



The Centre for Family Literacy Centre Page

CONVERSATIONS WITH BABIES

At our Books for Babies program, staff share with parents a variety of techniques to help them support their babies' learning. The program emphasizes the importance of reading, talking, and singing with their babies. The bond formed between a parent and baby through these shared activities builds strong connections that help build early language and literacy skills.



From birth, babies are naturally drawn toward faces and voices. Therefore, the first steps on their literacy journey begin with conversation.

Here are a few things to keep in mind when you talk with a baby:

- Babies are excellent listeners. Share your thoughts, talk about the things you are doing, or tell stories.
- Even before their first words, babies reply with babbles and coos. Responding to their verbalization helps them learn about the pattern of conversation.
- Babies are super good at picking up additional languages. Speaking and singing to them in multiple languages supports language development.

Our Vision:
A healthy, literate society where all are able to contribute and succeed.

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THREE PRINCIPLES FOR IMPROVING OUTCOMES

Harvard University's Centre on the Developing Child recently released a paper entitled *Three Principles to Improve Outcomes for Children and Families*. The document focuses on designing policies and implementing practices based on recent advances in the science of brain development.

The science recommends three key principles be included when developing policy and programs to improve outcomes for children and families.

First, we need to provide practical assistance and modeling behaviour opportunities for program participants to support responsive relationships. A responsive relationship, whether adult to adult or adult to child, needs to reflect a serve-and-return interaction. A serve-and-return interaction is like a game of tennis where there is a back and forth exchange.

The paper states, "When adults model responsive relationships, the benefits come full circle, ultimately helping children become healthy, responsive parents themselves." A child who experiences serve-and-return interactions early in life is more likely to experience healthy brain development.

The second key principle is strengthening core life skills. These are the skills needed

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WINTER
2017

CONVERSATIONS WITH BABIES

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- Babies use facial cues to learn about sounds. So maintain eye contact, use facial expressions and an expressive voice. This keeps them engaged.



An extra note about the last point. You have probably noticed people sound different when they talk to babies. They will use a high energy sing-song voice that usually makes babies smile. There are studies that show this helps babies to recognize the differences between different speech sounds.

Although adults might try to tone the sing-song voice down, there is evidence that we all do it on some level. Using the

sing-song voice is one of the many ways we can show a baby that we are engaging with them personally. The technique of the back and forth communication is foundational for language development and brain development in general.

Babies appear to learn language faster when they have parents who treat them as conversation partners. It is important to not talk *at* them, but to interact *with* them. Studies have shown that children raised with chatty parents get higher test scores in reading and vocabulary. Baby conversation does matter.

THREE PRINCIPLES

Continued

to function in everyday life whether at home, work, or in the community. They are learned over time, beginning in families where parents pass them along to their children. We use core skills or capabilities to focus, plan and achieve goals, control impulse behaviour, and adapt to change. Building the core skills of children is best developed in programs designed for two-generation participants. Through activities that involve the adult and child, the adult strengthens their own skills and is then able to support the child in building these skills.

Reducing sources of stress is the third principle the paper recommends. The families and adults we serve often are experiencing significant stress in their lives. Low literacy skills affect their health, their ability to find employment, and their connections to community supports.

Developing policies and implementing programs that reduce the external factors creating the stress helps create a more stable family environment, and parents are then better able to develop responsive relationships with their children. We need to ensure that we reduce as many barriers as possible to program participation. We need to help parents strengthen their skills, and provide support and guidance on accessing other services that will help them reduce the stress in their lives.

The three principles outlined in the Harvard paper are interconnected and reinforce one another. Evaluating our policies and programs to determine if we are incorporating all three principles is the first step in determining if we are effectively improving outcomes for children and families.

RENOWNED CANADIAN ECONOMIST TO DELIVER KEYNOTE AT LITERACY BREAKFAST

Craig Alexander, Vice President and Chief Economist with the Conference Board of Canada, will give the keynote address at the Centre for Family Literacy's annual Leading with Literacy Breakfast. Mr. Alexander brings over 20 years of experience in the private sector as an economic and financial forecaster.



Craig is a strong and motivational public speaker, a strong supporter of literacy, and a champion of the charitable sector, for which he received a Queen's Jubilee Medal.

Previously, Craig was Senior Vice-President and Chief Economist for TD Bank Group where he authored *Literacy Matters: A Call for Action*, and in December 2013 a special report *Canada's Literacy and Numeracy Challenge Worsens*. In April of this year, Craig participated as a panelist on a national forum hosted by Frontier College – Literacy and Poverty.

In Alberta, it is shocking that 45% of Albertans lack the necessary literacy skills to succeed in today's economy. In *Literacy Matters*, Craig states, "This depressing situation carries a significant economic and social cost that can be tied to many pressing problems facing Canada today."

The subject is too broad and too complex to be addressed in one keynote speech; our intent is to build awareness of the issue and provoke discussion. What role do business, government, and community leaders play in shaping the discussion, and what actions can we take to improve literacy levels in Alberta?

"It is hard to identify any one single issue that can have such a large payoff to individuals, the economy and society than literacy," said Craig Alexander.

The **Leading with Literacy Breakfast** will take place **Tuesday, January 23, 2018 at the Westin Hotel in Edmonton** and is the kick off to a week of celebrations around National Family Literacy Week. Tickets can be purchased through the Centre for Family Literacy website www.familit.ca.

IMPORTANT DATES

Office Christmas Closure

December 25 - January 2

Leading with Literacy Breakfast

Tuesday, January 23

7:00–9:00 a.m.

The Westin Edmonton

National Family Literacy Day

Saturday, January 27

Family Literacy Carnival

Sunday, January 28

2:00–4:00 p.m.

Robbins Health Learning Centre

MacEwan University

Visit our website for more information.



Online donations to the Centre can be made through CanadaHelps.org



The Centre for Family Literacy gratefully acknowledges the ongoing support of the following:



WINE RAFFLE SUPPORTS CENTRE'S PROGRAMS

To switch to our email newsletter: please send us an email at info@famlit.ca and reference Centre Page in the subject line.

We are holding a wine raffle with the prize being 50 bottles of red wine, each worth at least \$50. Only 100 tickets are available at \$100 each.

There are many unique wines in the collection including a bottle of 2006 Robert Hunter Cabernet Sauvignon. This wine was produced by one of the pioneers of Sonoma, Robert Hunter, and since his passing, the winery has closed and only limited stock is available.

You can download a ticket order form on our website at www.famlit.ca or call the Centre for Family Literacy at 780-421-7323.

FAMILY LITERACY DAY CELEBRATIONS

Come and join us for this fun filled carnival! Wander from station to station at your own pace discovering fun activities that support literacy. Past activities have included making elephant tooth paste, being up close to a hissing cockroach, and building music shakers.

Visit each of the eight stations and get your passport stamped so you can take home a free book!

The Carnival is presented in partnership with MacEwan University Golden Key Society.

Date: Sunday, January 28
Time: 2:00 – 4:00 p.m.
Location: Robbins Health Learning Centre
MacEwan University
109 St & 104 Ave, Edmonton

YES, I WOULD LIKE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

Your support will help us make a difference in the lives of Alberta families! Together we can make Alberta a healthy, literate society where all are able to contribute and succeed.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR
SUPPORT!

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Literacy Develops in Families First

The Centre for Family Literacy is dedicated to helping Alberta grow and prosper. Our innovative programs, training and research help Alberta families achieve what they imagine—improved education, jobs and health.

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