

# Parents: You Have Teaching Power



Program of Continuing Professional Education  
College of Education and  
University Extension Division Cooperating





*A small toy “triggers” talk between mother and her son.*

## Introduction

Parents are the first and most important teachers that children have. Two basic facts make the relationship of parent-to-child learning such a crucial one:

1. The early years, from birth through five, are critical ones in the intellectual and emotional development of children.
2. The home learning environment is as important, if not more so, than the school learning environment in influencing children’s chances of success in school achievement.

Research points to this conclusion: **homes and parents make a difference—an important difference.**

This publication is written to encourage parents to view their teaching skills as important in their children’s early learnings. We suggest teaching-learning experiences that enhance the quality of parent-child interaction and indicate everyday happenings in the home learning center that can provide children the foundations for basic skills of reading, writing, and problem solving in the classroom.

These suggestions are only initial ones for parents. From these, parents

can build and add even more ways to enhance their teaching skills—teaching skills that will

- help their child grow in language skills;
- help their child grow in thinking skills;
- increase the quality of interaction with their child;
- learn to become a partner with teachers in the education of their child.

It is important that you, the parent, use your teaching power to make early learning for your child special. Besides, it is fun to be a part of children's learning—**especially your own child's**. You provide your child's **first school**.

## Parents' Talk Helps Children Talk

Does thought come before language? Or does language come before thought? That's a question even the theorists cannot agree upon. The important thing right now is talking about talk.

We do know that babies must hear much language in their early lives before they can use language themselves. We also know that as young children are taking in language from the environment around them, they are also beginning to act upon that environment. They learn to do a good many things before they are able to speak in sentences. They use the senses of touch, taste, hearing, and smelling to determine the texture of an object, the pleasing or not-so-pleasing tastes and odors of things, and the sounds of familiar and unfamiliar voices nearby. Children react to all of this sensory input.

Talking to your baby, talking with your young child promotes feelings of "I'm important and cared about" in your youngster. Listening to your child continues to foster feelings of value for the contributions the child can make. We all know that when we feel good about ourselves—when our concept of self is positive—we are able to do better.

At this young age, it is important to "listen" to your child's non-verbal communication. Notice how your child smiles, eyes dance, and facial expressions change. Likewise, your child notices your frown, wide smiles, sparkling eyes of happiness, and your firm grasp of love.

Children who are fortunate enough to come from a home environment rich in language are able to communicate more effectively with others outside that home learning center. Language learning is part of that "hidden agenda" in homes that make a difference for children's school success.

### **Baby's Talk; Not Baby-Talk**

Baby's talk is mighty important—to the baby and to the parent. Your baby needs to hear sounds and talk from you. When you talk, your baby hears language; and your young child begins to build **receptive language**. This happens long before it is time to say words and talk of things, people, places, and ideas. Not only do babies need to hear words and sentences, they need to



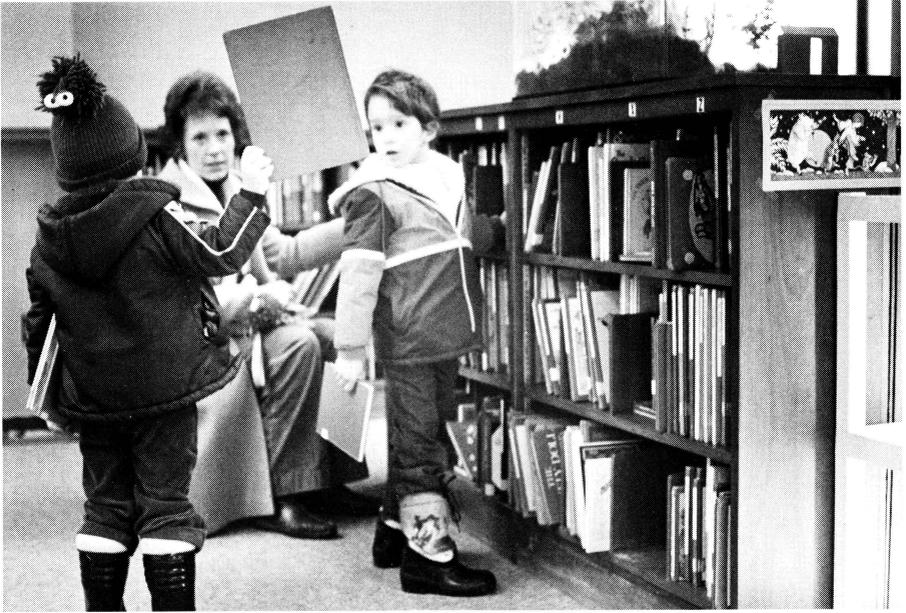
*Eating times are good talking times.*

hear their own baby sounds—the cooing and babbling sounds of infancy—repeated by you. These sounds are the beginning of **expressive language—talk**. When you imitate your baby’s sounds—baby’s talk—your baby learns his or her sounds are meaningful and important to you. Then your sounds—adult’s talk—become meaningful and important to your baby. Language is underway.

### **The Talk-Modeling Process**

Isn’t it amazing how children learn to talk? Our language is so complex; yet, your child learns to use words effectively without you really teaching language rules. Children are able to control their environment, including the people in it, very well with the language they have by the time they are three years old.

How does this happen? Through the socialization process you and your child share ideas and feelings aloud. Children model the language patterns they hear every day from those who are important in their lives. You are one of the most significant others in your child’s life. When you use interesting and descriptive words, when you speak in complete and conversational sentences, when you let your face and body also speak together with your words, your child will learn word meanings and sentence sense without really being taught. You may even hear yourself when your child speaks.



*Discovery involves asking questions.*

### **Questions and More Questions**

Remember when your toddler pointed to everything with never-ending, “Dis?” And, now, just a few months later, you are still hearing, “What’s this? How does it work? Why?” Three-to-five year olds can ask scores of questions every day. However, these questions are not only necessary for continued language growth but are even more important to the child’s intellectual growth. Children are acquiring labels for objects and actions when they ask, “What’s this, Mama and Daddy?” And when they ask, “How does it work?” and “Why” they are trying to verify what they think is how and why. Children in this state of intellectual development are relearning all they knew from babyhood through their sense of touch, sight, and taste. Now, they’re transferring that knowledge into language—yours and the child’s. Encourage questions and keep right on answering each and every one.

### **Feelings: From Actions to Language**

Feelings are very real. One of the hardest things young children have to do is to let someone else know how they feel—and to use words to tell them. Could it be that we notice the behavior of the child and react only to that? When your child’s feelings are strong, and actions are “talking” instead of words, you might put those feelings into words for the child.

“You really are angry at Bill, aren’t you?”

“You wanted to go with Sally, didn’t you?”



*Father and child talk through stories.*

A hug goes a long way to let your child know you understand. Learning to talk out our feelings is important for each of us. Many actions are not acceptable. But your child needs to have words for feelings, first. Help with those words. And, remember, to share your feelings through words, too.

### **The Wait-Time Conversations**

Reading to your children should be like talking with them. When you talk about the story as you read the book to your child, it encourages a conversation between the two of you. You share what's happening in the story, what might happen next. Listen for your child's ideas. Ask a "what-if" question that requires more than a one-word answer. Some questions might be, "What if the Three Bears had not come home?" or "Do you think the cow really jumped over the moon?"

**Then, wait for your child's response.** It takes time to think about the question, time to think about the words to use, time to respond. Do not hurry your child's response. This waiting time in adult-child conversations promotes thought.



*It's fun to figure out what's in the box.*

### **Discussing for Decision Making**

Children need many opportunities to help with family decisions such as what to take on a picnic, what to pack to go to Grandma's, what to plant in the gardens this year.

Children, even young children, should play a role in family talks about what to do, when to do, and how to do. Do this as often as possible. Children hear different ideas, contribute their ideas, weigh alternative solutions to problems, and become active partners with parents in deciding what's possible and why. Discussion requires listening attentively, responding appropriately, and staying on the topic. These are all valuable language learning patterns. Your child can only learn these language patterns when the opportunity is there.



*Cooking time can be thinking time.*

## Parents' Talk Helps Children Think

How parents interact and how they structure the home environment is critical for their children's intellectual and emotional development. As parents, you know children learn from the everyday happenings around the home, from special events in the community, as well as travel opportunities you may be able to provide them. These learning experiences do not need to be especially designed, manufactured, nor expensive. They just naturally grow out of the daily activities and interests you share with your children.

No special teacher training is necessary. Common sense, good judgment, and a child-like curiosity are essential, however. Through and with you, your child will learn how things sound, how things grow, how things work or don't work, and how to see and do things.

The ways parents ask and answer questions, the ways they suggest the "what ifs" and wonder about the "then what's" can make simple everyday experiences bloom into a wide range of thinking and learning skills for children.

Learning experiences should be fun. When you and your child talk together and learn together, these experiences make a strong bond between the two of you.

Here are some examples of how to encourage thinking through your language with your child. **Remember**—there is no right age for language and thinking experiences. Similar things happen at every age for children from birth to eight years of age.



*Pots, pans, cans, provide inexpensive toys for thinking.*

## Bang! Bang! What Fun!

Are you having fun with the pots and pans? How many round ones are there? So you have more square ones than round ones! Do you think the square pan would hold more beans than the round one? Bet you can count the corners of the square one.

How quickly can you put the four round pans from the smallest to the largest? Is one pan taller than any of the others?

Hit the pans together, like this. Do you hear the different sounds? Which pan do you think sounds like our door bell? Bet the two of us could have a pan band!



*When walking in the woods, new smells and sounds can be found.*

## Using Senses When Walking in the Woods

Just smell this freshly broken twig. Is it similar to a smell in the kitchen? Let's walk ten feet and listen to the sounds. Stop. What do you hear? Can you see what you hear? Does that sound like anything in our yard?

Oh, let's smell the pine needles, the bush over there, and that rotten stump.

I bet this is a good place to feel the dirt. It is rich, black earth. Why is it better earth than that in our garden? How does the dirt feel? Is it warm? Does it have moisture in it? You're smelling the soil. What sounds do you hear as you rub the soil together?

How do you feel when walking in the woods? What makes it seem different than when you are in the city?



*Children can learn about the past from unusual places.*

## Cemeteries Give Us Information

This smooth stone is leaning so much. Let's see if we can read the faint writing. See you can hardly make out the letters. Oh! It is Herman. He died in 1917. Your grandfather was born about then. This boy was only 18 years old when he died. Your brother Harry is 18 now. Let's see if we can find something different about the markers. This stone is shaped like a rectangle. What is the shape of the one over there? Yes, it is round. Some say, "Round like a sphere." That one over there by the tree looks like a cube. Oh, you can spot two other rectangular ones. Do you think there are more rectangular ones than round ones? That one has a verse. You want to count the rectangular and round stones? All right, I'll copy the verses while you count.

Say, did you know that your Aunt Nena worked at the monument works at the edge of town?

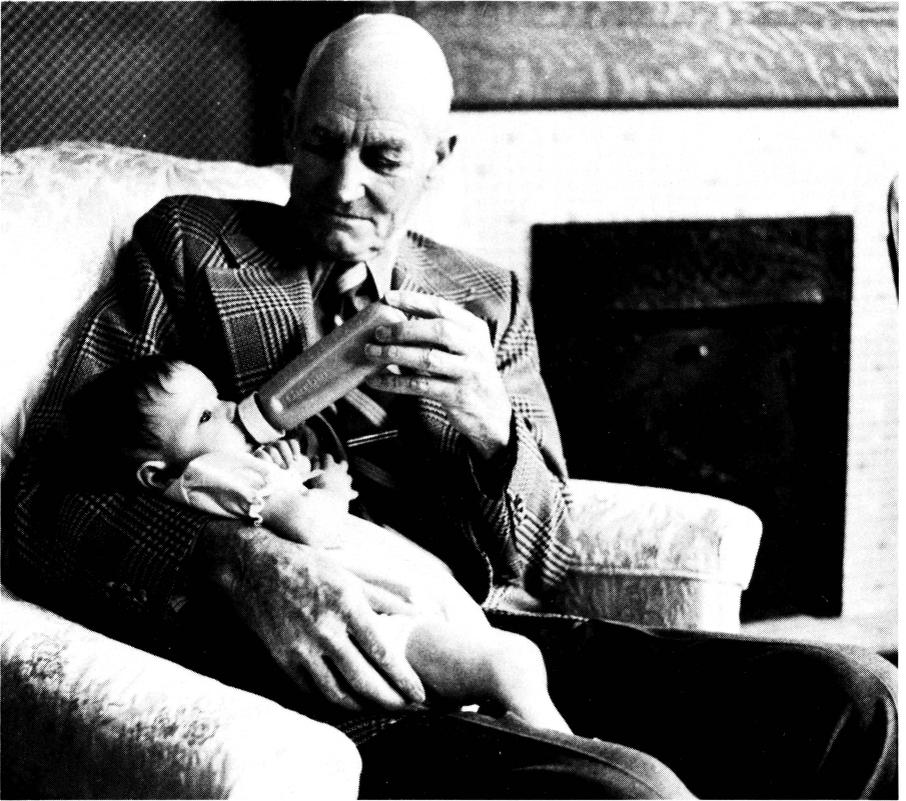


*Mud, sand, and water provide learning experiences.*

## €-€-€-€-€ MUD!

Just see the messy, old mud come up between your toes. It feels cool. Are there any pebbles in the mud? Is it fun? Bet you want to wiggle your toes even more. See the different shapes that squish between your toes. Yes, some are like the designs made by my cookie press.

The mud does splatter on your shorts. I'm glad I've an automatic washer. As for you, we'll just turn the yard hose on you. Water, sand, and mud are such fun, play toys.



*Age, experience, time and feelings can be shared.*

## The Beauty of Age

My what beautiful wrinkles you have, Grandpa Eberle. The wrinkles just make your eyes twinkle. Your hands look so strong. They're different from my little hands. Mother said that your knuckles are so big because of arthritis. Is that something all old people have? Such large veins! I can see where your blood goes!

Have you always lived in this big house? Even when you were a little boy? Was the town always here? Then I bet this was a farm house.

Your grandparents homesteaded this 160 acres. What does 'homestead' mean? Your grandfather built two rooms of the original house. Who built all those other rooms?

What kinds of animals did you have? Where did you go to school? Did you ride the school bus? Oh, you had to walk to the country school. My parents have potluck suppers at our school. Are they anything like the socials you talk about?



*Things you have in the home provide thinking time.*

## Buttons! Buttons! What Can I Do with The Buttons?

Those buttons glisten in the glass jar! Let's empty them onto the floor. They tell some of our family history. This one was used on Lynn's first pajamas. Here's one from my uniform as a policewoman. This one is from Daddy's mailman's suit. This one is from Grandpa Meyer's overalls.

Let's put these buttons in white, red, and blue piles. What other ways can we group them? Yes, by the number of holes, by size, by shape, and by texture. Someday you can group them by those with and without shanks, by personality, and those worn by different workers.

## Places To Go with Your Children:

aquarium  
airport  
bakery  
bus terminal  
circus  
courthouse  
dairy  
fabric shop

farm  
fire station  
gas station  
grocery store  
hatchery  
library  
neighborhood party  
parade

pet shop  
post office  
sand box  
shopping center  
toy store  
zoo

## Curiosity Encouragers

baby books  
balls  
bean bags  
bells  
blankets for tents  
blocks  
books  
boxes

catalogues  
clay  
clothes for dress up  
dirt  
finger paint  
milk cartons  
paper plates  
pictures of friends  
pictures of relatives  
puppets

puzzles  
records  
ropes  
tin cans  
tongue depressors  
tree house  
scrapbooks  
water  
wood, nails, hammer





*Parents and teachers need to talk to know.*

## Parents and Teachers As Partners

By the time your child is eligible to enter kindergarten, you will have had the opportunity to be a parent-teacher for 43,800 hours. When we compare those hours with the total number of hours children spend in school, from kindergarten through the senior year in high school; it will total only 14,040 hours! Yes, your children will be in school about one-third the hours you will have spent with them by the time that kindergarten year begins.

**That's why home learning and parents' teaching power are so important.**

Even when children go to school, parents are still teachers, too. You haven't lost that role; your child has just gained another teacher to work with you. Parents need to be involved in the educational processes of their children—not just during those first years before school, but during every school year. Home and school partnerships enhance children's total learning. These are some ways to help build this partnership with your child's teacher.

### Getting to Know One Another

There was a time when parents and teachers really knew one another. They lived just down the street from one another; they often went to the same church and community gatherings. Younger children in the family usually had the same teachers in elementary school that their big brothers and sisters had before them.

Now, things have changed—even in many small towns. Teachers sometimes live in another community or across the city in a different neighborhood. Children are often bussed to a school quite some distance from their homes. Families, as well as teachers, move more in this highly mobile society of ours.

Be sure you meet your child's teacher; become more than a name. Remember that a teacher has many names and faces to learn; you only have one new person to get to know. That means you need to take the initiative. Your child's teacher will welcome a new friend. It's the beginning of the partnership.

### **Take Time to be Supportive**

Children love their first teacher. They'll quote that teacher over and over again. You may even begin to think your child believes the teacher has the only answer for everything. Welcome this; know it means your child is really enjoying school and all the exciting happenings there.

Share that with the new teacher. Take time to write a short note, make a quick telephone call, or stop by the classroom and let the teacher know how much your child is liking school.

Also, if your child is not as happy for whatever reason, share that, too. Let the teacher know there seems to be a problem and ask if the three of you (include your child) might talk together and share ideas for helping to make your child's new world a little better. Teachers care and they welcome your concern. That's one more step towards a partnership.

### **Volunteers Can Really Make a Difference**

Everyone needs a little help along the way, especially teachers. How they'll welcome your help—both in and out of the classroom!

Sometimes, what is needed is just an extra hand to help with a cooking project in kindergarten or someone who can tell fun stories while the teacher helps two or three children with a special skill.

Toys get broken and bent out of shape with so many children playing with them. Dolls need new clothes. Parents need to be telephoned for a special get-together.

Don't wait to be asked; be a willing volunteer at school or at home. Let your child's teacher know how you might help. Your child will think this is special and will be pleased.

### **Parents and Schools Belong Together in Decision Making**

A home-school partnership means parents and teachers working together in the best interests of children. It's a two-way street; and partners hold joint responsibilities in decision making.

This means being informed—being certain of facts, listening to varying viewpoints, weighing alternatives, asking questions, sharing ideas and feelings—and then making time and giving time to promote what is educationally sound for all children. Be a full partner with your children's teachers—all the way. Become an active participant in creating the best learning environment for children—both at home and at school. Everyone gains; most importantly, children gain. Children and their education are the most important products we have.

If only now and then you think about how important your teaching power is, then sharing our ideas with each of you will have been rewarding to us, the authors.

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## About the Authors



**Dr. Stevie Hoffman** joined the faculty in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, College of Education, University of Missouri, during the 1978-1979 academic year. She comes to Missouri from the University of Florida where she taught in the Early Childhood Education Program and worked with the late Ira J. Gordon in the Parent Education Model of Follow Through for several years.

She has served as a consultant for parent-teacher workshops in migrant education, regional Headstart programs, educational daycare centers and public schools. Her doctoral degree is in foundations of education, emphasizing psychological foundations and early childhood education, and was received at the University of Florida. Dr. Hoffman is presently coordinating the developing undergraduate and graduate programs in early childhood education at the University of Missouri-Columbia.

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## The First School

A struggle, a cry, a baby is born  
To a strange and hostile world  
A helpless, defenseless and dependent child  
A Destiny, with moulding, to be unfurled.

It is I, all is I, for  
Naught is known but me.  
By touch, by love, by help  
Forthwith—the outside  
World is focused to see.

But what is friend and what is foe  
It does not know—but according  
To those whom it grows to trust  
The values here, true or false,  
Drive the first stake in destiny's guts.

Then building, adding or taking away  
The self is moulded like potter's clay.  
The early shaping is the critical key  
To fix what will in what could be.

Example, punishment, reward, and above,  
Dispensed in a blanket of sensible love.  
These are the tools the wise parent uses  
With balance, design, and never abuses.

Then built on the base of early design  
Further exchange of values align.  
The skills and the cognitives, cute little views  
Are built like pyramids on earlier cues.

How can it happen that a child can be  
Without a respect just meant for me?  
How can it feel concern for another  
Except it receives the same from its mother?

How can it learn to value direction  
Except that it feels a sense of perfection?  
How can it grow in its multiple tasks  
Except that the answers exceed what it asks?

Now widens the view to outer reaches  
To family and friend—more learning breeches  
Exploring, testing, always seeking  
But needing sure guidance, loving, beseeching.

So comes the time for formal instruction  
And sent to teacher for its introduction  
Here, fruits of previous efforts will rule  
for the child has completed its FIRST SCHOOL.

Charles H. Koelling

Being a parent is no small task! Recollections surely will reveal the silent and verbal commitments made when a child was born. At that moment the center of the universe usually shifts to focus upon a small creature in a crib, completely dependent upon those outside for its sustenance, both material and emotional.

It is obvious to everyone that the right amount and kind of food is essential for adequate growth of the child's body. Unfortunately, it is not always equally recognized that specific and deliberate provision must be made for adequate development of the mind and spirit. This requires effort, time and commitment. It very often requires some old fashioned sacrifice - not so much in material things (you can't buy what is needed here), but the willingness to forego, when necessary, one's own personal preferences and immediate pleasures in order to do whatever is required to maximize the well being of the child. In recent years the "do your own thing" syndrome has become rampant. However, this attitude can almost guarantee disaster in rearing a child. In child rearing the parents are number one, and they will continue to be throughout the maturation process. The required roles will change as the child grows older, but they will be no less important.

The authors of this monograph have provided some guidelines, some representative activities and suggestions which will be very helpful to parents. Obviously, it doesn't cover everything. However, used as a structure or a guide, it will provide a way for parents to be on the right track.

Charles H. Koelling  
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