

PLANT THE SEEDS

A seed is a beginning. It is a start. To develop to its potential, a seed must experience an environment that fosters its growth. Also, a seed's experiences during the first phases of growth are the most critical. A child is no different.

The experiences in the first five years have a great impact on how a child grows and develops. And, similar to a seed, no other time will match the rate of growth and need for nurturing than during the first stages of life. For example, babies are born with fully developed miniature adult lungs and hearts; but they are not born with fully developed miniature adult brains.

Approximately 75 percent of the lifelong development of the brain happens during the first five years of life.

Because most brain development takes place during the first five years, parents and caregivers play a crucial role in helping young children reach their potential. The experiences provided will determine which children become secure, competent and productive adults, and which children will struggle in school and in life. Luckily, a child does not need fancy educational toys or all that money can buy. Optimal growth will occur with sensitive and loving care provided by parents and caregivers within a supportive environment. And, fortunately, there are educational re-

sources available that can make a big difference.

One local program offers numerous ideas for helping children develop skills needed for success in school and in life. The SEEDS of Early Learning training was first developed for child care providers and was adapted for parents by Child Care Resource and Referral through a grant from IBM. The SEEDS training shows how to use everyday adult/child interactions to help encourage growth and devel-

OTHER TIPS TO BUILD CHILDREN'S LITERACY SKILLS:

- Tell stories (real and imaginary)
- Recount what just took place
- Share family history
- Talk about the world around you
- Vocalize your feelings
- Describe what you are doing as you do it
- Chat about what will happen that day
- Recount the day's events

opment, specifically in the area of pre-reading. Participants report SEEDS has made a significant difference in their interactions with young children which has resulted in positive changes and language growth in children.

Lisa Socwell, an IBM employee, shared an example of what she learned at a SEEDS for parents seminar. Lisa discovered that the more words a child knows when entering kindergarten, the more likely the child will become a good reader and succeed in school. Lisa learned a child's ability to learn words and communicate well increases as positive interactions with a parent or other adult increase.

One simple technique for increasing the quality of interactions is to ask a child a question and then "watch, wait, and listen" for the answer. Young children may need up to 10 seconds to process an answer and respond. Some research even recommends up to 30 seconds for very young children or babies. In one study, children



with the highest vocabulary had parents who asked the child up to 40 questions in an hour. Lisa commented, "I went home thinking I would check out how many questions I actually ask my son. I discovered I do ask *many* questions but I also noticed I answer them all myself!" For example, Lisa asked—and answered—"What would you like for dinner? A hamburger?" or "How was your day at school? Good?"

After noticing this, Lisa implemented the "watch, wait, and listen" technique with her two-and-a-half-year-old. Lisa discovered that if she waited after asking the question, her son actually came up with great answers all by himself. Kudos to Lisa for developing her parenting skills in this area! Now, she is giving her son's brain the chance to do higher level thinking as he is given time to process what she has said, formulate answers, and practice responding to her questions. This will be an advantage to him in school and in his future career. Lisa feels he is going to do well in school because of the skills he is learning and that the strong connection she is building with her son will last a lifetime. Lisa is right. Investing time in building parenting skills has immediate and life-long benefits.

Most grandparents, aunts, uncles, and parents can relate to Lisa's discovery. It is easy to assume a two-year-old will not come up with an answer. It is also difficult to wait. But, even small babies respond vocally if given the time. It makes a big difference for a child's confidence, language development, and problem solving ability to have adults wait for an answer from a child rather than just answer for them. It is also a joy when the child does begin to respond with rich language and ideas.

Programs like SEEDS teach strategies that improve a child's ability to succeed in school. Furthermore, parents regularly report that because parent education programs provide useful support, tips and strategies that fit into their busy everyday lives, parenting becomes a lot more fun and a lot less stressful.

If you want a garden but have little experience with gardening, it helps to get tips and advice from professionals so your garden will thrive. The same is true for raising young children. Combining your love, knowledge and sensitive care with practical tips and solid information from the professionals will yield wonderful results!

RAELENE OSTBERG is the business liaison for the First Steps program, an initiative of the Rochester Area Foundation. Raelene is a parent educator and working mother invested in bringing helpful information to working parents.

WHAT DOES SEEDS FOR EARLY LEARNING STAND FOR?

SEEDS refers to five important areas that impact a child's success in school:

Sensitive Parenting; encouragement; educate; develop through doing; and positive self image. The training provides learning opportunities and helpful strategies for parents, grandparents, child care providers or other adults invested in the lives of children age 0-5 years.

The training includes:

- Fun and interactive games that promote writing, talking, reading, telling stories, etc.
- Ways to interact with a child that develop higher level thinking and problem solving skills
- Techniques that support language development in young children
- Ways to encourage a child's positive self image
- Age-specific techniques for interactive reading with infants, toddlers, and preschool age children
- Tips to keep young children excited about learning!

Where can I find SEEDS of Early Learning Training?

With the support of IBM and a grant from the Gillette Family Foundation, the Rochester Area Foundation's First Steps program coordinates SEEDS training available to working families in their workplace. As members of the First Steps Business Alliance, Olmsted Medical Center, Wells Fargo Bank, Sunstone Hotel Properties, RSM McGladrey, Express Employment Professionals and other local employers have scheduled SEEDS and are bringing this valuable program to their employees. Ask your employer to host a seminar at your workplace. Other community organizations such as the Library and faith communities also host training sessions.

UPCOMING SEEDS OF EARLY LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES OPEN TO ALL:

Dates: October 9, 16, 23, and 30

Location: Chamber of Commerce

Times: 12-1 p.m.

Cost: \$20 for all 4 sessions (includes lunch)

Dates: October 9, 16, 23, and 30

Location: Express Employment Professionals

Times: 7:30-8:30 a.m.

Cost: \$20 for all 4 sessions (includes breakfast)

For more information about SEEDS or to sign up, contact the Rochester Area Foundation's First Steps program at: 282-1027.

Is Your Child Care Provider SEEDS Trained?

Ask your child care provider if they are trained in the SEEDS of Early Learning. Over half of all licensed child care providers in our area have completed the extensive provider training. The Rochester Area Foundation and Child Care Resource and Referral subsidize and provide this in-depth training and coaching for child care providers. Encourage your child care provider to use the SEEDS curriculum to discover ways to provide your child with an exceptional learning rich environment. Call Child Care Resource and Referral for more information at 287-2020.



Rochester Women magazine is a founding member of the First Steps Business Alliance and is the sponsor of these two pages.



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