

Jarma: Hi, Tina, we're happy to have you here. Welcome to E...the ECLKC, which is the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center Parent Place. We actually...um...see this as an opportunity for you to share your stories and experiences about how you are your child's first and most important teacher in the home. So, happy to have you, and we'd like you to just share a little bit about your...um...family, your child...um...how old is he? What Head Start program you're from, where he attends or she attends? And we are going to get started.

Tina: Okay, thank you for having me. Um...my son is four years old. He currently goes to IOP Bethel Head Start. It's...um...Cheektowaga, New York.

Jean Simpson: Okay. And as...as he's enrolled in Head Start and as you are your child's first and most important teacher, what are some of the things that you do to support his learning at home, and how might you define yourself first as a teacher, then a parent?

Tina: Well, parents are the first teachers. Um...even when he was little I wouldn't speak to him in baby talk. I'd speak to him as...as, you know, an adult. And...um...if there... there're words he doesn't understand or I think he won't understand, I'd have him repeat it back to me, so he...I know he pronounces it, and also ask him, "do you know the definition of the word?"

And if he doesn't, then I would tell him what the word meant...um...I think that's very important, to build your child's vocabulary. But we also teach...um.. as far as you know for riding in the car we'll say, we'll pick a

color for the day. And I'd say, you know, "How many blue things can you find?" When we're driving and pick it out or ...um...even letters...You know on store signs or anything. There's always...always time to educate your child.

Jarma: Sure is. And so as you're doing that so...you know, you just mentioned that together time, things you just said, "riding I the car"...What are some examples of some other things that you all might do together that really spurs his attention and motivates him to want to learn. I mean there're so many things that they can learn about: the arts, the maths, the sciences.

Tina: Um...well even...even simple things like counting stairs, you know, if we're going up into a building, count the stairs. Or, you know, "How many stairs have we gone today?" Or...um..doing color hunts in the house or number hunts...um...even shape hunts. You would be surprised how many different shapes of things there are in your house and see how many you can count up.

Jarma: And you know, we...I would just like to talk a little bit about research and what it shows.

I'm going to share this with you. It says that research shows that a good home life has a positive and lasting effect on children's...um...learning and when you as a parent provide that supportive and loving environment in the home the children become very well-versed in more...um...widespread in the things that they're learning and these experiences become more rich and meaningful because, you said it earlier, you are your child's first and most important teacher.

So, with that being said, how do you feel that your involvement in the Head Start program has helped you become very successful at being that first and most important teacher in your child's life?

Tina: The teachers, well I...I drive my child to school and pick him up, so I...I'm very...um...active with his school and his teachers and they...they will tell me what they're doing, you know, what is their activity for the week, what are they focused on?

And so I piggyback off of that and, you know, when we do our colors or our numbers...there's a different letter every week also, so we...I piggyback off that letter and help him at home, finding, you know, finding the letter, writing the letter...um...sounding out things...finding it on things on different, you know, even cereal boxes, you know. "How many As can you find on the cereal box?" So I piggyback off of it so when he...when he goes back to school, he has that extra strength because he's...he's practiced it at home also.

Jarma: Are there...are there siblings in the home that he shares time with?

Tina: Yes, um, I also have a five-year-old daughter and a twelve year old daughter.

Jarma: And how do they integrate with him?

Tina: Oh they're right there with the hunt too. It's a competition. Kids love the...my kids love the competition. So they...um...they go on the hunt and who...who can find the most, you know? Who can find the most circles or who can find the most A's, and, you know.

Jarma: And that makes it so exciting for children to really have that...that older sibling around to really boost that...um...those experiences and even in those experiences they're gaining so much more cognitive skills and then the social skills become more enriched because they have the interaction.

If you had to...say in so many words, what advice would you give to other Head Start parents about being parents as teachers in the home? How important is it to you? What influence has it had in your life in being a mother...um...taking on that role to ensure that your child is successful in school and ready for school and life?

Tina: I just sta...say, "Stay active." A lot of parents feel, you know, they're teaching their kids at home and then once they go to school, that's the teacher's job. But your job never ends. And you need to continue, you know, work with the teachers. Stay in communication. Your teachers should know...your child's teachers should see you on a regular basis. Should stay in communication and piggyback off of what the...the teacher's teaching your child.

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