



Your Child's First Teacher: You



Learning Begins at Birth



First 5 School Readiness Programs help parents and caregivers prepare children for success

by **KENDALL FIELDS**

Getting your children ready for school begins even before you hold him or her for the first time.

The choices you make about things such as prenatal care, breastfeeding, doctors, child care, and even bedtime stories shape your child's future.

As parents and caregivers, we are our child's first teacher.

According to a report by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 90 percent of brain development occurs within the first five years of a child's life, and most of that occurs in the first three years. Early experiences help children shape how the brain develops — how they think, how they feel, and how they grow.

As parents and caregivers, we are our child's first teacher. Helping our children to have positive learning experiences during their first five years of life increases their chances of success, in and out of school.

From birth, children learn from *you* through simple activities, such as singing, talking, reading, giggling, snuggling, and playing games. Everyday events make a

difference: reading a bedtime story each night, singing songs together in the car, sorting laundry, telling stories, or talking about vegetables at the grocery store. Children who are strongly connected to their parents and caregivers are better prepared for school.

It starts with taking an active role in your child's life from the day he or she is born. This may sound easy, but it means so much more. It may seem best to let children learn from the TV, computer or smartphone, but it's connecting with your children that will help them succeed in school — and life. First 5 Commissions were developed to help parents in this most important role.

**What is School Readiness?
Making sure children are**
1. Healthy,
2. Learning, and
3. Have a supportive family and community.

Proposition 10: The Children & Families Act

In 1998, California voters passed Proposition 10, a tobacco tax, to fund programs for children ages 0 to 5 and their families. The distribution of funding is based on the number of children born in each of the 58 counties. All First 5 Commissions provide unique local services to help during the first five years of life.

Each county commission provides funding to local agencies that deliver services through a range of programs to support healthy children, strong families and early learning. School Readiness programs — preparing a child to enter kindergarten ready to learn — help families see the doctor or dentist for well-child visits, understand their child's growth and development, gain parenting skills, read to their children each day and attend high-quality child care. Programs will vary by county and the age of your child. Most of all, First 5 Commissions support parents as their child's first teacher.

Voters created First 5 to support the growth of young children. First 5 is building strong communities for all of us.

Setting Your Child Up For Success

First 5 Early Learning Programs help parents prepare their children for school



story and photo by **MIKE BLOUNT**

Getting children ready for school means more than getting dressed, having breakfast, and getting to school on time. The job of helping children succeed in school starts before they are born.

Research tells us that children's brains grow the fastest during the first five years of life, so it's important to love, support, read to and play with them to help them get the best possible start in school and in life.

Four-year-old Tobin Lasko and his brother, 2-year-old Talbot, love to read books with their mother, Serena Lasko. She first learned about First 5 Early Learning Programs through her local library. She decided to get involved because she wanted to learn more about parenting. She used First 5 materials to learn where each of her children were in their growth. Lasko says she and her husband came up with a plan to support their children's language development and physical activity.

First on their list, the family reads together each day. "They're not just learning words. When they're looking at pictures — especially when they're little — it opens up a conversation. Even with a 2-year-old who might not have a ton of words, you're discussing colors and shapes and numbers. It's also a time to connect with them."

The Lasko family also started going on nature hikes near their home after they learned their oldest child, 5-year-old Sora, was interested in animals. Lasko believes it's important to let your child's interests guide your activities. "It really comes down to a kid loving to learn and we really try to do our best to help support that," Lasko says.

Mother Rocio Larson agrees. Her 4-year-old daughter, Alexandra, is already excited about preschool from being involved with a First 5 Early Learning Program in their hometown. "Whenever Alexandra enters the classroom, she gets quiet, sits down and prepares herself to learn," Larson says. Her daughter enjoys making crafts and reading. But most importantly, preschool has helped Alexandra become more outgoing.

"I think [the First 5 Early Learning Program] was extremely important for her because she was very shy," Larson says. "She was always with me — I'm a full-time mom — so it was important for me that she learn how to work with other people."

With the help of First 5, Larson found out about Alexandra's speech problem and has been referred to a speech therapist. Larson says she has seen her daughter's confidence grow since she has been involved. "It's helped her so much and I'm very pleased [at her progress]. She's really happy now and looks forward to going to school."

Through First 5's Early Learning Programs, both mothers learned new parenting skills to help prepare their children for school. Lasko and Larson both encourage parents to get involved with First 5 and learn how to take an active role in parenting.



Serena Lasko looks on as her son, Tobin, builds a creation with painted Popsicle sticks and Velcro.

Through First 5's programs, both mothers learned new parenting skills to help prepare their children for school.

Tips to get ready for school:

Children should enter school ready to learn. Communities have programs that help children learn and grow. For more information, visit the First 5 California website at www.ccfc.ca.gov/parents.

Read with your child each day. Reading, singing, and talking with your child each day helps him or her learn and read. For more information on reading to children daily and other early learning activities, contact your local library or visit Get Ready to Read at www.getreadytoread.org.

Connect with your children. Play, sing, laugh, and enjoy your children each day. For more information on activities to do with your children, visit PBS Kids at www.pbs.org/parents or Born Learning at www.bornlearning.org.

Connect with your community. Get connected and learn about your community. For more information, contact your local First 5 Commission. (See back page).

Stefani Santana helps her son Charlie brush his teeth.



“It is a common goal that children are given the chance to reach their full potential. Concerns in growth and development, vaccinations and overall health are addressed in each clinic visit. It ... is the start of the relationship built between a doctor and patient.”



Dr. Rina Rivera
San Joaquin General Hospital

Learning Healthy Habits

Family uses First 5 Health Programs to teach healthy lifelong lessons

story and photo by **MIKE BLOUNT**

At the Santana house, brushing teeth is a family activity. Each of the children own toothbrushes that light up. Stefani Santana says her children use them as timers, so they know how long to brush. The children like the toothbrushes so much, they often do not have to be told to use them. “At the same time, we’re also reminding them that they can’t eat candy because we want them to have good teeth and be healthy,” Stefani says.

Teaching their children healthy habits that they will carry on in the future is important to Stefani and Carlos Santana. Things like good dental habits, eating healthy food and having high self-esteem are lessons the family uses from First 5 Health Programs to pass on to their children.

“They’ll ask me ‘Is this healthy to eat? Is this something that is good for me?’” Carlos says. He’s always happy to answer because he knows that his children look to him for guidance, and he wants to help them make the right choices. “We are the voice of the children for things they don’t know, and we are expanding their knowledge by teaching them how to live happy, healthy lives.”

“Thanks to First 5 [Health Programs], we were able to understand how Logan should be growing.”

Stefani Santana

The Santana’s three children, 8-year-old Logan, 6-year-old Charlie, and 2-year-old Dante, are all involved in active team sports, including baseball, soccer, and basketball. Stefani volunteers to help coach her sons’ teams because she wants to show them how exercise fits in a healthy lifestyle. She also knows the benefit of learning how to play with other children.

“When children first start sports, they’re usually shy,” Stefani says.

“But after a little while I start to see them work together and start smiling. They become more confident, and I can see the difference.”

Aside from teaching them creative ways to keep their children healthy, Stefani and Carlos say a First 5 Health Program also helped them identify early signs of autism in Logan.

When Stefani first received a flier from First 5 showing what to expect from children as they grow, she realized that she needed help for their son. Both of the young parents noticed that he wasn’t as advanced as other children his age in walking or crawling and other areas. So, they took Logan to a doctor, where he was diagnosed with high-functioning autism.

“Because he was our first child, we didn’t know what to expect, but as a parent I had to be the voice for Logan,” Stefani says. “Thanks to First 5 [Health Programs], we were able to understand how he should be growing. This helped us explain [concerns] to our doctor and learn how to teach him certain things before he started kindergarten. We also learned how to help our kids to be healthy in every way.”

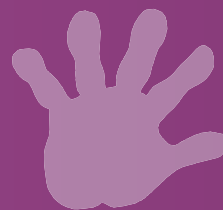
Tips for having healthy bodies:

Take your child to all well-child visits. Make sure they are up to date on all of their immunizations (shots). Children who get regular check-ups are healthier and better able to learn.

See a dentist by your child’s first tooth or first birthday. Healthy baby teeth help build strong adult teeth. Get your child’s teeth checked regularly. For more information visit the The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD) website at www.aapd.org.

For more information on finding health insurance, choosing doctors and dentists, attending well-child visits, including visiting a dentist, go to the American Academy of Pediatrics website at www.healthychildren.org.

The Magic Moments In Child Development



First 5 Parent Support Programs help parents appreciate each moment in their child's growth

by NATASHA VON KAENEL

At her school play, Jen Kalsbeek's 4-year-old daughter Camlyn Kalsbeek, was not happy. "She threw herself down, refused to put her costume on, was screaming and everyone could hear her." People came up to Jen afterward and said, "Oh, she is a lot to handle."

But Jen, therapist and mother of three, knows as a parent there are challenging moments. Parents need to set aside time each day to connect with their child in a positive way and focus on their "sweet side." These are the 'magic moments' that help parents get through those tough times during the school play or in the grocery store.

Jen understands how hard it is to juggle children and a job. "I think the biggest thing is having that [magic] moment every day. No matter how crazy life gets, there is a treasure in the moments where you get to play or connect with your child. Those moments are so precious." She explains that special moments can be when you read your child a story, tuck them in at night or play in the park. These magic moments can be anything that creates or strengthens the special joy between parents and their children. The great thing about a magic moment is that parents don't have to do anything, the magic is always available; even after a long tantrum or struggle to get the car seat fastened — the magic is in the everyday moments.

When talking about how a child develops, Jen says "There are general milestones, which give parents an idea about what to expect as a child grows. These are helpful, but every child is different. We are experts of our children. If you have a feeling that something is wrong, trust your gut."

She says to enjoy special moments with your child. "You are the most important everything to your child. You are their superhero. Much of their learning is based on the relationship they have with you and others in their life." This is a huge job for parents. With that said, it's as important for parents to be good to themselves as to their little ones. Taking time with friends, hobbies or whatever you enjoy is essential for parents. When every family member is given love, respect and space to grow, families are able to support the healthy development of their children.

It is important for families to know they are not alone. Parenting can be the most joyful, yet most challenging job in our lives. "We know that many families deal with colic (excessive crying), sleep difficulties, medical issues, emotional struggles, and lots of outside stress. It is important for families to know that there are resources out there to provide the support they want. One easy way to find local resources is calling your county's First 5. A person is on the other side of the phone and will have a name and number for you.



Sisters Camlyn and Ava Kalsbeek create a magic moment, enjoying outside time on the family's hammock.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JEN KALSBECK

First 5 Parent Support Programs are great resources to help parents, especially during those challenging moments.

Tips for healthy development:

Make sure your child is on track. Information on developmental milestones can help parents see how their child is doing socially, physically, emotionally, in language and learning. Parents who regularly screen their child's growth have a better understanding of whether they are meeting these critical milestones. For more information on a child's developmental milestones, visit the American Academy of Pediatrics website at www.healthychildren.org. If you would like more information about children with special needs, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/index.html.

Choose high-quality early care and education programs. Children who attend high-quality child care and preschool programs are better prepared for school. To find quality programs in your community, contact the California Child Care Resource and Referral Agency at www.rrnetwork.org.

Get your child ready for a bright future



SCAN ME
WITH YOUR
PHONE!

The first five years of a child's life is when most brain development occurs. As a parent, you are your child's first teacher and their voice. From the minute your child is born, you can start preparing them for school — and life. From breastfeeding and health care to bedtime stories and sing-alongs, First 5's support parents in their most important job — raising healthy children.

Connect with First 5!

First 5 Colusa

(530) 458-5555
www.First5Colusa.org



First 5 El Dorado

(530) 622-5787
www.First5ElDorado.com



First 5 Merced

(209) 385-7337
www.First5MercedCounty.org



First 5 Placer

(530) 745-1413
www.First5Placer.org



First 5 Sacramento

(916) 876-5865
www.First5Sacramento.net



First 5 San Joaquin

(209) 953-5437
www.SJCKids.org



First 5 Stanislaus

(209) 558-6218
www.StanProp10.org



First 5 Sutter

(530) 822-7505
www.SutterCounty.org/CFC



First 5 Yolo

(530) 669-2475
www.First5Yolo.org



First 5 Yuba

(530) 749-4877
www.First5Yuba.org



10 Things to do with your child

Children learn through play — playing helps them get along with others, learn new skills, and use their imagination. Help your child fall in love with learning through playtime. Be an active parent, engage your children in a game or with a book. Here are some activities you can do with your child.

- ☐ 1. **Talk to your child, beginning the moment she is born.** Describe what you are doing as you do it, tell her stories, recite rhymes, ask questions. Don't forget to listen to her when she talks.
- ☐ 2. **Sing and chant with your child.** Explore rhythms and repetitions. Have musical instruments — even homemade ones — available to make this activity even more fun.
- ☐ 3. **Read to your child every day.** Read different types of books, including ABC books, picture books, nursery rhymes, even magazines. Share with him what you like.
- ☐ 4. **Eat healthy.** Provide your child with fruits and vegetables and only drink water or milk.
- ☐ 5. **Get active.** Plan regular physical activities like walking, jumping, hopping, throwing, dancing, and catching a ball. Let your child play outside as often as possible.
- ☐ 6. **Make the doctor fun.** Teach your child the importance of healthy habits. Play doctor and dentist to prepare him for going to well-child visits and talk about things he can do to keep his body healthy, like brushing his teeth. Make sure he is up to date on immunizations (shots).
- ☐ 7. **Set a good example.** Children imitate what they see others do and what they hear others say. When parents treat others with respect, children will be respectful, too.
- ☐ 8. **Teach your child appropriate behavior.** Teach your child how to express her feelings through books and talking. Help her develop self-control and understand that some behaviors, like kicking and biting, are inappropriate. Make sure to praise her for listening and learning good behavior.
- ☐ 9. **Know your child.** Pay attention to the unspoken messages of your child's body language and for clues about how he is feeling.
- ☐ 10. **Connect your child with other children and your community.** Encourage your child to play with other children. Take her to places where there are plenty of other children to interact with — parks, libraries, and picnics are all great places to start.