



Speaking for Children

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

Warming up your baby's brain for reading

Don't wait until your child is learning to read to open up a book with him or her...learn how to warm up the baby brain, and from infancy, prepare your child to learn to read.

Did you know that the parts of the brain that develop for reading are active as early as birth? Thanks to neuro-imaging techniques, researchers have been able to study activity in the baby brain, and are beginning to understand how early stimulation sparks development in infants.

Words and sounds fire up the baby brain before he or she can read or even speak. Talking in a caring voice while changing your infant and singing a lullaby at bedtime all stimulate your baby's brain and encourage the development of phonological awareness (the ability to hear and know the sequence of sounds in that make up words). **This understanding of how spoken words fit together as a whole language is a powerful indicator for your child's future reading skills,** when he or she will transfer the ability to analyze and store parts and patterns of the spoken word to words on the page.

Researchers agree that talking and interacting with infants and toddlers serves as a critical foundation for healthy child development. Nursery rhymes and other stories filled with rhyme and repetition aren't just fun to listen to—they help children learn to break down and piece together the elements and patterns present in spoken language.

If children are exposed to words and sounds early on, they will develop the tools they need to learn to read, and be better prepared to excel in school and in life. So start warming up your child's brain today.

Source: Reach Out and Read www.reachoutandread.org

Children play to learn

If you've seen the concentration on the face of a child fitting together the pieces of a puzzle, you recognize that play is the "work" of children. In a nurturing and engaging play environment, children spend their day learning to interact with and understand the world.

To support their understanding and use of language, keep the following in mind when you play with your child:

- Be comfortable playing with your child
- Establish eye contact with your child
- Use adult speech and speak clearly
- Speak in complete sentences
- Name objects and verbally describe actions and feelings
- Ask questions and model the answers
- Ask questions and allow your child to answer
- Use open ended questions
- Wait for your child to ask for help from you *before* providing assistance
- Follow your child's interests
- Allow your child to correct his/her own mistakes without your influence
- Expand on an action or learning your child is involved in, for example by adding another shaped block to her tower or introducing a new animal into his pretend play

Children learn through their senses

Because children learn through all five senses— hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting and touching, it is important to provide age-appropriate multi-sensory experiences for young children.

Talk to children about using their ears to hear the many kinds of sounds around us—birds, wind, voices, sirens, even silence. Name what you hear. Ask children to identify things by the sounds they make.

Tell children we use our eyes to see everything that is around us. Name what you see. Ask your child to identify differences in shapes, colors, and sizes.

Our nose helps us to smell all the different scents that are around us. Name what you smell. Ask children to close their eyes and identify things by their fragrance.

Young children put objects in their mouth to identify them. We use our tongue and mouth to taste objects and foods. Describe what you taste. Encourage children to try new fruits and vegetables and describe their tastes—sweet, sour, salty, bitter.

Through our sense of touch we identify texture and heat and cold sensations on our skin. Encourage children to explore their environment and describe what they touch and taste—hot, cold, smooth, rough, creamy, or juicy.

A glossary of school readiness skills children learn through play

The following is a list of often difficult or specialized words and their definitions having to do with school readiness skills.

- **Auditory Discrimination**—The ability to notice the difference between two or more sounds, such as loud or soft, noisy or soothing.
- **Visual Discrimination**—Being able to notice details in shape, color and size.
- **Eye-Hand Coordination**—The ability to make the hands and eyes work together. For example, grasping, catching a ball, cutting with scissors,



coloring, crawling.

- **Fine Motor Skills**—Being able to use small muscle groups in children's hands and eyes, such as holding a pencil, picking up raisins or cheerios; following an object with the eyes.
- **Gross Motor Skills**—The ability to use large muscle groups in the child's body. Walking, jumping, running, climbing, throwing and catching balls are examples of gross motor skills.
- **Imagination**—Creating and acting out different roles.
- **Number Sense**—Activities that help a child learn to count, identify the number symbols, and sort and group by shape and size.
- **Self-Awareness**—A child's understanding of himself and his body parts, likes, dislikes, friends, family and surroundings.
- **Cause/Effect**—A child's understanding of what happens as a result of her actions. For example, dropping a utensil makes a loud noise, or running toward a cat makes it run away.
- **Nouns**—The name of a person, place or thing.
- **Verbs**—Action words.
- **Adjectives**—Descriptive words for colors, shapes, textures, sizes, temperatures, and feelings.
- **Spatial Relations**—Descriptive words about space and location and time. For example, over, under, above, below, beside, behind, before, after, on, left, right.
- **Comprehension**—The capacity to understand communication, facts, rules and ideas. Check a child's understanding by asking questions.

Source: AVANCE Parent-Child Education Program

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 565-6680 or visit www.first5sonomacounty.org