

PARENT CONNECTIONS

A Newsletter for First Steps Families ❖ Fall 2014

Tips for Staying Healthy During the Winter Months

When the weather turns cold, most families will spend more time indoors. The chances of being exposed to germs and viruses goes up during cold weather. Young children are more likely to get sick from these germs and viruses because their immune systems are still developing. Children who have additional medical concerns are very susceptible to catching colds or the flu.



Here are some tips to help First Steps families keep their children healthy during the winter season.

1. Insist that everyone wash their hands! Germs and viruses can live on surfaces like counter tops and door handles. Washing your hands frequently helps reduce the risk that you will become sick. Don't forget to wash your child's hands frequently too! Begin teaching toddlers the steps needed to wash their hands by themselves. Ask everyone else who lives in your house or visits to wash their hands as well, including your First Steps provider.

2. Wash your child's toys. It is a good idea to wash any toy your child mouths or drops on the floor. This is especially true during cold and flu season. Plastic toys can be washed using ½ cup of bleach mixed into 1 gallon of water. Most toys can be soaked for 5 minutes, rinse well and dry. First read the cleaning instructions on your washable-only toys or contact the manufacturer for instructions on how to clean and sanitize these items. Be sure to dispose of bleach water properly to ensure all chemicals are kept locked and out of your child's reach.

3. Stay indoors. It is important to stay home when either you or your child has cold or flulike symptoms. Your immune system is weakened, which means you could become worse because of exposure to additional germs or viruses. Also, you may be contagious and could make others sick. Limiting visits to public places like the grocery store, the mall or even school can reduce the risk that you or your child will be exposed to germs and viruses.

4. Cancel appointments if you or your child is sick. If you or your child has cold or flulike symptoms, it is important to cancel your regular appointments to prevent the spread of the illness. Many First Steps providers work with children whose immune systems are compromised. It is important providers do not "carry" a germ or virus from one home to the home of another First Step family.

5. Reschedule appointments if your First Steps provider is sick. Families don't want to risk unnecessarily exposing your child to germs or viruses and neither does your provider. If a First Steps provider misses an appointment, then the provider is expected to make up the visit as soon as possible. Work with your provider to reschedule the appointment for a time when everyone is healthy.



To learn more about how to prevent a cold or the flu from affecting your family, visit www.flu.gov.



A Missouri Family's Story

By Crystal of St. Joseph, MO

My husband and I noticed significant delays in our son, Cameron, after his first year of birth. He would not make eye contact, he started jumping a lot in place, and he flapped his hands like a hyper little bird. Many of his behaviors started to worry us. His pediatrician said, "He's fine, just delayed a little." But as the months went by and his second birthday came, I was hit by an overwhelming feeling that something was wrong. It wasn't just the fact he wasn't speaking, he seemed to wander around a lot, didn't play with kids or us, and he never responded to or acknowledged us when we spoke his name. I knew it was time to act.

I called Cameron's pediatrician's office again. Crying my heart out, I told them I just knew something was wrong. By the end of the conversation, I had a phone number to an organization that changed our life: Missouri First Steps.

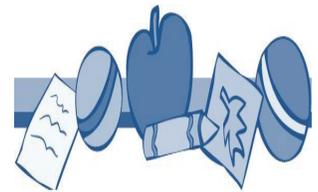
Soon after contacting First Steps, Cameron was evaluated and assigned three therapists; Sally, Courtney, and Ann who specialize in ABA, Speech, and Occupational Therapy. They are now our friends and more so, our family. Later, Cameron was also evaluated by a medical team and received a diagnosis of severe Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The team recommended we stick with First Steps and we were given a list of books to read and resources to call.

Our support comes from our First Steps family. I have cried to them, laughed with them, and seen an amazing little toddler start to emerge. Cameron used to not play at all, be super defensive against eating, and run around and cry all the time while I used the process of elimination to figure out his needs. He is now a happy two-year-old, interested in toys and curious about books and our family no longer has to hide in our bedrooms just to have dinner.

Our First Steps providers have taught me so much. Because of all our hard work and dedication as a team, Cameron is improving. We went from no hope to unconditional hope for him, because of Missouri First Steps.

Just for Fun... My Turn, Your Turn

Your daily routine includes many opportunities for turn taking. In fact, almost anything you do with your toddler can be a chance to practice turn taking. Simply alternate which one of you is doing the activity.



- **Follow your child's interest.** Use whatever toy your toddler is interested in playing with to start a conversation. Start by commenting on what she is doing with the toy. When it's your turn, you can ask her to talk about what you are doing. Or, you could choose to each talk during your turn.
- **Increase your child's attention span.** Many toddlers will naturally hand you a favorite toy. You can encourage this by using words like "It's my turn" or "It's your turn." Start out by keeping the turns short because toddlers are still developing their attention span. It also helps to maintain toddlers' interest by imitating the way they play with toys.
- **Read to your child.** Reading books is a great opportunity for turn taking. You can alternate who turns the pages, who comments on the pictures, or who says the words. Favorite songs and nursery rhymes can also be used in the same way by alternating who sings the lines in the song.

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The First Steps Parent Connections newsletter is written in collaboration with MPACT, Missouri's Parent Training and Information Center.



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