

PARENT CONNECTIONS

A Newsletter for First Steps Families ❖ Winter 2014

The Importance of Family Outcomes

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.

Family members have the greatest influence on a child's development because they know the child's likes, dislikes, family activities and routines. First Steps professionals visit the child and the family in their natural environment where the child typically lives, learns and plays. Family members know which daily routines flow smoothly and which are more difficult, and they can prioritize their needs. The First Steps program is responsive to these priorities and helps the family:



- Know their rights,
- Understand how to effectively communicate the child's needs,
- Increase the child's participation in family and community life,
- Obtain the assistance needed to deal with situations related to the child's development, and
- Provide the best conditions for the child to learn.

Just as parents want feedback on how their child is developing, often referred to as child outcomes; the First Steps program wants feedback on how the program is helping families, often referred to as family outcomes. 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 Step services and effectiveness in supporting both child and family outcomes.

In the past, all families actively participating in First Steps were surveyed about how the program supported child and family outcomes. Next year's survey will be sent to families who have recently exited the program in order to gain information about the services received while participating in the First Steps program and the child's transition out of First Steps at age three.

Though the annual surveys will only be sent to families exiting First Steps, the perspective of families actively involved in the First Steps program is also important. Families actively participating in First Steps can share their perspective on the services they receive by contacting their First Steps Service Coordinator. Families may also share their experiences by contacting DESE at webreplypsefs@dese.mo.gov.

Each year the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) is required to submit an annual performance report (APR) to the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. Indicator four of the APR includes information about Family Outcomes. The APR related to First Steps is available for review at: <http://dese.mo.gov/se/SPPpage.html> under "Part C."



A Missouri Family's Story

By Susan of Kansas City, MO

When our daughter, Elizabeth, was 5 months old she woke up one day without the use of her legs. The following weeks at the hospital have become a blur, but we learned a lot about spinal cord tumors and living with paralysis. We were connected with First Steps while in the hospital and started using services right away after we got home. We only needed physical and occupational therapy, but it was nice to know that there was a whole team of other therapists in the background who knew our story and were available if needed.

Our therapists were invaluable in teaching us the day to day routines we needed to help Elizabeth thrive and become independent. It was easy to apply what she did in her sessions to the activities we engaged in with her. She never realized that she was receiving therapy – just that we had fun people to play with and we continued the games when they were away.

We also enjoyed being able to meet out in the community – at a park or the mall – every once in a while. It was a good change of pace and helped us understand and overcome some barriers to adaptive equipment that are just naturally a part of the environment.

Our transition to Early Childhood was a lot easier having been in First Steps, but one thing we realized right away was that we no longer had the same personal connection with the therapists. We recognized the importance of knowing what they are working on at school so we could continue it at home, but we had to build the relationships and establish a communication plan with the school therapists to stay involved at the same level as when services were in our home.

Elizabeth continues to show her independence each day and we are thankful for the support and guidance our First Steps therapists gave us and the genuine compassion they had for Elizabeth!

Just for Fun...

During the winter months, there are many ways to have fun and improve your child's development while staying indoors.

- **Basket-Stroll.** Help your toddler practice walking by filling a laundry basket with toys and then letting him stand and push it (while you stand on the other side and make sure the basket remains steady and doesn't go too fast). Be sure to watch what your toddler is communicating as he plays—if he looks like he is unsure of himself, slow things down and let him take his time. This game will help toddlers develop muscle strength and balance.

- **Hello, Good-Bye.** Make a tunnel from a large cardboard box by opening both ends. Place your toddler at one end of the tunnel and you sit at the opposite end. Peek your face in the tunnel and say, "Hi!" and then lean away from the tunnel (so your toddler can't see you) and say, "Bye!" Be sure to watch if your toddler tries to communicate with you by crawling to find you, or by making sounds to copy your "hi" and "bye". This game will help toddlers develop communication and play skills.



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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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