

PARENT CONNECTIONS

A Newsletter for First Steps Families ❖ Summer 2014

School Readiness

Preparing a child for school begins at birth. Being ready to enter school means a child is prepared in the key areas of early learning and development that include social and emotional, language and literacy, cognitive, motor, health and physical well-being, and positive attitudes and behaviors toward learning.



Young children learn best in everyday situations with people they love and trust. Young children also learn best when activities are repeated more than once during a daily routine or during play time.

There are four important areas in which a child needs to develop skills before going to school:

Language and Literacy Skills – A child does not need to learn to read by the age of three, but children do need to learn language skills such as communicating through sounds and gestures, learning words that interest them and understanding what those words mean. Building these skills can be added to things adults and children do every day, such as talking during routines like meal time, bath time or diapering. Reading books out loud, singing songs and playing games like pointing at pictures or objects and naming them are examples of activities that will help to build a child's language and literacy skills.

Thinking Skills – Children are born with a need to understand how things work. As they grow, they begin to be able to predict what will happen as a result of something they do. For example, when a child throws a spoon on the floor, an adult will pick it up and put it back on the high chair. Games that involve simple counting and sorting build the foundation for math skills which will be important later. Problem-solving skills are built when children observe and imitate others or play interactive games hide-and-seek and peek-a-boo. Repetition of these daily activities is important when building thinking skills.

Self-Control – Children need to learn how to express and manage their emotions in appropriate ways. The foundation for skills in self-control begins as an infant when a child learns to cope with frustration and find ways to calm down on his or her own. Cooperating with others and resolving conflicts are skills toddlers can begin to learn. Adults can help young children strengthen their skills in self-control by teaching children simple words to describe their feelings (i.e., happy, sad, mad), praising appropriate behaviors, and giving them choices.

Self-Confidence – Children who feel competent and believe in themselves are more willing to take on new challenges. Self-confidence is very important for success in school. Skills in self-confidence are built when a child shares with others and makes friends. Friendly competition and getting along with others also contribute to a child's self-confidence. Adults can encourage a child's self-confidence by giving age-appropriate responsibilities and coaching him or her through new activities.

~Adapted from "Getting Ready for School" by Zero to Three.~

The Missouri Department of Education, along with representatives of early childhood programs in Missouri, developed a set of early learning goals to help describe what most children should be able to do when they enter kindergarten.

These goals are available online at: <http://dese.mo.gov/sites/default/files/eel-el-2013-MELGoals.pdf>



A Missouri Family's Story

By Kirsten of Lee's Summit, MO

My son, Reed, was just turning one when we got involved in the First Steps program. At the time, the only physical movement Reed was capable of was sitting up on his own. He never rolled over, crawled, nor could get to a seated position if he was lying down.

I truly believe First Steps saved my son's life! He started off by getting physical therapy weekly. Our Physical Therapist was very flexible and willing to come to our home, but also to my son's daycare. This was such a blessing to my husband and me who worked full-time. She left us notes on sessions when we couldn't participate, which made it easy for us to follow and continue to work on things as well. Since Reed was our first child, our First Steps providers were even more instrumental to us because they could point out basic developmental things he was or wasn't doing that we simply didn't know.

We learned while with First Steps that Reed had low muscle tone (hypotonia) throughout his body; his mouth, hands, feet, core, back, etc. He was evaluated by an Occupational Therapist and a Special Instructor. They were all wonderful and thorough with their evaluations and sat down with my husband and me to explain everything. Every time Reed did something new, I would tear up. It was just beautiful to see him pull to stand, and then walk, and then walk up/down stairs.

When my son was 2 ½ years old, his speech was evaluated because he wasn't talking much due to the low tone. My husband's goal was to just hear the words, "I love you daddy." Reed began weekly speech therapy and just recently graduated as he is now talking appropriately for his age. I never thought the day would come. Words will truly never express what you have done for our son and our family!

Just for Fun... A Floating Communication Board

Is bath time one of your child's favorite activities of the day? If bath time is going well, you might consider adding opportunities to communicate with your child.

Things you will need:

- Pictures - photos, magazine cut outs or drawings of things like soap, towel, or bath toys
- Foam garden kneeler or swimming pool kick board
- Card stock paper or poster board
- Two Velcro strips
- Gallon size clear Ziploc storage bag
- Glue and/or tape



Preparation:

1. Cut the card stock or poster board so it will fit inside your Ziploc bag.
2. Create the communication board by gluing or taping pictures to the card stock or poster board.
3. Put the communication board in the Ziploc bag, pushing out excess air so the bag lies flat.
4. Attach Velcro (loop side) on the garden kneeler/kick board.
5. Attach Velcro (hook side) on the back of the Ziploc bag. Pictures should face upward.
6. Attach the Ziploc bag to the kneeler/kick board by connecting the Velcro.

Ways to Adapt this Activity:

A waterproof communication board can be used at the pool or on the beach. You may want to include beach symbols for the pictures, such as a swimsuit, beach ball, goggles, sand castle, or swimming.

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