reform because he believes that we need to end the cycle of dependency and help all Americans take responsibility for their own lives. The President

believes -- and all the evidence suggests -- that children who grow up in households and communities where there's work will be far better off in the long run than those who don't. The welfare bill dramatically expanded the availability of child care for people moving from welfare to work, while preserving health, safety and other quality standards for child care.

Q. Doesn't this new research mean that women should stay home?

No. What the research suggests is that we should support all parents, those who work outside the home and those who don't. There are terrifically engaged parents who go to work, and there are parents who stay home but don't know or chose to spend time talking, reading and singing to their children. A recent report indicates that children in quality child care settings do just as well as children whose mothers stay home. What's most important is that children are surrounded by loving, nurturing caregivers who understand the importance of the first few years of life.

Q. Doesn't this new research mean that we can stop investing in children once they reach the age of three?

No. It would be nonsensical to stop spending money on things like crime prevention, schools, and job training. But we now know that early childhood is a critical time in children's development. Investments early can reduce the need for investments later, and we ought to set our priorities with that in mind.

Q. Doesn't this new research suggest that people should not adopt older children?

No. We know that children develop and grow throughout their lifespan and that a warm and loving home will help children reach their full potential. The President and First Lady are very supportive of efforts to ensure that all children grow up in a permanent, loving homes and consistently speak about adoption -- in particular adoption of older children -- as a wonderful way to build families.

Q. Given the new research, do you see an enhanced role for government in the lives of young children?

There are certainly things that government can do. The President fought for Family and Medical Leave so that workers can take leave to care for a newborn or adopted child, and he has proposed to expand FMLA to allow people to take up to 24 hours off each year for things like finding child care or school activities. The President has also expanded Head Start and created Early Head Start, increased participation in WIC, and raised immunization rates. But parents are responsible for raising their children. The purpose of this conference is to share information about what we can all do to enhance our children's development and learning, and to highlight model community efforts that are working across the country to support children and families.

Q. Isn't this conference just about government intruding into the family?

No. Parents raise children but, like it or not, children are influenced by businesses, schools, the media, and the government, to take just a few examples. This purpose of this conference is to share information about what we can all do to enhance our children's development and learning. The conference will also highlight model community efforts that provide voluntary assistance to parents and children, although most of these local initiatives do so with financial support from the federal government.

[NOTE: DOJ supports the New Haven Police initiative; AVANCE receives funding from Early Head Start, Even Start, and Family Preservation; and The Ounce of Prevention receives Early Head Start and Head Start funding.]

Q. Will there be a report on the conference?

Yes. There will be a report coming out of the conference that digests the research and its practical applications, summarizes the recommendations of the panelists, and provides a resource guide for parents, caregivers, and policymakers. We are also putting together a web page devoted to the conference that will be accessible through the White House home page.

Q. Is this conference part of Rob Reiner's 0-3 campaign?

No. Rob Reiner is working on an important effort -- a national engagement campaign involving foundations, corporations and media to spread the word about the significance of the first few years of life. The President and the First Lady support his efforts and believe they complement the White House Conference, but the two are separate.

Q. Why didn't any Republicans participate in the Conference?

We invited the three Republican and three Democratic members of the NGA's Children's Task Force and asked both its co-chairs to participate in the afternoon roundtable discussion. None of the Republicans were able to attend. We also invited key Republican and Democratic Members of Congress, and one Republican was scheduled to attend.

Q. A number of Members of Congress have sent a letter to the President urging him to devote at least one-third of the discussion to the development of the brains of fetuses. Did you do this?

Brain development before birth is a relevant topic. In fact, one of the panelists has done extensive work in this area, and it was discussed at the conference.

QUESTIONS ON POLICY INITIATIVES

Q. The President announced that there is going to be a White House conference on child care. What will it do?

At the conference, the President and First Lady spoke about the need for an honest discussion about child care in this country. The White House conference on child care will provide a venue for this discussion and will explore ways to improve our child care system to work better for all the American families who rely on it.

Department of Defense

Q. You are holding the military child care system up as a model. Why is it so good?

The military child care system is noted for its high quality standards, including a high percentage of accredited centers; a strong oversight and enforcement system, that includes a 1-800 hot line for parents to report concerns; mandatory training for child care providers; relatively generous wages and benefits tied to continued training and education; a system of linking up and providing needed support to individual home care providers; and sufficient funding to make quality child care affordable.

Q. Isn't the military child care system so good because the military spends so much to fund it?

Experts agree that the military child care system is the best in the country for a number of reasons. It is true that the military recognizes that quality child care costs more than most parents can afford to pay and, therefore, the Department of Defense provides sufficient funding so that parents can afford the fees.

[NOTE: The military pays 50% of child care costs with appropriated funds. Parents pay according to a sliding scale based on income. Last year the average weekly fee was \$65 per week.]

In addition, the military child care system is noted for its high quality standards, including a high percentage of accredited centers; a strong oversight and enforcement system, that includes a 1-800 hot line for parents to report concerns; mandatory training for child care providers; relatively generous wages and benefits tied to continued training and education; and a system of linking up and providing needed support to individual home care providers.

Q. What are you doing to ensure that all Americans have access to affordable child care?

The President has proposed a \$500 per child tax credit, expanded the Earned Income Tax Credit

to help working families with children and, in the welfare reform law, increased federal funding for child care by \$1 billion, providing services for over 660,000 children -- 65% of whom are under 5 years old.

Q. Why should the military use their resources to help civilian child care providers?

There's no doubt that the military's first priority is protecting the national security and supporting its own service members. This initiative will not undermine that mission. Much of this can be done without a significant expenditure of dollars. One piece of evidence that that is true is that the military is already reaching out to civilian child care providers in their communities, though in a less comprehensive, coordinated way. This initiative will also benefit the military by providing workers for its child care centers and by increasing the number of available spaces.

Health Care

Q. Many Congressional Republicans say they are opposed to new entitlements. How are you going to convince them to expand health care coverage?

The President's children's health proposal is not a new entitlement, but a capped program which gives states the flexibility to design innovative ways to extend health coverage to uninsured children. This carefully targeted investment has been fully paid for in the President's balanced budget. Moreover, we have seen enormous interest from both Republicans and Democrats in expanding health care for children, and we are optimistic that we will be able to pass a children's health bill this year.

Q. Couldn't you reach these children more effectively through an existing mechanism such as the Medicaid program, the tax code, or an existing discretionary program?

The President wants to pass bipartisan legislation that will extend health care coverage to up to five million uninsured children. He is willing to consider any ideas that will enable us to reach this goal.

Q. Is it really worth cutting \$22 billion from Medicaid and implementing a per capita cap just to expand coverage to a few more children?

First of all, the President has proposed \$7 billion in net savings in Medicaid, which represents a reduction of about 1% off of the current Medicaid baseline over the next five years. Also, the President's plan to expand coverage to more children is not paid for solely from our savings in Medicaid. Moreover, because under a per capita cap States would get more dollars when they cover additional children and because children are relatively inexpensive to cover, we believe that this policy may well provide States with positive incentives to extend health care coverage to more children.

Q. Does the President support the Kennedy-Hatch children's health care bill which finances children's health care expansions by increasing the tobacco tax?

First of all, the President is delighted that there is so much bipartisan interest in expanding health coverage to children, and he will continue to work with Senators Kennedy and Hatch and others in Congress to pass a balanced budget this year that extends health care coverage to more uninsured children.

While the Hatch-Kennedy bill pays for new expansions by increasing the tobacco tax, the President has a proposal which would expand coverage to millions of additional children and is paid for in the context of his balanced budget plan. Regardless of the source of financing, assuring a significant commitment for children's health care will continue to be a top priority for the President.

That being said, studies of State excise tax increases indicate that they can have significant public health benefits, particularly for children and adolescents, because the increased cost can discourage them from starting and continuing to smoke.

Q. The Hatch-Kennedy children's health coverage bill seems to be losing support even by some of its cosponsors because of the tobacco tax financing. Are you concerned about these recent developments?

No piece of legislation in this town experiences smooth sailing throughout the legislative process. The President continues to be very encouraged by the strong bipartisan support for an investment in children's health coverage. In addition to the Hatch-Kennedy bill, a number of others in Congress are coming forward with proposals to expand children's health insurance. Just this week, Nancy Johnson joined the list of Republicans who have put forth proposals on to expand children's health care coverage. And we expect there will be many more. This should be a major priority for this Congress, and it is a top priority for the President.

Safe Start

Q. What is Safe Start?

Safe Start is a program designed to change the way law enforcement officers respond to children who are the victims of or witnesses to violence. The program will provide training on early childhood development to community police officers, prosecutors, probation and parole officers, school personnel and mental health providers. It prepares the people on the frontline to respond better to the needs of children who have been exposed to violence, and to intervene in time to prevent any further evidence.

Q. How much will this program cost?

In fiscal year 1997, the Department of Justice will spend \$700,000 of already appropriated funds on the program.

Q. How many individuals and communities will be reached by Safe Start?

Safe Start builds on a program that is already in place. In addition to providing additional intensive training and technical assistance to the four communities already taking part in the program, the Department of Justice will involve four additional communities and will provide training on early childhood development to 20,000 law enforcement and other professionals in more than 50 communities.

Q. Is President Clinton trying to turn police officers into social workers?

No. New Haven Police Chief Wearing -- part of the panel at today's conference -- is a cop's cop, who rose up the ranks from detective to police chief. He will tell you that his department's partnership with the Yale Child Study Center helps stop the cycle of violence by providing early intervention to children who are exposed to violence and who, if left untreated, would be more likely to become violent offenders themselves.

Early Head Start

Q. Aren't many more children eligible for Early Head Start than are being served?

We estimate that nearly 3 million children ages 0 to 3 are eligible for Early Head Start while only 23,000 are currently served. However, Early Head Start is a very new program. The first Early Head Start grants were awarded in October 1995. The President's 1998 budget would nearly double the number of children and families served, from 18,000 in fiscal year 1995 to 35,000 in fiscal year 1998. The President is committed to continuing to support this program.

Q. Have the organizations who will receive this new funding been selected?

No. Today, we are announcing a competition for this funding. The Department of Health and Human Services expect to announce the new grantees in September.

Ready*Set*Read Kits

Q. How were the kits developed?

Fifty reading, literacy and early childhood groups worked with the Department of Education on the basic design for the kits. The materials were then developed by researchers from the Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center, and finally a working group of families, caregivers and early childhood administrators reviewed and commented on them.

Q. How and when will these kits be distributed?

In May, kits will be mailed to families served by early childhood programs across the country like Even Start, Foster Grandparents, and Learn and Serve Early Childhood Programs. It will also be available to the public through the Department of Education's toll-free number at 1-800-USA-LEARN and will be available on the Internet through the Department of Education's home page. The kits are available in Spanish and English.



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

cc EK
NR
JS

March 12, 1997

MEMORANDUM TO PAULINE ABERNATHY

FROM: Carol H. Rasco

SUBJ: Early Childhood Components of America Reads

Jer -
As promised
- Pauline

EARLY CHILDHOOD KIT

Per your request I am sending a summary regarding the America Reads Challenge Early Childhood Kits for Families and Caregivers: Ready*Set*Read. Included is information about the development of the kit, the components included in the kit, the current distribution plan and activities surrounding the release of the materials which are not finalized pending a decision from The White House regarding the release being scheduled for the April 17 conference. We have also included a page about additional distribution should more funds be made available by outside sources.

We are also discussing with various organizations the potential incorporation of some of the Kit's components into their own materials for distribution. Examples could include: WIC produces a yearly calendar featuring nutrition news for parents -- they might incorporate the activities from this calendar; or the Newspaper Publishers might encourage local papers (especially the small weeklies around the country and smaller daily papers) to publish the calendar each month. The Early Childhood Working Group will work to maximize opportunities like these.

SATELLITE TOWN MEETINGS

In addition, we have a monthly Department of Education Satellite Town Meeting presided over by the Secretary scheduled for June 20 (they are held monthly on the third Tuesday) at 8 p.m. on the topic of Early Childhood. Development of the format and content is underway but we hope to base it somewhat on the Kit discussed above. The Early Childhood Working Group of America Reads will be working on the show; that group is headed by Libby Doggett from the Department of Education and Joan Lombardi of HHS. Ideas under discussion:

- The regional reps for the Department of Education (and very likely those of HHS) work to set up viewing sites around the country where parents and caregivers meet together to view the show and hold a follow up discussion. (We're thinking on the West Coast the show would be a great time for parents to stay at the day care as they pick up their children and have a sandwich supper.)
- Public broadcasting stations around the country also pick these shows up and we would work to increase this number.

- An extensive press packet is prepared with sample op-ed's, ideas for other media outreach, etc. and sent to all downlink sites.
- Congressional members who will be in session here are invited along with appropriate Cabinet members to do radio interviews pre-and post-meeting.

OTHER EVENTS

I had mentioned to you I would include the large Parents As Teachers (PAT) Annual Meeting in St. Louis as a possible follow up activity for one of the principals. However, I do note for you that meeting is the same weekend as the Nashville Family Reunion hosted by Vice President and Mrs. Gore (June 22-23 is the Family Reunion, PAT is June 22-24). I am going from Nashville to St. Louis that Monday evening to do a workshop on America Reads on Tuesday morning at PAT.

Please note also on the accompanying document referring to the Early Childhood Kit that the National Center for Family Literacy will hold its National Conference in Louisville, Kentucky April 20 and 21; it, as noted, is the largest annual meeting of administrators and providers of literacy programs specializing in early childhood.

I hope this is helpful information and that you will call should you need additional information.

AMERICA READS CHALLENGE

EARLY CHILDHOOD KITS FOR FAMILIES AND CAREGIVERS: READY*SET*READ

The **AMERICA READS CHALLENGE EARLY CHILDHOOD KITS** were developed by early childhood researchers from the Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center through a joint project of the U. S. Department of Health and Human Service (Head Start Office and Child Care Bureau) and the Corporation for National Service, coordinated by the U. S. Department of Education. The purpose of the two early childhood kits for families and caregivers of young children (birth through age 5) is to help them develop and improve their children's language skills.

How Were the Kits Developed?

Sponsors of the **AMERICA READS CHALLENGE: READ*WRITE*NOW!** initiative -- including early childhood providers, family members, representatives from early childhood literacy organizations, researchers, and businesses -- identified the need and provided the basic design for these easy-to-read, research-based kits that contain activities, ideas, and information for families and caregivers of young children. Once the materials were developed by researchers, a focus group of families, caregivers, and early childhood administrators reviewed and commented upon the materials and graphics for public use. The kits can be used with all children, including those with disabilities.

What Is Included In Each Kit?

The **AMERICA READS CHALLENGE EARLY CHILDHOOD KITS FOR FAMILIES AND CAREGIVERS** include the following materials:

- **READY ★ SET ★ READ For Families:** An activities booklet for families of children from birth through age 5, with ideas for families to do with their children every day to help them learn about language.
- **READY ★ SET ★ READ For Caregivers:** An activities booklet for caregivers of children from birth through age 5, filled with ideas for activities that caregivers can do with children every day to help them learn about language.
- **READY ★ SET ★ READ Calendar for Families and Caregivers:** Day-to-day activities for families and caregivers to do with young children during 1997-1998.
- **READY ★ SET ★ READ Developmental Growth Chart for Families and Caregivers:** A growth chart for families and caregivers that identifies language skills that many children can perform during each growth period, describes when families should request the help of a professional, and provides simple activities to help children grow in language for each growth period.

Who Will These Kits Be Distributed To?

Only limited funding is available to send the EARLY CHILDHOOD KITS to families and caregivers of children in Even Start and Corporation for National Service early childhood programs. The Department of Education will fund the distribution of 60,000 English and Spanish versions of the kits for Even Start programs. The Department intends to fund an additional 100,000 copies for the Department's 1-800-USA-LEARN tollfree number to fill public requests for the kits. The Corporation for National Service will fund 4,000 copies for Corporation-supported early childhood programs. They are donating an additional 5,000 copies for the Department of Education's tollfree number.

Additional funding will be needed if the kits are to be sent to Head Start programs, pediatrician's offices, public day care programs for young children, and public school prekindergarten and kindergarten programs. See the attached distribution plan for a detailed proposal.

Additionally, the public may obtain copies of all of these materials on the Internet through the U. S. Department of Education's home page <<http://www.ed.gov>>.

What Activities Are Planned for the Release of the EARLY CHILDHOOD KITS?

We propose that the EARLY CHILDHOOD KITS be formally announced and released at the White House Early Learning Conference in April, 1997.

On April 20 and 21, Carol Rasco, Director of the AMERICA READS CHALLENGE will announce the availability of the kits at the National Center for Family Literacy National Conference in Louisville, Kentucky -- the largest annual meeting of administrators and providers of literacy programs specializing in early childhood.

DISTRIBUTION AND PUBLICATION PLAN FOR THE EARLY CHILDHOOD KIT

DISTRIBUTION:	NUMBER OF COPIES:	FUNDING:	TARGETS:
<i>Currently Funded</i>			
EvenStart	48,000 color English	48,000 copies x \$1.00 = \$48,000	Mailed to EvenStart families and providers
	11,000 color Spanish	11,000 copies x \$1.00 = \$11,000	Mailed to EvenStart families and providers upon request
	total: 59,000 copies	total: \$59,000	
Corporation for National Service Early Childhood Projects	4,000 CNS facilities x 1 copy = 4,000 copies	4,000 copies x \$1.00 = \$4,000	Mailed to AmeriCorp, Foster Grandparents, RSVP, and Learn and Serve Early Childhood Programs
	5,000 copies	5,000 copies x \$1.00 = \$5,000	Mailed to 1-800-USA-LEARN callers upon request.
	total: 9,000 copies	total: \$9,000	
U. S. Department of Education*	100,000 copies	\$100,000	Mailed to 1-800-USA-LEARN callers upon request.
TOTAL	168,000	\$168,000	
*Intended funding			

<i>Proposed Funding</i>			
HeadStart	2,500 facilities x 32 copies (30 family, 2 caregiver) = 80,000 copies	80,000 copies x \$1.00 = \$80,000	Mailed to 2,500 HeadStart centers
Childcare Bureau	20,000 facilities x 4 copies (2 family, 2 caregiver) = 80,000 copies total: 160,000	80,000 copies x \$1.00 = \$80,000 total: \$160,000	Mailed to 20,000 Child Care Bureaus
Pediatricians	50,000 pediatricians x 11 copies (10 family, 1 caregiver) = 550,000 copies	550,000 copies x \$1.00 = \$550,000	Mailed to pediatric offices
Public Pre-K and Kindergarten Facilities	26,160 facilities x 6 copies (5 family, 1 caregiver) = 156,960 copies	156,960 copies x \$1.00 = \$156,960	Mailed to pre-k and kindergarten public school teachers
Public Daycare Centers	66,278 facilities x 6 copies (5 family, 1 caregiver) = 397,668 copies	397,668 copies x \$1.00 = \$397,668	Mailed to public daycare directors
TOTAL	1,264,628 copies	\$1,264,628	
GRAND TOTAL	1,432,628 copies	\$1,432,628	

EARLY CHILDHOOD KIT

PROPOSED RECOMMENDATIONS (based on conversations internally and with Jen Klein)

- We announce the early childhood kit at the WH Conference on April 17.
- We ensure that every participant at the White House (including press) and as many participants at satellite downlinks as possible have a copy of the kit. (NOTE: BIG PROBLEM HERE IS DOWNLINK SITES, AND THIS MAY NOT BE POSSIBLE.)
- We announce that the kit will be available beginning on a date to be determined; i.e. May 1st. (This way, we will not encounter as much confusion about different groups of people having access prior to others, and we will have more time to find sponsor(s) and to produce the kit. The only people who will have received the kit are those attending the conference -- either at the White House or at a downlink site.)
- We secure sponsors for the kit BEFORE the WH Conference on April 17 so that we are sure we can announce it and who will receive it.

See attached breakdown of what is currently-funded, and what we would like to fund in addition.

PROBLEMS/OTHER ISSUES TO NOTE

- **April 17:** We currently do not know how many satellite downlink sites there will be, nor do we know how many participants will attend each. Cabinet Affairs has JUST begun to organize these. Options for preparing for this piece:
 1. Given how late they are getting started, it is not feasible that we ask coordinators in the field to take camera-ready copy for local reproduction.
 2. If we decide to reproduce a quantity estimated to be sufficient for distribution -- we would need to order the black/white camera ready NOW -- paid for with OERI funds because this is the only available money -- and give it to a printer outside of the government because they will do a faster job. If we give it to a printer outside of the government, then the funds for the actual printing must also come from outside the government. It takes 4 days to get the black/white camera-ready; then up to one week to do the print job depending on quantity; then we would need to drop-ship the kits to each site in time for the 17th. In other words, we would need to know right away about funding for this piece.

3. If we cannot manage to come up with an estimate of people at sites or with the funding necessary in time to make the deadline for drop-shipping, we could send one kit to each downlink site as a model. Perhaps we could have a sign up sheet there for individuals who want to request the kit; requests would be filled by the 1/800 #.

- **Funding:** Finding a sponsor may be difficult -- although not impossible given the potentially high profile of the kit -- but certainly it will be quite difficult to do for the such short notice required for the downlink sites.

Johnson & Johnson is likely funding the conference report. (Note: Naomi -- you should just continue to talk directly to the White House about this.) Other businesses involved in the conference, but who still might be willing to contribute, are: IBM and Kellogg's. Susan: I left a message with Jen about Lamaz and haven't heard back. If I don't hear first thing tomorrow, you should certainly get back to them. Sorry to keep you waiting.

CURRENT SCHEDULE/QUANTITIES FOR DISTRIBUTIONDATES READY

April 7: 1000 kits for the White House conference
(Jen Klein is checking on how many they actually need there to cover audience and press.)

April 28: 59,000 Even Start kits will be ready and will be mailed to Even Start families
(There will be some leftover; Susan T-H is determining approximately how many)

May 1: 77,000 kits ready for the Learning Center (1/800 #)

May 1: GPO will have as many kits as fit demand available for sale for \$5. The White House wants to ensure that the 1/800 # does not refer people to GPO until they run out of kits.

DATE??? 9,000 kits will be mailed to AmeriCorp, Foster Grandparents, RSVP, and Learn and Serve Early Childhood Programs

CURRENTLY NOT FUNDED, BUT RECOMMENDEDDATES TO AIM FOR

May 1: Kits in Spanish
LULAC has expressed strong interest; waiting for word to Susan T-H or Mario Moreno to confirm
QUANTITY? DATE READY? HOW DISTRIBUTED?

April 14: Kits for Downlink Sites
We need external funding for this asap.
Jen Klein is getting an estimate.

May: HeadStart Facilities
80,000 copies
WHAT ABOUT HEAD START FAMILIES?

May: Childcare Bureau
80,000 copies

May: Public Pre-K and K Facilities
157,000

May: Public Daycare Centers
400,000

AMERICA READS CHALLENGE

READY★SET★READ

FOR FAMILIES

Early Childhood Language Activities
for Children from Birth through Age Five



A Joint Project of the Corporation for National Service,
the U.S. Department of Education, and
the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Corporation for National Service
Harris P. Wofford
Chief Executive Officer

U.S. Department of Education
Richard W. Riley
Secretary

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Donna E. Shalala
Secretary

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This booklet for families of children from birth through age five was developed by the AmeriCorps Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center as a project of the Corporation for National Service; the U.S. Department of Education; and the Child Care Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, Administration for Children and Families of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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Others who assisted in the production of this booklet include Anne Goldstein, Director, National Child Care Information Center; Jewel Bazillo-Bellegarde, Corporation for National Service; and Joan Lombardi, Jennifer Chang, and Lillian Sugarman of the Child Care Bureau.

We also wish to acknowledge the graphic design work of Eve Guanan and Loren Holtkamp of Books and Beyond, with production oversight by Ellie Topolovac and Sue Holtkamp of Books and Beyond.

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Dear Family Member:

Welcome to **READY★SET★READ**, an **AMERICA READS CHALLENGE** booklet that is filled with activities and ideas that you can use to help your young children learn about language. Families¹ are their children's first teachers. As a family member you begin teaching your babies about language as you welcome them into the world with smiles and caring words. You respond to your children's coos, babbles, early words, and simple sentences. By the time your children are preschoolers, they know a lot about language. You have spent many hours listening, talking, reading, and writing with them.

Most of the activities in **READY★SET★READ** are simple to do with materials found in your home or at the library. The activities can be added to your life at home as you and your children play, work, and grow together.

The activities are presented for four age groups:

- **Young Babies** (Birth to 8 months)
- **Crawlers and Walkers** (8 to 18 months)
- **Toddlers** (18 to 36 months)
- **Preschoolers** (3 to 5 years)

The ideas for one age group may also work for a younger or older child. Using what you know about your child's skills and interests can help you decide which activities to use. You can read the section for one age group now and save the others for later.

Children learn about language when their families:

- Listen and talk with their children a lot
- Read out loud to their children every day
- Keep reading and writing materials where children can reach them on their own
- Show children how they use reading and writing to learn, have fun, and get jobs done

Many children are early readers because they have learned from their families that reading and writing are worthwhile and useful activities.

On the next page are some simple tips to help you teach your young children about listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These basic, daily activities can make a difference in your child's language growth.

¹In this booklet "families" refers to all of the adults who have nurturing relationships with a child--a mother, father, grandparent, other relative, or close friend.

TIPS FOR FAMILIES AS THEIR CHILDREN'S FIRST TEACHER

- ☐ Talk with and listen to your children as you play and do daily activities together.
- ☐ Read with your children at a regular time every day and when they ask you.
- ☐ Take toddlers and preschoolers to the library so that they can choose books to read at home. Find out about your library's special books and services.
- ☐ Create a special place in your home for your children to read and write.
- ☐ Keep books and other reading materials where children can reach them. Add new books often.
- ☐ Keep writing materials such as washable, nontoxic crayons and markers, paints and brushes, and different kinds of paper where your children can reach them.
- ☐ Take books and writing materials for your children with you whenever you leave home, so that they can read or write at the doctor's office, on the bus, and in the car.
- ☐ Show your children how you read and write every day to have fun and to get things done.
- ☐ Point out to your children the printed words in your home and in the community.
- ☐ Encourage your children to do things for themselves when they are ready. Let them feed and dress themselves, and clean up after themselves even if these tasks take more time and are not done perfectly.

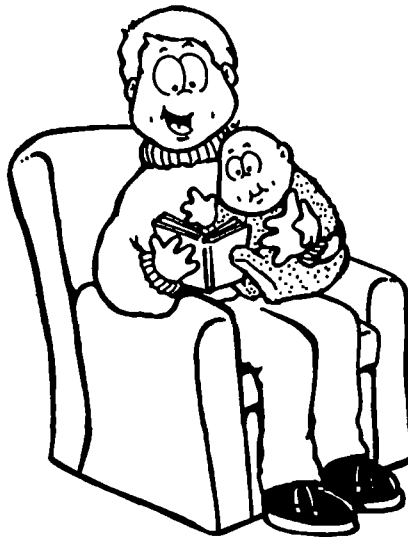
GETTING TO KNOW YOU:

**ACTIVITIES
FOR
YOUNG
BABIES**

(Birth to 8 Months Old)

WHAT DO YOUNG BABIES DO?

- ☐ Cry, make other sounds, and move their bodies.
- ☐ Listen and respond to the sounds and voices around them.
- ☐ Coo, gurgle, laugh, and babble to themselves and others.
- ☐ Enjoy listening to stories.
- ☐ Smile when people smile at them.
- ☐ Respond to their names.
- ☐ Take turns while singing and playing with another person.
- ☐ Pick up objects with their fingers and thumbs.
- ☐ Move objects from one hand to the other.

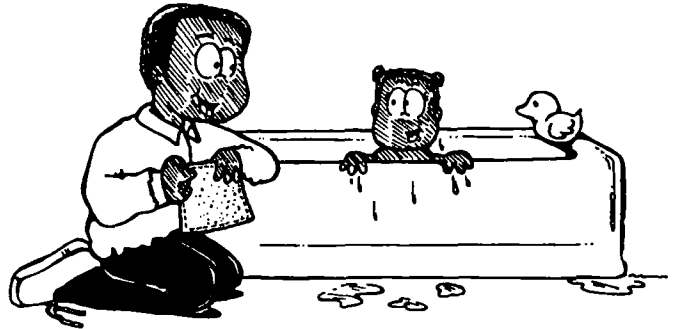


HOW DO YOUNG BABIES LEARN?

Katie is in the bathtub splashing in the water with both hands. Her father sits on the floor next to the tub making sure she is safe. "Katie, Katie," he says as he picks up a washcloth. "Are you ready to play our special game?"

Katie looks up and sees her father's smiling face. She smiles at him and laughs. He says, "Let's play Peek-a-Boo," and puts a washcloth in front of his face. Katie reaches out and pats the top of his head.

Her father says, "Peek-a-Boo, Katie, I can't see you." He lowers the washcloth so his eyes are no longer covered. Katie squeals with delight. He covers his eyes again and says, "Peek-a-Boo, Katie, I still can't see you."



Katie's father holds the washcloth out toward her, saying, "Your turn, Katie." She takes the washcloth from his hand and puts it in front of her face. Her father says, "Where's Katie?"

Katie drops the washcloth in the water and splashes with her hands. She babbles to her father, "Dadadada. Babababa." He says, "I think you're saying that you're tired of playing Peek-a-Boo. Let's play with your sponges."

Like many young babies, Katie is learning about language:

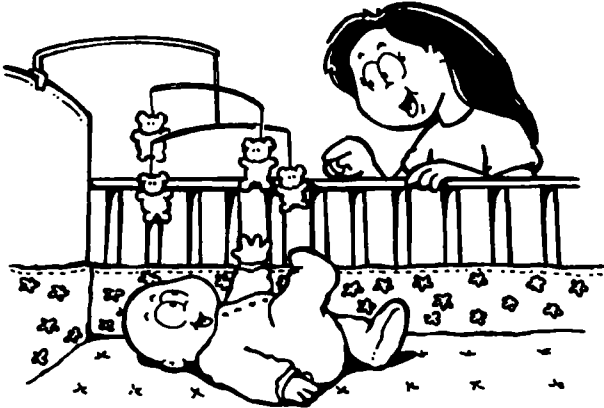
- ☐ She knows that it's fun to play with another person.
- ☐ She looks up when her father says her name.
- ☐ She smiles when her father smiles at her.

Katie's father helps her learn about language:

- ☐ He talks with her during a daily activity--bathtime.
- ☐ He says her name again and again so that she will learn to recognize it.
- ☐ He takes several turns in their game and then encourages her to take a turn.
- ☐ He responds to her babbles as if he knows what she is saying.

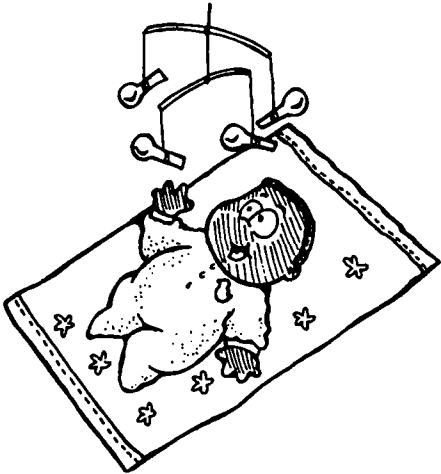
ACTIVITIES AND IDEAS FOR YOUNG BABIES

AGE	ACTIVITIES
YOUNG BABIES: BIRTH TO 8 MONTHS OLD	Listening and Talking Young babies make sounds and move their bodies. • Listen and talk to your baby throughout the day. Get to know the meaning of your baby's cries and gestures. Listen to the sounds the baby makes and watch the way the baby's body moves. • Take your time while feeding, diapering, and bathing your baby. Sing songs, say nursery rhymes, and smile and coo back at the baby's smiles and coos. In this way your baby will learn that you think what he or she says is important and that people take turns when talking with each other. How to help your baby's caregiver: Tell your caregiver how your baby communicates with the family. Explain the meaning of your baby's cries, babbles, gestures, and words. Ask the caregiver to tell you how your baby expresses his or her wants and needs.

AGE	ACTIVITIES
YOUNG BABIES: BIRTH TO 8 MONTHS OLD	Young babies listen to the sounds and voices around them. • Talk to your baby about what you both are doing and what he or she sees and hears. "I see you looking at your mobile. I'll touch it gently to make the faces move back and forth." • Tell your baby through your words and actions how much he or she is loved and valued. • Give your baby simple directions with words and gestures. Point, look toward something, or hold out your hand while talking to the baby. Ask, "Are you hot?" Then, lift up your arms and say, "Please lift up your arms so I can take off your sweater." 

AGE	ACTIVITIES
YOUNG BABIES: BIRTH TO 8 MONTHS OLD	Reading Young babies like being close to their families. • Many people say you should start reading to your baby at birth. Even though your baby doesn't understand your words, he or she loves to sit on your lap, hear your voice, and have special time with just you. You will feel relaxed and the baby will learn to think of reading as a pleasant activity. • Let your baby set the pace for your reading times. When the baby loses interest in reading, play a game, or do something else together. How to help your baby's caregiver: Tell your caregiver about your baby's favorite books and show your caregiver the words to songs and rhymes in your home language, so that your baby can feel secure at home and at child care. Young babies use all their senses to learn. • Babies are likely to crumple, shake, and chew books just as they do with other things. Look for soft cloth or vinyl books that can be washed. • Choose books with simple, large pictures or designs set against a solid background on each page. Ask your librarian to suggest books for babies, and look for children's books in good condition at yard sales and neighborhood bazaars. 

AGE	ACTIVITIES
YOUNG BABIES: BIRTH TO 8 MONTHS OLD	Developing Muscles For Writing Young babies are learning to use their hands and fingers. • Help your baby develop hand and finger muscles. Place a simple rattle in your 3-month-old baby's hand. Hold out a sponge for your 5-month-old to grab. Give your 8-month-old a piece of paper to crumple. • Encourage your baby when he or she tries to do things such as pulling off socks and holding a bottle while sitting in your lap. • Play with your baby. Shake a rattle then hand it to the baby to have a turn shaking it. Hold out your hand so that the baby can hand the rattle back to you. How to help your baby's caregiver: Ask your caregiver what toys and materials your baby plays with at child care. Discuss often the new things your baby is learning to do without help at home and at child care.

AGE	ACTIVITIES
YOUNG BABIES: BIRTH TO 8 MONTHS OLD	Young babies are learning that they can make things happen. • Watch your baby to see what he or she likes to do. Provide play materials that match the baby's skills and interests. Offer toys the baby can use to make noise, such as plastic keys on a ring to hold and shake, soft toys that squeak when squeezed, a wooden spoon to hold and bang on the floor. • A cradle gym tied to a crib or playpen will encourage your baby to reach out and try to touch the items and make them move. Remove the cradle gym when the baby gets strong enough to pull it down. 

ENJOYING OUR COMPANY:

**ACTIVITIES
FOR
CRAWLERS AND WALKERS**

(8 to 18 Months Old)

WHAT DO CRAWLERS AND WALKERS DO?

- ☐ Use sounds and gestures to say hello or get attention.
- ☐ Point at things they want.
- ☐ Say a few simple words.
- ☐ Like rhymes and simple songs.
- ☐ Enjoy reading with a favorite person.
- ☐ Turn the pages in sturdy cardboard books.
- ☐ Put objects such as nesting cups inside each other.
- ☐ Fill containers with water or small objects, then dump them out.
- ☐ Hold large crayons and make marks on paper.



HOW DO CRAWLERS AND WALKERS LEARN?

Marcus picks up a book with cardboard pages and a duck on the cover. He puts the book in his mouth for a moment, then waves it in the air. Marcus looks at his big sister, Maria, and makes noises that sound a lot like words. Maria says, "Do you want to read? Bring the book to me. We can read together."

With book in hand, Marcus crawls to Maria. She lifts Marcus into her lap and holds the book so that he can see it. She points to the duck on the cover, "That's a duck. Let's see what's inside."



Marcus turns the page. He pats the picture and says something that sounds like words. "That's right," says Maria. "The baby is in the bathtub."

After looking at a few more pages, Marcus squirms and wiggles. "Okay," says Maria. "Have you read enough? Let me help you down." She puts Marcus on the floor and he crawls away.

Like many other crawlers and walkers, Marcus is learning about language:

- ☐ He knows that people will respond to his sounds and actions.
- ☐ He thinks it's fun to look at books with another person.
- ☐ He knows how to wait for his turn while talking and reading with his sister.

Marcus's sister, Maria, helps him learn about language:

- ☐ She responds to his sounds and actions as if he were saying words.
- ☐ She lets him turn the pages of the book.
- ☐ She talks to him about what he seems to be saying.
- ☐ She lets him find something else to do when he has lost interest in reading.

ACTIVITIES AND IDEAS FOR CRAWLERS AND WALKERS

AGE	ACTIVITIES
CRAWLERS AND WALKERS: 8 TO 18 MONTHS OLD	Listening and Talking Crawlers and walkers are learning that it's fun to be with other people. • Help your baby learn about taking turns the way people do when they talk with each other. Sing songs and play games such as Peek-a-Boo, hiding the toy under the blanket, and handing objects back and forth. At first you may have to take more turns than the baby does. • When your baby babbles, talk back. Make the same sounds the baby makes or teach new ones. • Respond when your baby wants to play a familiar game: "Oh good, you brought me the ball. Let's sit down and roll it on the carpet." Crawlers and walkers use gestures and actions to "talk" to you. • Respond when your baby shakes his or her head, points to something out of reach, or lifts his or her arms. Talk about what the baby seems to want to say. "Do you want to get out of my lap? Here's a wet cloth so you can wipe your hands." • Name the things your baby points to. "That's a <i>muffin</i>. Do you want a muffin?" Say the words for feelings and actions. "Aunt Nikki is <i>funny</i>, isn't she?" "I saw you <i>climb up</i> the stairs." How to help your baby's caregiver: Tell the caregiver about the gestures your baby uses to ask questions, make requests, say hello, and get someone's attention. Ask the caregiver to tell you the words and phrases your baby seems to understand.

AGE	ACTIVITIES
CRAWLERS AND WALKERS: 8 TO 18 MONTHS OLD	Crawlers and walkers learn to say a few words. • Show your excitement when your baby begins to talk. Talk with your baby about the names of objects, actions, and feelings. • Look at and listen to things together with your baby. Talk about what you see and hear. "See the bird. She's flying up to her nest in the tree. Do you hear the truck? I'll lift you up to the window so you can see it." • Listen carefully to your baby's tone of voice. The baby may use the same word to mean different things. For example: Alphonso stands at the window looking outside. He asks, "Sandy?" Grandma says what she thinks Alphonso means, "Where did Sandy go?" Then Grandma answers his question, "Sandy went outside." • Let your baby know that you think books and reading are fun. Comment when you see your baby "reading." "Is the monkey in your book taking a bath? Does he splash in the water the way you do?" 

AGE	ACTIVITIES
CRAWLERS AND WALKERS: 8 TO 18 MONTHS OLD	Reading Crawlers and walkers can join in during story times. • Read with your baby every day. Babies enjoy short, simple stories, rhymes, and songs. Read the same books over and over, and also read new ones. Because your baby probably won't pay attention for long, it's best to read for a short while many times during the day. • Point to the pictures and name the objects. Ask your baby to point and name things, too. Smile, change your tone of voice, nod, and make faces when you read. Your baby will have fun copying your words and actions. • Let your baby choose the books and set the pace for reading. Read books with thick, cardboard pages so that the baby can turn the pages. You don't have to look at every page, read the whole page, or finish the book at one sitting. How to help your baby's caregiver: Volunteer to help the caregiver make a book about the things babies do at child care. Paste photographs or simple drawings on cardboard, cover with clear adhesive paper, punch holes in the cover and finished pages, and bind with a piece of string. Make new books during the year. Crawlers and walkers like to look at books on their own. • Provide books that appeal to your baby. Babies may like books with simple drawings and photographs of familiar objects, animals, and scenes from daily life such as taking a bath, eating, or playing outdoors. • Store cardboard, cloth, and plastic books on low, open shelves along with other safe toys. Encourage your baby to choose a book to look at and help your baby return it to the shelf afterwards.

AGE	ACTIVITIES
CRAWLERS AND WALKERS: 8 TO 18 MONTHS OLD	Developing Muscles For Writing Crawlers and walkers can use their fingers, thumbs, and hands. • When your baby learns to move a bottle or a toy from one hand to the other, hand a toy to the baby and say, "Now give it back to me." • Provide toys and household items that the baby can put together and take apart, fit inside each other, or fill and empty (e.g., large plastic snap beads, a set of plastic measuring cups, or a box filled with bean bags). • Encourage your baby's independence. When your baby can pick up small objects with the index finger and thumb, offer finger foods such as pieces of banana. Grasping food will build the muscles in the baby's hands and fingers. Your baby will feel good about doing things without help. Allow the baby to pull off socks and shoes, and give the baby a spoon to help feed him- or herself. How to help your baby's caregiver: Ask the caregiver to suggest some inexpensive household items that are safe play materials for crawlers and walkers. 

AGE	ACTIVITIES
CRAWLERS AND WALKERS: 8 TO 18 MONTHS OLD	Crawlers and walkers can scribble with crayons and markers. • Give your baby large, nontoxic crayons and large pieces of scrap paper such as brown paper bags from the grocery store. At first, babies often put the crayons in their mouths, but show your baby how to use the crayons to make marks on paper. • Introduce large, nontoxic markers when your baby has learned to keep crayons out of the mouth most of the time. 

TALKING ABOUT ME:

**ACTIVITIES
FOR
TODDLERS**

(18 to 36 Months Old)

WHAT DO TODDLERS DO?

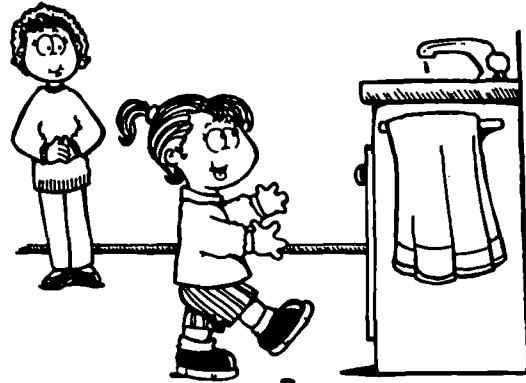
- ☐ Learn new words every day.
- ☐ Speak using groups of words ("Ned go out").
- ☐ Take turns while talking with people.
- ☐ Ask many questions ("What that?").
- ☐ Name objects in picture books ("Ball").
- ☐ Follow two-part directions ("Pick up the socks and put them in the basket.").
- ☐ Say "no" and "not."
- ☐ Copy adult voices and actions.
- ☐ Follow simple stories.
- ☐ Look at books on their own.
- ☐ Join in when a book has rhymes and repeated words.
- ☐ Scribble with crayons and washable markers.



HOW DO TODDLERS LEARN?

Rosa tugs on Ms. Vega's arm and says, "Wet." Ms. Vega says, "Your diaper is wet. Let's go change it."

Rosa lies down on the changing table. Ms. Vega washes her hands and tells Rosa what she is doing. "I'm washing away all the germs so you will stay healthy. I'm taking off your shorts. They're red, like your sneakers." Rosa says, "Red sneakers."



Ms. Vega takes a diaper from the shelf. She replaces Rosa's wet diaper with a dry one. "All done," says Ms. Vega. "Wash hands?" asks Rosa. "Yes," says Ms. Vega, "let's wash our hands."

Rosa heads for the sink, singing. "This way, wash hands, wash hands, wash hands." Ms. Vega sings along, then says, "Rosa, you learned a new song to sing." "Sing song," says Rosa.

Like many toddlers, Rosa is learning about language:

- ☐ She communicates her needs using groups of words.
- ☐ She repeats words she hears adults speak.
- ☐ She learns a simple song.
- ☐ She asks questions.
- ☐ She answers questions.

Rosa's caregiver helps her learn about language:

- ☐ She responds to Rosa's request by answering with a group of words.
- ☐ She describes what she is doing and names a color--red.
- ☐ She asks a simple question that Rosa knows how to answer.
- ☐ She sings with Rosa, then congratulates her on learning the song.

ACTIVITIES AND IDEAS FOR TODDLERS

AGE	ACTIVITIES
TODDLERS: 18 TO 36 MONTHS OLD	Listening and Talking Toddlers are learning to talk about the present, past, and future. Young toddlers tend to talk about the present. "Me want cookie." You can help your toddler learn new words to talk about what he or she did in the past and will do in the future. "Yesterday you went down the slide at the park. That was fun." "Tomorrow we're going to the store. You can help push the cart." Talk with your toddler about what happened during the day: "You had a busy day. This morning, you and Sam played in the sprinkler. You ate a peanut butter sandwich for lunch. After your nap we visited Poppy. What else did we do?" Talk with your toddler about what you will do tomorrow. "I think it's going to be sunny tomorrow. What would you like to do?" How to help your toddler's caregiver: Ask the caregiver what happened during the day. Talk to your toddler about the day's events at child care while eating dinner or at bedtime.

AGE	ACTIVITIES
TODDLERS: 18 TO 36 MONTHS OLD	Toddlers want to learn more about talking. - Some toddlers learn new words and phrases rapidly. Others still use gestures and sounds to tell their families what they want and need. Talk and read with your toddler, name the things the toddler points to, and tell the toddler the words he or she can use to make requests. "Say, 'Milk, please'." - Most toddlers understand more words than they can say. Give your toddler simple directions and praise the child for following them: "Please go to the bathroom and get your hairbrush." "Great! You got the brush. Now you can brush your hair."



AGE	ACTIVITIES
TODDLERS: 18 TO 36 MONTHS OLD	Toddlers use words to have fun and to learn. - Play make-believe with your toddler. You can pretend to talk on the phone, feed a doll or stuffed animal, or go shopping. Talk while you play, and encourage your toddler to talk back: "Brring, Brring. Hello. Yes, Todd's here. Would you like to talk to him? Okay, I'll give him the phone." - Offer props such as a doctor's kit to help your toddler talk about her fears. She can be the doctor, while you are the patient. "Oh good! That shot only hurt a little." - Say silly rhymes, such as, "The <i>bed</i> is on her <i>head</i>." Make up nonsense words like, "It's time to <i>skidaddle</i> to bed." Add a new verse to a song: "...and on his farm he had a <i>pickle</i>..." - Ask your toddler silly questions to which the answer is "No"—one of every toddler's favorite words. "Do puppies wear pajamas?" "Is the sky green?"

AGE	ACTIVITIES
TODDLERS: 18 TO 36 MONTHS OLD	Reading Toddlers like listening to stories. • Have a special time for reading with your toddler every day. Some families read after dinner or as a part of their bedtime routine. Toddlers may want to read a favorite book—again and again—because they love the story and love feeling close to you. When they get older they will have new favorites. • Read when your toddler asks you to, so that your toddler will know that you think reading is important. If you can't stop what you are doing, suggest that the child look at a book alone for a while or ask another family member to read to the child. • Take your toddler to the library so that the child can pick out his or her own books. Keep the books in a special place at home so that they won't get lost or damaged. Watch for secondhand children's books to buy at yard sales and local bazaars. How to help your toddler's caregiver: Tell the caregiver about the books you and your toddler like to read at home. Ask for suggestions of books your toddler would enjoy. Look for these books at the library or borrow them from the child care program. Toddlers like to join in while you read out loud • Look for books that let your toddler do something such as touch and feel the pictures. Some books can be scratched and sniffed, or squeezed to make noises. Some books have pull-tabs that make things pop up or move to reveal hidden pictures. Books like these may wear out before your toddler gets tired of reading them. • Choose books with repeated words, rhymes, and phrases that your toddler can remember. If you read these books again and again, the child might join in at the right time and feel that he or she is reading too.

AGE	ACTIVITIES
TODDLERS: 18 TO 36 MONTHS OLD	• Ask your toddler questions about the pictures in a book. "Who's that?" "Where do you think he's going?" "What do cows say?" Have the child point to people and objects in the pictures. "Where's the...?" • Talk about your toddler's real-life experiences. "That looks like your raincoat. What did you do when you played in the rain today?" Toddlers like to look at books on their own. • Keep your toddler's books on low, open shelves or in an open box or basket on the floor so that the child can reach them without help. Stand the books upright so that the covers are easy to see. Keep books in different places—in the bag that goes to child care, in the bathroom, in the car, and next to the child's bed. • Suggest books your toddler might like to look at alone. The child can talk about the people and animals in a favorite book, make up a story about what's happening in a wordless picture book, or name the objects in a book filled with pictures. • Help your toddler learn to care for books. Show your child how to turn the pages so they won't tear. Remind your child to put away books after reading them. Some well-loved books will wear out. • Ask your toddler to help you fix his or her own damaged books. Your child can show you which pages are torn and hold the book open while you patch the pages.

AGE	ACTIVITIES
TODDLERS: 18 TO 36 MONTHS OLD	Building Muscles For Writing Toddlers can build the muscles in their fingers while playing with homemade toys. • Make a simple puzzle for your toddler by glueing a picture to cardboard and cutting it into five or six pieces. Provide dress-up clothes with buttons and zippers. Offer scrap paper to be torn. • Make play dough that your toddler can roll, pound, and squeeze. Mix together 2 cups flour, 1 cup salt, 1 cup water, and 1 table-spoon of vegetable oil. Put food coloring in the water if you like. Add more flour if the dough is sticky. Store in an air-tight plastic bag or container. • Let an older toddler borrow your safe kitchen tools—a wooden spoon, plastic knives and forks, a cookie cutter—to use with play dough. How to help your toddler's caregiver: Ask the caregiver for recipes for homemade fingerpaint and glue, and tips on using throwaways such as egg cartons and berry baskets as art materials for your toddler. Toddlers use the muscles in their fingers and hands to do things for themselves. • Plan your day so there's time for your toddler to wash, dress, and feed him—or herself. The child may take longer to put on sneakers than you do, but, "Me do it!" is a mark of pride. • Make your home toddler friendly. A refillable pump soap dispenser is easier for your toddler to use than a bar of soap, and a small plastic cup fits in the toddler's hand. Keep the child's toothbrush where he or she can reach it.

AGE	ACTIVITIES
TODDLERS: 18 TO 36 MONTHS OLD	Toddlers learn about writing by scribbling, watching you write, and seeing words around them. • Look for inexpensive large pads of paper and large, nontoxic crayons, and washable markers. Save scrap paper and paper bags. Keep a supply of drawing and writing materials where your toddler can reach them. • Ask your toddler to get some paper and crayons so you can write together. The child will learn about writing by watching you make a list, sign a check, or do a crossword puzzle. The child's scribbles are a way of copying what you are writing. • Talk to your toddler about the scribbles. "You made a line and a dot. This line is thicker than that one. You used two colors, red and blue." • Point to written words around you and read them out loud to your toddler. "Here comes our bus. It says 'Northside' on the front. That's where we're going." "These diapers are too small. We need a box that says 'over 30 pounds.'"

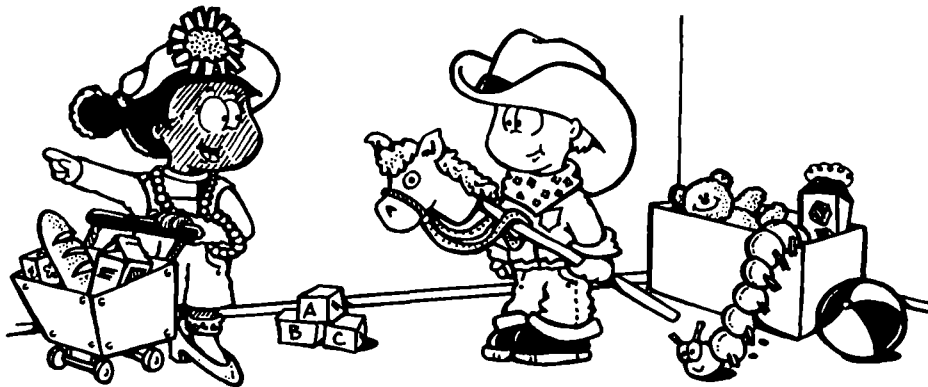
USING LANGUAGE TO LEARN:

**ACTIVITIES
FOR
PRESCHOOLERS**

(3 to 5 Years Old)

WHAT DO PRESCHOOLERS DO?

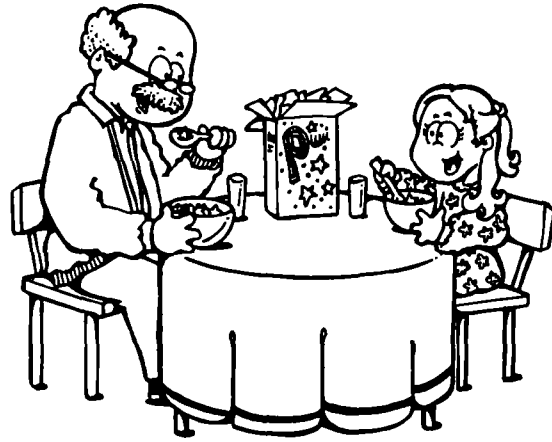
- ☐ Listen to stories and to conversations.
- ☐ Talk to adults and to other children in complex sentences.
- ☐ Master many rules of grammar.
- ☐ Make up silly words and stories.
- ☐ Use language to think, to share ideas and feelings, and to learn new things.
- ☐ Enjoy the same books over and over and look at new books.
- ☐ Retell familiar stories to themselves and others.
- ☐ Think about what the characters in a book might feel or do.
- ☐ Draw and write with pencils, crayons, and markers.
- ☐ See print around them and watch adults read and write.
- ☐ Imitate adult writing by scribble writing.
- ☐ Copy shapes and some letters.



HOW DO PRESCHOOLERS LEARN?

Gina bounces out of bed and hurries to the kitchen. She opens the cabinet, takes out a box of cereal, then puts it back. She takes out another box and says, "Grandpa, this is my cereal. It has a big 'P' and lots of stars."

Grandpa says, "That's good thinking." Gina points to a letter on the box, "That's a 'P'." She traces the letter in the air and says, " 'P' as in Peter. Peter's name starts with a 'P'. It's on his cubby."



Grandpa makes an offer. "Today, we can have our regular story time and then write together. I need to write a letter to a friend. You can write, too."

Gina puts her empty bowl in the sink and runs to find her mother. "Mom, I'm gonna read and write with Grandpa." Her mother says, "That sounds like fun. When I take you to family child care, I'll tell Ms. Jenkins that you like to write. You can write at her house and at home."

Like many preschoolers, Gina is learning language:

- ☐ She knows that letters (the P) and pictures (the stars) have meaning.
- ☐ She knows there is a 'P' on her cereal box and at the beginning of Peter's name.
- ☐ She knows that people take turns when talking to each other.

Gina's family helps her learn about language:

- ☐ They have a regular story time every day.
- ☐ Grandpa encourages her thinking, so Gina continues exploring the letters on the box.
- ☐ Grandpa offers to write with Gina.
- ☐ Mom talks to Ms. Jenkins, so that Gina can write at family child care and at home.

ACTIVITIES AND IDEAS FOR PRESCHOOLERS

AGE	ACTIVITIES
PRESCHOOLERS: 3 TO 5 YEARS OLD	Listening and Talking Preschoolers learn about language by listening and talking. - Start a conversation with your child by asking a question that has no right or wrong answer: "What did you think when you saw the tall tower you built?" - Help your child become a creative thinker by asking, "Suppose that..." "What do you think..." "What if..." - Encourage your child to talk with older and younger family members. A child who has lots of opportunities to talk will learn how to put ideas into words. - Help your child choose a few special television shows that are just right for children of the same age and interests. Watch with your child and talk about what you see and hear. "Are those lions like the ones at the zoo?" Ask questions to find out what the child is learning. "Does our family do things like the family in the show? How are we different?" - Use television wisely. At family mealtimes, talk and enjoy each other's company. Make a list of things your child can do instead of watching television, such as looking at books, playing with brothers and sisters, or drawing pictures.

AGE**ACTIVITIES**

**PRESCHOOLERS: 3
TO 5 YEARS OLD**

How to help your child's caregiver:

Tell the caregiver about the things your child does at home. Doing this will help the caregiver start conversations with your child and encourage your child to talk.

Preschoolers learn about language by watching and listening to you.

- Think and plan out loud so that your child can see and hear you using language to solve problems or make plans.

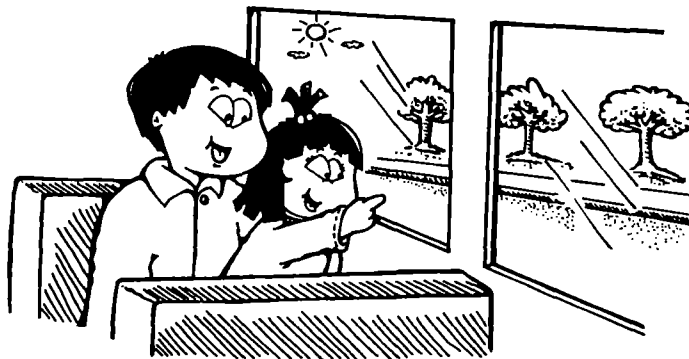
"Hi Elliott. Are we still on for basketball?"

"Great! I'll meet you at the park."

- Visit and talk about interesting places. Go to the library, the park, or a museum. Talk with your child about what you see during the visit. Ask questions about what the child sees. When you return, suggest that the child tell a relative or friend about the trip.

"Grandpa might like to hear about the giant insects we saw at the museum."

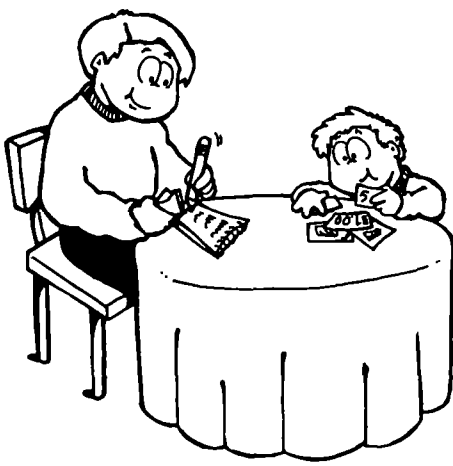
- Ask your child to help you do a chore—replace a battery in a toy, wash the car, or pull weeds. Talk to the child about what you are doing. The child will have fun and learn some new words.
- Take your child along when you do errands. The child will enjoy talking and learning with you at the supermarket, the laundromat, or wherever else you need to go. Children also like to look at what's happening in the neighborhoods along the way to and from these trips.



AGE	ACTIVITIES
PRESCHOOLERS: 3 TO 5 YEARS OLD	Reading Preschoolers like many different kinds of books. • Look for paperback versions of your child's favorite books, in English and in your family's home language. Encourage family and friends to swap books and give them as gifts. And remember that yard sales and neighborhood bazaars often have very inexpensive secondhand children's books. • Make regular trips to the library to borrow books, tapes, and other materials. If possible, have your child get his or her own library card. • Let your child see him- or herself in books. Choose books about families like yours and people from your culture and ethnic group. • Ask the children's librarian at your local library to suggest books for your child. Get ideas from other families, caregivers, and people who know your child well. • Look for books that match your child's experiences: <i>a special interest--bugs</i> <i>something familiar--going to child care</i> <i>a new event--going to the dentist</i> <i>a change in the family--the birth of a baby.</i> How to help your child's caregiver: Ask the caregiver about book clubs for young children and programs that offer inexpensive children's books. 

AGE	ACTIVITIES
PRESCHOOLERS: 3 TO 5 YEARS OLD	Preschoolers are more likely to learn to love books if they are read to. - Set aside a time each day when you and your child can relax and read together. Make these special times when you enjoy each other's company and explore the new worlds and ideas found in books. Children who are read to are more likely to love books and to be strong readers. - Read with lots of enthusiasm. Change your voice to fit different characters and feelings such as sad, excited, or happy. - Expect and encourage interruptions. Stop to talk about the pictures and the story in each book, and the ways they relate to your child's life. Ask and answer questions. Add information to help the child understand the story. "Blueberries are easy to pick because they grow on low bushes. Remember when we saw blueberries in the supermarket?" Preschoolers learn about reading when they look at books by themselves and when they see adults reading. - Set up a reading shelf, basket, or corner where your child can reach books without help. Store books upright so that the child can easily find the one he or she is looking for. Almost any room in the home—kitchen, bathroom, living room, or bedroom—is a good place to keep books. - Bring along a bag of books when you leave home. Your child can read on the bus or subway, in a car, at the laundromat, and at the doctor's office. - Show your child that reading is an important and useful skill. Children love to imitate adults. A child who sees you enjoying a book or magazine will want to do the same. - Show your child how you use books, newspapers, and other written materials to find out what time a store opens, what the weather will be like, or what you need for a recipe.

AGE	ACTIVITIES
PRESCHOOLERS: 3 TO 5 YEARS OLD	Writing Preschoolers need to practice using the small muscles in their fingers and hands. • Encourage your child to do things such as brushing teeth, buttoning and zipping clothes, and using forks and spoons without help. • Ask your child to help you do real jobs, such as peeling carrots, sorting and folding laundry, sweeping the porch, and making the beds. • Play with your child. Together you can thread beads on laces, do puzzles, and roll or pound homemade play dough. Ask your child's caregiver for ideas she or he may have. How to help your child's caregiver: Tell the caregiver about the real jobs your child does at home. Exchange samples of your child's writing with the caregiver so that you will both know what the child is doing and learning.

AGE	ACTIVITIES
PRESCHOOLERS: 3 TO 5 YEARS OLD	Preschoolers learn about writing when they see how people use writing every day. • Let your child see you write every day. When you make a note on the calendar, write a shopping list, sign in at the doctor's office, or take down a telephone message, talk to your child about what you're writing: "I'm writing a letter to Aunt Alice. Would you like to tell her about our walk to the library?" • Show your child the words around us--cookbooks, shampoo, coupons, buses, street signs, and buildings--and illustrate their purpose. Hold up two cans of soup and say: "What kind of soup should we have--chicken noodle or vegetable?" 

AGE	ACTIVITIES
PRESCHOOLERS: 3 TO 5 YEARS OLD	Preschoolers like to do their own writing. • Make sure your child has writing materials and places to write. Look around the house for items your child can use for writing--any kind of paper, crayons, markers, pencils. Put the writing materials in an open box on a low shelf or in a bottom drawer in the kitchen so that the child can reach them without your help. • Set up a place for writing in the room where your family spends the most time. For example, you can shorten the legs on an old chair and table to make them the right height for your child, or you can often find secondhand, child-size furniture at thrift shops and yard sales. Keep catalogs and other writing materials in shoe boxes on the table. • Talk with your child about how to write. If your child asks you how to make a letter, spell a name, or write a word, show the child how to do it. Otherwise, let your child write in his or her own way. You may not be able to read the writing, but the child can read it to you. Over time, the child will learn how to write words that others can read.

Reading and Writing Play Materials

Children learn about reading and writing in several ways. They watch adults, try out their own ideas, solve problems, and figure out for themselves how spoken and written words are connected.

Families can help by providing a special place where children can read and write and by encouraging them to include reading and writing in their play activities. Here are some examples of reading and writing materials for young children.

Create a Special Place With:

Table (homemade or purchased, sized for young children)
Chair(s)
Desk and chair
Low, open shelves
Bulletin board
Clothesline and clothespins (to hang up children's writing)

Explore Letters and Numerals With:

Magnet boards and alphabet and number magnets
Alphabet and numeral blocks, tiles, and puzzles
Alphabet and numeral sponges, stamps, and stamp pads
Alphabet and counting books

Play Make-Believe With:

Clipboards
Envelopes
Junk mail, catalogs, coupons
Magazines
Empty food containers
File folders and boxes
Mailbag and mailbox

Write With and On:

Chalkboards (wall and lap)
Chalk (white and colored)
Easels
Paint
Brushes
Paper (lined and unlined, different sizes, colors, weights, textures)
Markers (washable, nontoxic, thick and thin tips)
Crayons
Colored pencils
Erasable boards, markers, and erasers
Magic slates
Ready-made blank books
Bookbinding materials (stapler, hole punch, laces)
Scissors (for older toddlers and preschoolers)
Typewriter
Computer and developmentally appropriate writing programs

American Library Association's Suggested Book List for Young Readers

This *Recommended Book List for Young Readers* provides suggestions for books that you can introduce to children at different ages.² Although some of these books have been developed for a particular age, many are old favorites that can be enjoyed at any age.

BIRTH THROUGH EIGHT MONTHS

The following books have simple rhymes and poems.

Big Fat Hen, by Keith Baker

Ten. Nine. Eight, by Molly Bang

Play Rhymes, by Marc Brown

Goodnight Moon, by Margaret Wise Brown

Tomie DePaola's Mother Goose, by Tomie DePaola

Eye Winker. Tom Tinker. Chin Chopper: 50 Musical Finger Plays, by Tom Glazer

Rosie's Walk, by Pat Hutchins

Read Aloud Rhymes for the Very Young, by Jack Prelutsky

Have You Seen My Duckling?, by Nancy Tafuri

My First Mother Goose, by Rosemary Wells

EIGHT MONTHS THROUGH EIGHTEEN MONTHS

These books are short with a little text and many rhymes. At this age children really enjoy holding cardboard books and turning pages.

Moon Bear, by Frank Asch

Will I Have a Friend?, by Miriam Cohen

Corduroy, by Don Freeman

Where's Spot?, by Eric Hill

Mama. Do You Love Me?, by Barbara Joose

Peter's Chair, by Ezra Jack Keats

Pat the Bunny, by Dorothy Kunhardt

Clap Hands, by Helen Oxenbury

Seven Blind Mice, by Ed Young

"More. More. More" Said the Baby, by Vera Williams

² The U.S. Department of Education does not endorse particular books and recommends that parents review this list and make their own decision on the suitability of the books for their children.

EIGHTEEN THROUGH THIRTY-SIX MONTHS

These books have more text and an easy-to-follow story that moves along quickly.

The Little Red Hen, by Bryon Barton

Millions of Cats, by Wanda Gag

Clifford the Big Red Dog, by Norman
Bridwell

Chicka Chicka Boom Boom, by Bill
Martin Jr. and Lois Ehlert

Wait Till the Moon is Full, by Margaret
Wise Brown

Curious George, by H.A. Rey

Stellaluna, by Jannell Cannon

The Cat in the Hat, by Dr. Seuss

The Very Hungry Caterpillar, by Eric
Carle

The Bunny Planet, by Rosemary Wells

THREE TO FIVE YEARS

At this age children can enjoy more complex stories and understand humor.

Country Mouse and City Mouse, by
Jan Brett

Make Way for Ducklings, by Robert
McClosky

Stone Soup, by Marcia Brown

Tikki, Tikki, Tembo, by Arlene Mosel

The Three Bears, by Paul Galdone

The Tale of Peter Rabbit, by Beatrix
Potter

Hershel and the Hanukkah Goblins, by
Eric Kimmel

Sylvester and the Magic Pebble, by
William Steig

The Story of Ferdinand, by Munro Leaf

Lyle, Lyle Crocodile, by Bernard Waber

This reading list was developed at the American Library Association (ALA) under the Born to Read Project, which builds partnerships between librarians and health care providers to reach out to new and expectant parents and help them raise children who are "born to read."

Resources

AMERICA READS CHALLENGE: READ*WRITE*NOW! PUBLICATIONS

The following AMERICA READS CHALLENGE: *READ*WRITE*NOW!* publications have been placed on the U.S. Department of Education's Internet Web site <<http://www.ed.gov>> for your unlimited use.

- READ*WRITE*NOW! Basic Kit: Activities for Reading and Writing Fun
- READ*WRITE*NOW! Partners Tutoring Program
- READ*WRITE*NOW! Early Childhood Kit (of which this booklet is a part)
- READ*WRITE*NOW! Just Add Kids: A Resource Directory of Learning Partners, Reading Sites, and Other Literacy Organizations That Serve Children and Their Families
- READ*WRITE*NOW! Learning to Read, Reading to Learn: Helping Children with Learning Disabilities to Succeed

FEDERAL SOURCES OF ASSISTANCE FOR CHILDREN FROM BIRTH THROUGH FIVE

Corporation for National Service
Training and Technical Assistance, Rm. 4821
1201 New York Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20525

Even Start
U.S. Department of Education
Compensatory Education Programs
Office of Elementary and Secondary Ed.
600 Independence Avenue SW
Room 4400-Portals Building
Washington, DC 20202-6132

Title I
U.S. Department of Education
Compensatory Education Programs
Office of Elementary and Secondary Ed.
600 Independence Avenue SW
Room 4400-Portals Building
Washington, DC 20202-6132

Head Start
U.S. Department of Health and Human
Services
Administration for Children and Families
Office of Public Affairs
370 L'Enfant Promenade SW
Washington, DC 20202

Child Care Bureau
U.S. Department of Health and Human
Services
Administration for Children and Families
Office of Public Affairs
370 L'Enfant Promenade SW
Washington, DC 20202

National Institute of Child Health and Human
Development
U.S. Department of Health and Human
Services
National Institutes of Health
Building 31, Room 2A32, MSC-2425
31 Center Drive
Bethesda, MD 20892-2425

National Information Center for Children and
Youth with Disabilities
P.O. Box 1492
Washington, DC 20013

Office of Special Education Programs
U.S. Department of Education
600 Independence Avenue SW
Switzer Building, Room 4613
Washington, DC 20202