

PARENT CONNECTIONS

A Newsletter for First Steps Families ❖ Spring 2016

First Steps Annual Survey

First Steps is a family-focused program designed to improve both a child's development and the family's ability to help their child grow and learn. The goal of First Steps is to make sure the whole family has the necessary supports, services and resources needed to raise a healthy, happy and successful child.

Each spring, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) seeks feedback from parents through a family survey. These surveys are a helpful tool for evaluating the quality of First Steps services and effectiveness in supporting both child and family outcomes. The purpose of the survey is to collect valuable feedback from parents about their experiences in First Steps and to provide families an opportunity to have their voices heard.



In May 2015, 5,570 surveys were mailed to First Steps families, and 810 were returned (a response rate of 14.5%). Responses from the 2015 First Steps Family Survey include the following:

What Percentage of Families Strongly Agreed/Agreed?

It was easy to find out about First Steps.	93%
I know my First Steps parental rights related to my child's special needs.	98%
At First Steps meetings, I am comfortable asking for services and supports that my child and family need.	98%
I feel I am an active part of the team when we meet to discuss my child.	99%
My primary provider in First Steps helps me teach my child.	98%
My First Steps providers work with me to help my child in everyday activities.	98%
I am able to help my child learn new skills because of First Steps services.	98%
My First Steps providers are knowledgeable and professional.	98%
First Steps helps me know how to find and use the services and programs available to my family.	95%
First Steps helps me know who to contact and what to do when I have questions or concerns.	97%

2016 Family Survey

Last month you should have received a Family Survey in the mail. The First Steps Program wants the survey results to represent all families in First Steps, so it is very important that you complete and return the survey by July 1, 2016. Your responses will be anonymous and no one will be able to link answers to you, unless you provide your name and contact information.

If you misplaced the survey, you can complete the survey online at:
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/FirstStepsFamilySurvey2016>



A Missouri Family's Story

By Elizabeth of Webster Groves, Mo

When our third son experienced complicated medical and neurological problems during infancy that affected his development, our pediatrician referred us to First Steps. For nearly three years, my son received therapy from knowledgeable and caring physical, occupational, and speech therapists. The support we received was immeasurable. When he reached a goal or milestone, we all celebrated together, knowing that reaching that goal had truly been a team effort.

Having a child who has any type of special needs or developmental delays can be overwhelming to a parent, whether it is your first child or your fourth child. There are some things that you are never completely prepared for. But First Steps provides support that makes those first few years with your child less overwhelming. First Steps didn't just help my son reach goals and milestones; it helped me understand his strengths and weaknesses, and it helped prepare both of us for the transition into preschool.

I will always be grateful for the services we received from First Steps and my son's first therapists will always hold a very special place in my heart.

Just for Fun...Promoting Joint Attention

By Jill Brew, First Steps Special Instructor

Joint attention is the shared focus of two individuals on an object. Joint attention is achieved when one individual alerts another to an object by means of eye gazing, pointing, or other verbal or non-verbal indications.

Joint attention activities can be simple and worked into your daily routine. When interacting with your child, sit on the floor so you are at eye level. If your child does not sit up, then lay on your belly. Start playing with a toy to peak your child's interest and gain attention. For example, roll a ball near you. When you have your child's attention roll it to them. Give them a verbal command such as "roll me the ball." Use gestures or signs to offer a visual cue.

For younger children, a simple game of peek-a-boo with your hands or a cloth will allow an opportunity for joint attention. Books are also a great way to encourage this skill. Look at books that are simple and have no more than two pictures on a page. Sit your child on your lap or in the highchair or booster. While labeling the picture, over exaggerate tapping the picture. Pause and wait to see if your child will imitate you! Make sure to give your child enough time before repeating.

Joint attention is the foundation of learning. When children have joint attention they are able to learn from adults and develop new skills. Joint attention will foster language, social, and cognitive development. The more joint attention activities that you play with your child, the more your child will initiate play and attempt to include you!



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



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