Books are Good for Kids

Did you know that having books in your home has a greater influence on a child’s level of education than their parents’ income, nationality or level of education? According to research done by Dr. Mariah Evans at the University of Nevada - Reno, it’s true!

Her research concluded that a home with lots of books that are being read by and to children encourages kids to continue those skills throughout life. Reading encourages discussion among family members about what they’ve read. Books provide children with information, vocabulary, curiosity and skills for discovery and play.

Having books in the home—and reading those books helps children from all walks of life go further in their educational pursuits. Research also indicates that the benefits of books in the home are even greater for children from disadvantaged families.

Ready, set, read!

MU Extension contributors:

Help your child begin talking

Language development moves from naming objects to describing

When a child says his first words, it’s an exciting time for most parents. Learning to talk is what separates infancy from toddlerhood, according to Dr. Kyle Pruett, a professor at Yale University, who published an article in the Work and Family Life newsletter.

Using language to communicate helps us better understand our child’s wants and needs. It’s a gradual process and just having a few words in her vocabulary doesn’t mean that you won’t still be seeing and hearing non-verbal sounds and gestures being used as tools for communication.

When should you be seeing your child develop language skills?

According to Diana Milne, MU Extension human development specialist, “It varies, but generally around 18 months of age is when you’ll see an explosion of language.” By age two, many toddlers have a vocabulary of 1,000 - 2,000 words.

Language moves from naming objects to describing what they are doing or what is going on around them. Simply put, the drive to communicate is one of the strongest human impulses!

Emotional development also plays a big part in language development. Young children want and need to share what they are feeling and thinking. They especially want to communicate their thoughts and feelings with the important people in their world: parents, siblings, grandparents, caregivers. That is why it’s so important to engage with your child when they are learning language skills. Look at their face and listen to their words, reflect back what they’re trying to say and reinforce their speech in positive ways.

Here are some tips to support your child’s language development:

- Pay close attention if your child is not talkative. Is your child quiet in general? Are you doing too much talking and not allowing your child to “talk”? Is your child not enthusiastic about social interaction in general or is it specific to verbal communication?

- Use your words and correct gently. Use your own words to help your child gain confidence in her language skills. Instead of just listening to your child’s attempts to string words into a sentence, reflect back to them. For example your toddler may pick up a block and attempt to say something and all you understand is “block”. You smile and say, “you like to play with your red block!” It’s hard to understand a toddler, but go easy on correcting. Your child may say: “Me want cookie”. Instead of correcting, just say: “Would you like a cookie?”

- Read to your child. This may be the most important way to support language development. Research indicates that children’s brains show no change when language is received by audio or video. There is no substitute for the human interaction of an adult reading to a child.

Adapted from an article in Work & Family Life newsletter, vol 29, no 10.
Help kids snack smart for energy

Role model eating healthy snacks to instill a lifetime of healthy habits

Practice advice about feeding children

Parents feel a lot of pressure to feed their children right especially if their child is larger than peers. According to Linda Rellergert, MU Extension nutrition and health education specialist, “Satter’s book, Your Child’s Weight: Helping Without Harming, is an excellent resource on feeding all children regardless of size.” Satter is recognized for promoting division of responsibility for parents and children around feeding. Parents have the job of reliably providing healthy foods, while it is up to the child to decide how much or whether to eat it.

Consider these tips for putting Satter’s advice into action.

♦ Be reliable by having meals and snacks on a regular basis so children know they can count on you to feed them.

Without a predictable pattern, children may become anxious and overeat when food is available.

♦ Offer snacks midway between meals but do not allow unlimited access to food and drinks all day (except for water). Structured snacks keep hunger from becoming overwhelming without interfering with appetite for meals.

♦ Accept your child’s ability to determine how much to eat. Appetite varies from day to day and changes with growth and activity habits. Both restricting the amount and pushing children to eat more than they want can backfire. Set a good example for your children by observing and following your own hunger and satiety cues.

Banish the clean plate club for yourself and your children.

♦ Everyone in the family should eat the same foods. Do not keep certain foods like salty or sweet snacks for adults only or try to hide them from children. These forbidden foods will become more desirable and your child is likely to find ways to sneak them or over eat them when the chance arises.

♦ Respect what is normal and healthy for your child. Healthy people come in a wide range of sizes, from short and broad to tall and thin. Ask your pediatrician for advice about healthy growth patterns.