Let’s Talk…It Makes a Difference: An Oral Language Development Campaign that Empowers Parents

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Agenda for Children History

- Community-based process to choose city priorities: literacy and out-of-school time

- The Agenda for Children, a partnership formed in 1997, oversees the *Let’s Talk* Campaign
  - Cambridge Human Services Department
  - Cambridge Police Department
  - Cambridge Public Health Department
  - Cambridge Public Library
  - Cambridge Public Schools


- Goal: All children and families in Cambridge will be able to read.
Most literacy programs start with reading…
We start with TALK.

- Children with rich vocabularies are better prepared to read and learn once they enter elementary school.

- The quantity and quality of talking with young children develops their language, reading, and writing abilities.

- The amount of reading and talking parents do with their children tends to differ based on parents’ language, cultural background, and economic status.
Helps children enter school ready to learn how to read and write by educating and supporting their parents and caregivers.

We do this by working to improve the quality and quantity of conversations taking place between young children and their parents starting at birth.

Provides a continuum of services from birth to age 5.
Key Messages

- Learning begins at birth.

- Talk with your child as much as possible...
  - while doing everyday activities
  - in the language you speak the best

- Engage in conversations, back and forth, with your child

- Read with your child every day. Talk as much as you read.
Techniques

- Oral Language Development Techniques
  - OWL (Observe, Wait, Listen)
  - Imitation
  - Expansion
  - Extension
  - Turnabout

- Concept: “Play Talk” versus “Business Talk”

- Reading Development Techniques/Dialogic Reading
  - CROWD (Complete, Recall, Open-Ended Questions, Wh-Questions, Distancing)

Fun Fact! Did you know that babies around the world make the same sounds until they are 4 months old?
Much of our work is carried out by Literacy Ambassadors – multilingual, multicultural, trained parents who serve as a primary link between the Agenda for Children Literacy Initiative and harder-to-reach families in our community.
Let’s Talk Program Components:
Educate parents of children birth to five about the importance of oral language development, and provide them with techniques that enrich conversations with their children.

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Maternity Ward Visits and Born to Read Bags

We visit Cambridge Hospital twice a week and see all new moms.

All newborns in Cambridge are sent a Born to Read packet at 4 months.
Literacy Home Visits

Model positive, interactive literacy practices with families in their home environments, and connect families to available community resources.

“The Home visitor made me feel comfortable. It's as if I already knew her – she described her own parenting experiences, and that was helpful too.”
Talking, Reading and Storytelling Workshops

Help parents learn about the importance of talking, interactive reading and storytelling and provide specific, practical techniques.
Community Playgroups

Provide a variety of structured literacy-based activities for young children and their caregivers in a fun, stimulating and social environment.
Learning in the Neighborhood

A series of activities that promote literacy and learning in and around the community

- StoryWalks
- Distributing Books at Community Events
- Family Literacy Fun Day
Lessons from the Field

- Our **approach** is that all parents want the best for their children and are willing to try things that will help their children.

- **Model** the new skill and have parents **practice** it.

- Emphasize that this is a new skill that takes practice; **start from their experience** as a child.

- **Be practical** about suggestions: How can it fit in their life? Give them time to think about how they can do it and what their barriers are. Have parents come up with one new idea to try.
Lessons from the Field (continued)

- Communicate and reinforce **a few clear key messages**.

- **Give reminders**: Have giveaways, summary sheets, books, or activities to take home.

- **Pay attention to what is working** for parents and adapt as needed.

- **Reinforce messages throughout community**; have a variety of ways to participate; get it “in the drinking water”.

- **Collaborate** with other agencies to extend your reach & resources.
Outcomes

- 95% of parents who received a literacy home visit reported they had changed the way they talk to their child, with 40% reporting that they had changed “very much.”

- 85% of parents who received a literacy home visit reported they had changed the way they read to their child, with 45% reporting that they had changed “very much.”
Parent Quotes

- “Before the visit, I think the baby not understand. But after the visit, I talked about everything – like flowers, trees, cars, and bubbles.”

- “I didn't talk to my daughter much before the Home Visit; now, I always include her in conversation and in whatever I'm doing…”

- “When reading, I'll point to pictures with him on my lap and allow him to freely touch book, put it in his mouth, that kind of thing.”

- “We go out for walks, looking around for things and talking - I feel like this increases our bond.”
Thank You!

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