

# PARENT CONNECTIONS

A Newsletter for First Steps Families ❖ Fall 2013

## *Parent Participation in Early Intervention Services/Home Visits*

Young children learn new skills best when they are in their natural environment instead of an unfamiliar place like a therapist's office. A natural environment is a place that is natural or typical for same-aged children without a disability. The natural environment for most children is their home but may also include the child care setting or another family member's home.



The goals you have for your child are written into outcomes in the First Steps Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) developed by you and your IFSP team. The main person to help with your outcomes is called a primary provider. The primary provider will schedule home visits with you at times that are convenient for you and your child. During these visits, the primary provider will help to reach the IFSP outcomes by building on activities you already do with your child and using materials and toys in your home. Your primary provider will talk with you about how these activities are working between visits and make suggestions when you need them. Because you have the greatest influence on your child's development, you need to actively participate in home visits with your primary provider. Through First Steps visits your family will develop new skills to help your child grow and learn as a part of your everyday life.

You may wonder why the primary provider needs to work with you and not just with your child. While it is true that your primary provider is knowledgeable about strategies that will help your child meet their IFSP goals, you are the most important person in helping your child learn and develop. You have a wealth of information to share about your child. You know the other important people who help you and your family and are aware of the materials, toys and other items in your home. This information helps you and your primary provider build on your child's interests and strengths.

An example of how parents can support a child's learning through everyday activities is illustrated in the chart Michael vs. Miguel\* found on the First Steps website at: <http://dese.mo.gov/se/fs/SPOEResourcepg.html>. This chart shows how much more time a child can spend practicing a skill like speech with his family doing everyday activities than if this practice was limited to a structured activity.

Families participate in many teaching opportunities throughout the day but often do not recognize the significance of the "stuff" of everyday life. Just like Miguel, young children learn best when they are taught skills like eating, playing, moving and communicating during the times and in the places where they need to eat, walk or talk. Services provided in natural environments support and encourage families to find and strengthen natural supports they already have outside the early intervention system. These supports are likely to remain throughout a child's school career and into adulthood, if the supports are established when the child is young.

*\*Michael vs. Miguel is utilized in the Missouri First Steps program with permission by the Family Guided Routines-Based Intervention project of Florida State University.*

*The state regulations governing the First Steps program, including transition to Early Childhood Special Education and services to children with summer third birthdays, are under revision. The proposed changes are posted on the web and available for public comment until November 12, 2013. To review the changes or make a comment on the proposed state regulations, go to: <http://dese.mo.gov/se/stateplan/index.html> and under the "Part C: Ages Birth to 3" column, click on "Proposed changes to the State Plan, 2014."*



# A Missouri Family's Story

By Leah of St. Peters, MO

My son, Aaron was diagnosed with Autism when he was 17 months old. My husband and I were very overwhelmed with this diagnosis but we are so grateful for the help he got through First Steps. He received help from an occupational therapist, special instructor, physical therapist and speech therapist but he made the most improvement with applied behavior analysis (ABA) services. During his one-on-one sessions with the First Steps ABA provider, he started pointing to things, following directions, and playing with toys. Sometimes it was difficult to re-arrange our schedules to allow for ABA (he got 15 hours a week) but the results we saw were amazing.

The speech therapist was also a very helpful person in my son's life. Some of the things the speech therapist showed us were simple changes to things we already did, such as playing and modeling more for Aaron. But she also shared some cue cards with me and showed me some prompts to use by touching Aaron's face and mouth to show him how to make specific sounds. It was amazing to listen to my son start making sounds with the simple use of these physical cues and I never would have known about them if it had not been for help from our First Steps providers.

## Just for Fun...

### Sensory Table

Fall is the perfect time for sensory exploration. Use plastic storage bins to create a fun sensory activity perfect for the backyard. Fill the bin with beans, rice, water, sand, or other items to explore. Measuring cups or other items that can be filled and dumped can extend the fun.

### Building Bricks Maze

With the older kids going back to school, there may be more time for playing and building together with your younger child. Create a maze constructed from large, building-interlocking bricks or cushions and pillows. While building the maze, kids develop fine motor skills that can build skills needed for writing, buttoning, and tying shoes. After the maze is built, they can improve balance and coordination by walking or crawling through the maze.



### Kid's Shopping Book

Fall is a great time to visit your local farmer's market. Make a kid's grocery shopping book with pictures of food to add engagement and communication during family shopping trips to the farmer's market or grocery store. A shopping book can be made from newspaper flyers, magazine clippings or pictures created from construction paper. Children can keep track of the shopping list and communicate with you about the items they want or items left on the list.

*From Simon Technology Tech Notes by PACER Center, © 2013. Used with permission from PACER Center Inc., Minneapolis, MN, (952) 838-9000. [www.pacer.org](http://www.pacer.org). All rights reserved.*

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



Office of Special Education  
205 Jefferson St., P.O. Box 480  
Jefferson City, MO 65102-0480  
Website: <http://dese.mo.gov/se/fs>

Phone: 573-522-8762  
Fax: 573-526-4404

*The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, national origin, age, or disability in its programs and activities. Inquiries related to Department programs and to the location of services, activities, and facilities that are accessible by persons with disabilities may be directed to the Jefferson State Office Building, Office of the General Counsel, Coordinator - Civil Rights Compliance (Title VI/Title IX/504/ADA/Age Act), 6th Floor, 205 Jefferson Street, P.O. Box 480, Jefferson City, MO 65102-0480; telephone number 573-526-4757 or TTY 800-735-2966; fax number 573-522-4883; email [civilrights@dese.mo.gov](mailto:civilrights@dese.mo.gov).*