



Family Literacy “TIPS” has arrived!

The National Head Start Family Literacy Center (NHSFLC) at Sonoma State University is pleased to publish TIPS (Training, Information, and Practical Strategies in Family Literacy), a quarterly newsletter con-

taining innovative, practical ideas, research-based practices, unique program approaches, and important resources on all four components of family literacy and math. TIPS is a way to share information throughout the Head Start community. Head Start programs may use articles from TIPS at no cost in their newsletters, on their websites, or as part of a training for staff or families. (Please cite the issue of TIPS and the NHSFLC when using the material.) If you would like to share ideas for topics of interest in family literacy, math, or Promising Practices from your program, contact NHSFLC staff at (800) 849-7810 or nhsflc@sonoma.edu.

What is Family Literacy?



“I can learn,” a 3-year-old declares.

He walks into the kitchen and sees his mother snipping cilantro with scissors. He asks if he can cut as well. His busy mother replies, “Maybe another day, I don’t have time to teach you now.” “I can learn,” he responds. Reminded by his wisdom Mom sends him to find his scissors, gathers some leftover stalks and leaves in a plastic colander, and shows him how to cut the cilantro with his scissors. They sniff the cilantro, discuss the smell, color, and taste. Then his mother puts the cilantro into the stew she is making for dinner. Later that week, he watches his mother make a grocery list. When they get to the store, he holds the list while she shops. In the produce section, he excitedly points out the cilantro. His mother

points to the word on the list and names each letter “c-i-l-a-n-t-r-o” as they mark the purchase off their list.

“I can learn” is an important lesson that will serve this child well throughout his life. He realizes that he is capable on his own but that sometimes he needs the assistance of adults or more able peers to teach him new skills or to help him use current skills for a new purpose. This child and his Mom are engaging in family literacy activities as they go through their daily routines. His mother follows his lead, provides him with the help he needs to be able to transfer his paper cutting skills to the more delicate task of cutting cilantro. She expands his literacy learning by involving him in writing the grocery list, purposely adding cilantro to the list, and, when he recognizes the herb, connecting it with the word on the list, and spelling it out for him.

Amazing learning events and interactions occur everyday as part of the ordinary lives of children and families. Recognizing the learning potential of everyday routines and transforming them into opportunities for growth and development are part of the Head Start mission. Head Start programs all over the country engage in family literacy as an inter-generational approach that improves the literacy, language, and life skills of parents and children.

The 2007 Head Start Act defines the four components of family literacy: interactive activities between parent and child; parents as primary teachers and full partners in their children’s education; parent training that leads to economic self-sufficiency and financial literacy; and age-appropriate education approaches that prepare children for school. When Head Start programs use a systemic approach to implementing all four components of family literacy with sufficient duration and intensity, families and children experience success and change that lasts for a lifetime. Such family literacy programs support every child and family to embrace the concept that “I can learn.”

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**“To learn to read
is to light a fire,
every syllable is
a spark.”**

~Victor Hugo



National Head Start
Family Literacy Center

Home: Where Learning Begins!



Dad is stopped at a train crossing on the way home. In the rear view mirror he watches as his 9-month-old daughter squirms in her car seat and his 2-year-old son looks out expectantly for the train. As the train comes into view, the boy says, "Train". "Yes, the train is going really fast! Now that it is gone, the light will turn green and it will be our turn to go." Later that day, week, or month they will have a similar experience and Dad will connect it to this one. They may look at a picture of a train in a magazine in the doctor's office, or read a book about vehicles and the father will ask the children to recall "the day we watched the train go by."

Conversations in the car, when getting dressed, and when getting ready for bed expose children to rich language and sets them on the path to being successful readers. These conversations should take place in the language that the family is most comfortable in so that children can grow up speaking the language of their family and learn lots of different words and concepts. Research has shown that children who learn their family's language well by age 5 are able to read well in English in third grade—even when their family language is not English.

Every family teaches their children to walk, talk, how to behave, and what is important in their family. Families play a critical role in every child's learning and that is why the Head Start Act has long required that programs support families to do an even better job of teaching their children the skills that will later help them succeed in school. Research shows that the more involved families are in children's development when they are young, the more children learn. Families are truly the first and most important teachers for their children.

IDEAS TO USE AT HOME

- ✓ When talking with a young child **wait at least 5 seconds** before saying more. This gives the child time to think of the answer and get the words put together in his/her mind.
- ✓ Teachers can send home new words children are learning at school so their parents can use them at home – in whatever language the family usually speaks at home.
- ✓ Families can use simple, everyday experiences to teach children to continue to develop their language and thinking skills.
 - In the car, or on the bus – point out symbols that "say" what to do - e.g., stop signs, green and red lights, wait and walk signs.
 - Talk about what these signs "say" – "The red stop sign tells us to stop, look both ways, and go when it is our turn."
 - As a child gets older, adults say, "We are coming to a stop sign, what do we need to do?" Allow the child to give the answer and to practice new words and concepts.
 - The parent may ask, "When we were at the stop sign, what did we do?"
 - Later the parent may inquire, "Why do we stop at stop signs?"
 - Looking at a picture of a stop sign, the adult and child can point to and name the letters in the word "stop."
 - Later the parent can point to the "s" in a picture of a stop sign and say, "SSSSS is the sound for the 's' on 'stop' and SSSS is the same sound that is in your name, 'Sonia!'"



Everyone is a Learner!

A father who recently lost his job as a server meets with the Head Start Family Service Worker to talk about the family partnership agreement. As they talk, he identifies his interest in becoming a cook. He learns about a partnership between the Head Start program, the local workforce development office, and the local Technical School. This program enables him to participate in a culinary program, develop job and literacy skills he still needs to master, and work as a cook at the HS program—while receiving a stipend from the workforce development office. He joins the program, but has car problems and misses a few classes and several days of work. He thinks he will have to quit since he has no transportation, but with the ongoing support of the Family Service Worker and the job counselor at the Technical School, he gets temporary, alternative transportation until he can get his car fixed and is able to continue his effort!

Head Start has long been committed to promoting parent and child well-being and education. Parent education is associated with children's success in school and with higher incomes for families. In addition, the more comfortable parents are with their own education, the more apt they are to be involved in their children's education (Nord, 1998). Family partnership agreements are opportunities for families to work with HS staff in order to plan their education and to receive support in order to complete the often long journey of completing an educational program. Many HS programs have developed unique partnerships and exemplary projects to help parents progress towards their educational goals even when they meet challenges such as lack of transportation, child care, etc. The overwhelming research about the positive effects of parental education on child and family well-being encourages all HS staff to renew and revisit our efforts in parent education with the goal of assuring that every family becomes "economically self-sufficient" and competent in financial literacy.

Promoting Language and Literacy in Head Start Classrooms



*Sadie, an assistant teacher, sits on the floor with four children reading *Is Your Mama a Llama?* by Deborah Guarino. The children had listened to the book earlier in the day during circle time. When the baby llama approaches the second baby animal, Sadie pauses and poses a question to the children, "What do you think the llama is going to ask?" She waits patiently for about 5 seconds. A child responds, "Your mama a llama?" Sadie, "Just like the title of the book the llama asks, "Is your mama a llama?" During the rest of the book Sadie pauses expectantly each time the baby llama approaches a new animal friend; this gives the children the opportunity to "read" with her. When the calf makes an appearance in the book Sadie asks the children, "How will this baby describe his mother?" She waits 5 seconds for a response, and then gently prompts, "How is the seal different from the llama?" A child answers, "No legs." Sadie expands on the child's answer by adding, "The mother seal has flippers." After the book has been read Sadie asks the children to describe their own mothers and documents their responses on chart paper. At the end of the day, each of the four children take home the book to share with their families.*

The National Early Literacy Panel (NELP) has completed an analysis of the best research and determined the skills in specific areas that enable children to enter school ready to learn to read. These include:

- ✓ Alphabet knowledge
- ✓ Phonological awareness
- ✓ Rapid naming of letters and digits
- ✓ Rapid naming of objects and colors
- ✓ Writing or writing name
- ✓ Phonological short term memory
- ✓ Print knowledge, concepts, and conventions
- ✓ Oral language components of:
 - Definitional vocabulary
 - Listening comprehension
 - Grammar
- ✓ Visual processing

Sadie was intentionally using a variety of research-based strategies including: dialogic reading, specially selected questions designed to promote language development (CROWD), listening comprehension, and definitional vocabulary activities—all the while modeling the use of correct grammar. She and her lead teacher planned for this lesson, working with this specific small group of children all who were working on these specific skills and providing them a natural, fun way to learn. Sadie chose *Is Your Mama a Llama?* because these four children especially enjoy repetitive songs and chants and she knew it would appeal to them. The books were loaned to the children to take home that day because the teachers had arranged with their families to share the book at home since these teachers and parents are well aware of the research that shows that when parents and teachers work on the same thing at the same time, children learn better (Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998).

The 2007 reauthorization of the Head Start Act requires that Head Start classrooms use research-based strategies to promote optimal learning. It is critical for teachers to be aware of the research, skilled in using a wide variety of research-based strategies, and very deliberate about when to use each strategy with each child. Head Start staff who learn these skills and use them often and well in partnership with families are best able to provide optimal school readiness experiences for the children in their classrooms.



Math is Everywhere! Math is for Everyone!

A nine-month-old pulls up on a basket of clean laundry, leans against the basket and spreads his feet so that he is firmly "planted" on the ground. He begins to explore the clothes in the basket using his right hand. He pulls out a shirt, looks at it, feels it, and then tosses it onto the floor. He continues this process until the basket is about two-thirds empty and he has articles of clothing spread all around him. Next he pulls on a baby blanket, but it does not come out easily. He grabs the blanket with both hands, bends his knees slightly, and pulls the blanket using his whole body strength to loosen it. The blanket comes loose and the baby, who is still pulling, loses his balance and flops onto his bottom into the pile of clothes. At this young age this child is learning math and science skills. He knows that things go in and out of containers. He knows it takes extra force when something is "stuck" and that he must position his body differently in order to pull hard. Now he has also learned that when he exerts a force and the resistance is removed, he can fall down!



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Math is Everywhere! Math is for Everyone! CONTINUED

Children begin to learn about how their bodies move in space, about distance from one object or person to another, and even that three is more than one at a very early age. Math skills begin to grow and flourish when adults use words that describe what preschool children are learning (“That toy is too high for you to reach. Let me lift you up so you can get it.” or “Oops, you fell because you were pulling hard and the blanket came loose!”). To develop a child’s positive attitude towards math, adults have to intentionally engage in math-related language during everyday experiences and conversations (“Do you want more carrots?” or “The ball was so fast I could not catch it.”).

Research has shown that the amount of math knowledge that children have by age five can be predictive of how well they do in math in school (Early Childhood Longitudinal Study). When adults respond to children’s interests in math and give them new information and words and intentionally support their math learning, they go to school prepared to succeed in math. Math is everywhere—we just need to recognize and “mathematize” the opportunities that occur in the kitchen, playground, and when climbing into bed each day and make those moments learning moments!

Head Start has the unique responsibility to provide important math experiences to children AND support their families to do so as well. The NHSFLC has developed a research-based training curriculum and is offering professional development opportunities for Head Start staff.



Promising Practices

In response to families’ needs and the requirements of the 2007 Head Start Act, the East Coast Migrant Head Start Project (1501 Lee Drive, Suite #208, Arlington, VA 22209) developed a multi-faceted, financial literacy training program. The training includes money management, budgeting, and savings information. Interactive activities that enable parents to teach their children basic money concepts are also part of the training package. In order to assure sufficient duration and intensity to create sustained change in the daily lives of families, financial literacy information is provided throughout

the year in different contexts and includes a variety of staff. For more information, contact Sofia Baucom, Family Services Manager [baucom@ECMHSP.org or (919) 926-3343] or Clara Cappiello, Training and Development Manager [cappiello@ECMHSP.org or (772) 781-2334].



About NHSFLC

The National Head Start Family Literacy Center at Sonoma State University is funded by the Office of Head Start to provide training and resource materials on the four areas of family literacy and math to Head Start programs across the nation. For information about unique training opportunities and resources at no cost, call (800) 849-7810 or email nhsflc@sonoma.edu.

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Helpful Resources



- The official website for the Office of Head Start, the ECKLC (Early Childhood Knowledge and Learning Center) is an excellent resource for Head Start Programs <http://ecklc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc>
- The newly published report from the National Early Literacy panel is available for download at www.nifl.gov or can be ordered online at www.ed.gov/pub.edpubs.html
Phone: 877-433-7827