



PARENT-CHILD HOME PROGRAM

A PROVEN BEGINNING FOR SCHOOL SUCCESS SINCE 1965

Curriculum

The goal of the Parent-Child Home Program is to prepare young children for later school success by stimulating the positive parent-child interaction that develops critical language and pre-literacy skills. The Program also focused on preparing children to be strong readers because reading is the critical domain that all children must master in order to succeed academically. The Program is designed to reach children who may be at risk for reading problems and school failure as early as possible, by modeling for the parent and child together ways in which the parent may interact with the child and develop their language and literacy skills.

The Parent-Child Home Program provides intensive home visiting – twice a week, for 30 minutes each visit – to families with two- and three-year-old children. The first visit of the week, the Home Visitor brings the family either a children’s book or an educational toy that is a gift for the family. The second visit of the week is considered a review visit. The parents may take a more active role in this session as they begin to see the value and results of the work they are doing in their home with their children. Each Program cycle lasts a minimum of 23 weeks, and the complete program spans two years.

The Parent-Child Home Program’s home visit curriculum is designed to support the two critical aspects of young children’s early literacy: their social-emotional development and their language development.

Social-Emotional Development

Three reports from the National Academy of Sciences, National Research Council: *Eager to Learn: Educating Our Preschoolers*; *From Neurons to Neighborhoods*; and *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* all contain common themes about how children learn and what they need to be successful in school. Young children learn best, and are most motivated to learn to read, when their early literacy experiences take place in the context of a loving, nurturing relationship. There is now strong evidence of the link between early social-emotional development and language development, and an understanding that a young child’s emotional well-being will continue to affect their language and literacy development throughout their preschool years.

Early language development grows out of a need that a young child has to communicate ideas, thoughts, feelings, and observations to the people in his/her life to whom he/she feels closest. Children who have secure early relationships with their primary caregivers tend to explore more, involve others in communication, and engage in more positive social interactions.

The non-didactic approach of The Parent-Child Home Program encourages parents to support children’s exploratory behavior, language development, and positive social interactions. The Home Visitor models all three, encouraging the parent to participate in the play or reading activity and reinforcing the bond between parent and child. Particularly for a parent who engages in negative and restrictive communication with her/his child, the demonstration of a different way of interacting can make a profound difference. Over the course of two years in the Program, with intensive home visits that take place in a non-threatening, fun manner, such parents often make dramatic changes in their own behavior.

Language Development

Reading is a language-based skill. The skills for learning to read competently begin to be developed very early in a child's life. A developed vocabulary is the springboard for later reading fluency. Narrative skills, whether they are acquired through a tradition of oral storytelling or dinner conversation at home, or being read to at bedtime, are directly correlated with the ability to learn how to read. In addition, the latest research indicates that phonological processing, which is the awareness and ability to distinguish sounds in oral language, is directly linked to later reading ability.

Book reading, using quality children's picture books, contributes to all these skills – enriching vocabulary, increasing narrative skills, and heightening phonemic awareness. Picture vocabulary books, rhyming books, repetitive or rhythmic text, and predictable stories all can help young children in providing an early literacy foundation. A caring adult reading aloud to a child can ask questions, label pictures, and engage a child in a conversation about the narrative, all within the comfortable context of a loving relationship.

Play is also ideal for enriching children's oral language. Educational toys foster symbolic play, help children learn self control, instigate problem-solving, encourage reflection, and facilitate verbal communication. Access to writing materials as part of the play activity further supports a child's narrative skills. The active participation of a caring adult during a play session provides the child with a play partner who has a more advanced vocabulary, can ask questions, and provide commentary. The adult can also assist the child in regulating emotions, taking turns, and using reasoning.

The Parent-Child Home Program curriculum is designed with all these factors in mind. The schedule alternates bringing books and toys into the home, so that both may be used to facilitate early literacy activities. The books and toys for the Program are selected by the local replication site coordinators, but must adhere to strict guidelines set by the Program's National Center. These guidelines address issues such as developmental appropriateness, safety, durability, and cultural sensitivity. The book and toy curriculum progresses in a developmental sequence that is appropriate for the age groups served. The Program encourages a loving primary caretaker to participate one-on-one with the child, and shows the adult (a parent/grandparent/foster parent or other primary caregiver) approaches to stimulating verbal and non-verbal interaction, including how to ask open-ended questions that initiate conversation with the child and enrich his/her vocabulary. Both the books and toys remain permanently with the family, so they may continue using them as tools to further parent-child interaction on a daily basis.

Focusing on Families at Risk

Reading readiness and school readiness is undermined when a child lives in a home environment that is stressful, unpredictable, or unstimulating. Families challenged by poverty, unemployment, substandard housing, language and literacy barriers, and/or low levels of parental education often cannot or do not access center-based programming, or other community resources, such as public libraries, with their children.

The Parent-Child Home Program curriculum is designed to engage such parents in non-threatening, enjoyable activities on a predictable schedule with a trusted, friendly Home Visitor. Developed over 40 years ago, and evaluated for four decades, The Program meets all the best practice criteria set forth in the most recent research: it is an early intervention/prevention model; it focuses on early literacy both within a social-emotional and cognitive/language development context; and it emphasizes parental responsibility. It also honors each family's culture, uses developmentally appropriate books and toys, connects the family with the local school district and other community agencies, emphasizes the importance of training and supervision of Home Visitors, and is a program model with very specific goals that is designed to be replicated in any community.