



Speaking for Children

What's best for our youngest children is best for everyone!

The early childhood years are the most important

Research shows that a child's brain starts developing at birth and grows most rapidly for the first five years of life. During this time, all of a child's experiences contribute to his or her ability to learn throughout life. Parents, teachers, caregivers, and other adults play important roles in the lives of young children. Everyone in the community has a role in ensuring that each and every child experiences the type of early environment--at home, at child care, at school, and in the community--that will promote their early learning.

What Parents Can Do:

Care giving during the early years shapes the way your child learns, thinks and behaves for the rest of his or her life. Children develop best when you:

- **Are warm, loving and responsive.**
Infants and children feel safe with adults who care for them. These first attachments help develop self-esteem and can serve as the basis of a child's future relationships.
- **Talk, sing, explore and play with your child.**
Making up stories about daily events and singing silly songs provide your child with regular "conversations" that help him develop the language skills he'll need to talk and learn to read. Even describing the contents of your grocery cart while

doing the shopping makes a difference.

- **Make reading together a daily habit.**
Read aloud with your child as soon as she is born to build her vocabulary. Daily reading is one of the most important ways to prepare her for school. Set aside a specific time each day to read together. Involve your child in the story by asking questions. Read the same book over and over. Try using silly voices.
- **Recognize that each child is unique.**
Children have different temperaments and grow and learn at different rates. It is difficult to compare your child's development with other children's. Trust your instinct if you think your child needs help.
- **Take care of yourself.**
Parents and caregivers need care, too. Reach out and ask for help when you need it. Family, friends, neighbors, pediatricians, child care providers and



others can assist you in fostering your child's healthy development.

What Child Care Providers Can Do:

High-quality child care and early education can boost children's learning and social skills. To ensure children receive high-quality care, child care providers can:

- **Take advantage of First 5 funded programs that improve child care quality.**
Administered by the Sonoma County Child Care Planning Council (SCCCPC), the Sonoma CARES program rewards and encourages continued professional development by providing stipends to qualified individuals working in early care and education programs. For information, call the Child Care Planning Council at (707) 588-7420.
- **Engage parents in your child care program.**
Studies show that the children do better in school when their parents are involved. Start parents on the right foot by providing opportunities for them to volunteer or get involved. Have parents participate in events such as career day presentations, special story times, or field trips. Ask parents to prepare meals for special events or to submit articles for your newsletter.

What Community Members Can Do:

Every child needs and deserves good health, optimal development and exceptional education. Your personal effort is needed to help keep kids healthy, happy, and learning in Sonoma County.

- **Write your legislators**
Legislators at the local and state level need to start putting kids first. They need to support our schools and preserve the quality of education for every child in this state. They need to preserve health and dental care programs so children are healthy enough just to come to school. And they need to protect high-quality early care opportuni-

"Studies show that children in early childhood education programs are more likely to score higher in reading and math, more likely to graduate from high school and attend college, more likely to hold a job, and more likely to earn more in that job. For every dollar we invest in these programs, we get nearly \$10 back in reduced welfare rolls, fewer health care costs, and less crime."

— President Barack Obama's remarks to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, March 10, 2009

ties so every child has a chance to learn and grow before kindergarten and be more prepared for success in school.

- **Volunteer your time or make a donation to your favorite children's organization.**
Nonprofit organizations that serve low-income children and families in our community are facing monumental budget cuts, and the impact on people living in this county will be tremendous. Contact family-serving agencies in your community and learn how you can help - financially, as a volunteer, or by donating needed items such as children's books.
- **Clean up a neighborhood park.**
A study released last week found that one in 5 preschoolers in the United States is obese. Kids who play are healthier and less likely to be overweight, but the number of accessible and safe outdoor parks is decreasing. Contact your local park and recreation department to find out what you can do to make a difference for children in your community.

About First 5 Sonoma County

First 5 Sonoma County funds children's health insurance and programs that improve childcare quality, help children succeed in school, and help parents provide safe and nurturing environments for their children. For more information on *First 5 Sonoma County* and its programs, please call 565-6626 or visit www.first5sonomacounty.org