

Supporting Language Development in Child Care Settings and at Home

By Tamra Goettsch, Marion County Children and Families Department and Great Beginnings project director

From the moment a child is born, learning begins. It's important for parents and other significant individuals to talk, listen and play with children to help them learn new skills and to understand what is going on in their world. With a growing number of families in the work force, childcare providers are playing a more significant role in a child's development. Of all the childcare options in our community, family childcare is still one of the most commonly used out-of-home childcare arrangements.

In an effort to support the healthy development of children and to support children and families using out-of-home child care, Marion County's early childhood initiative called **Great Beginnings** and its literacy initiative called **Reading for All** have been hard at work. In August 2009, nearly 200 **Reading for All: Born Learning Lending Library** kits were provided to local child care providers. The purpose of the Lending Library kit is to foster early literacy among the children in childcare and to promote literacy within the child's home. Kits include fifty books for young readers, tote bags for young readers to borrow books overnight, and a video that helps parents understand the importance of reading. In addition to the books and totes, each kit includes multiple resources to aid child care providers in fostering emergent reading skills among infants, toddlers and pre-schoolers and to encourage families to actively participate in their child's literacy development.

The Lending Library concept is quite simple: Creating or adding to libraries in child care settings exposes children to age-appropriate materials that can be checked out by the child and their family to enjoy in their own home. We believe books need to be in every facet of a child's life to encourage and support their love for reading. In partnership, the childcare provider and the parents can share in the child's reading successes and interests.

If you have children in your life, of any age, encourage them to read. If you have an infant or toddler in your life, here are some tips you might want to consider:

- ✓ Read every day – Don't worry if you don't finish the story: a few minutes at a time is OK.
- ✓ Talk or sing about the pictures – You do not have to read the words to tell a story.
- ✓ Let children turn the pages – Remember, it's OK to skip pages!
- ✓ Show children the cover page – An older toddler, can guess what the story might be about.
- ✓ Show children the words – Run your finger along the words as you read them, from left to right.
- ✓ Make the story come alive – Create voices for characters or use your body to tell the story.
- ✓ Make it personal – Talk about your own family or pets when you are reading about others in a story.
- ✓ Ask questions about the story, and let children ask questions too!
- ✓ Let children tell the story – Children as young as three years old can memorize a story.
- ✓ Create books together – Make photo books of family members or cut pictures out of magazines.
- ✓ Make books a part of your daily routine!

Reading for All and *Great Beginnings* have been identifying creative ways to expose children of all ages to books, especially at a very early age. Research has repeatedly demonstrated that when children listen to stories they gain crucial language skills. Learning to read begins at infancy and continues throughout the toddler years. Start today. Support literacy!

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