



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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ATTENTION EDITORS & NEWS DIRECTORS: During National Week of the Young Child (April 19-25, 2009), South Carolina First Steps is highlighting early childhood brain development. Cutting-edge research in this field is empowering parents and policymakers alike in creating the brightest of futures for young children.

Priming young brains for lifelong success

At birth, the brain is only 25 percent of adult size and reaches 90 percent of adult size by age 5. A child's surroundings and interactions with others have the greatest impact on brain development during the child's first three years of life.

Cutting-edge brain research reveals how a child's brain develops and also points to how to create an optimal environment for that development. This research gives powerful guidance for parents, child care providers – any adult or policymaker who impacts a child's day-to-day environment.

TIPS FOR BRANIACS

TIP: Hold your baby close to you to build strong bonds.

WHY IT MATTERS: From the very beginning of life, the quality of relationships a child has with important people – parents, child care providers, etc. – influences the emerging architecture of the brain. Research on the topic of “attachment” reveals that the quality and frequency of basic interactions with a baby, such as touching and holding, molds the very early developing regions of the human nervous system, including the brain stem.

TIP: Respond quickly and calmly to your baby's/young child's needs.

WHY IT MATTERS: Emergent emotional and social experiences are as important to the wiring of the brain as intellectual experiences. Experiences – such as responding to a baby's cries – create expectations in the child, which alters their perceptions. These positive experiences establish the foundations in the brain for “attachment” – for example, a baby's sense of trust or knowing that crying will result in a response from the caregiver.

Sources: “From Neurons to Neighborhoods,” Jack P. Shonkoff and Deborah A. Phillips; WestEd: The Program for Infant/Toddler Care, Ronald J. Lally; Zero to Three; South Carolina First Steps staff.

***About National Week of the Young Child:** The Week of the Young Child is an annual celebration sponsored by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. The purpose of the Week of the Young Child is to focus public attention on the needs of young children and their families and to recognize the early childhood programs and services that meet those needs.*

***Week of the Young Child in South Carolina:** To read Gov. Mark Sanford's South Carolina Week of the Young Child Proclamation – and to learn more about early brain development and the work of First Steps and our partners – go to www.scfirststeps.org.*

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South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness is a comprehensive, results-oriented statewide education initiative to help prepare children to reach school healthy and ready to succeed. Public and private support are combined through county partnerships to enable individual communities to address the unmet needs of young children and their families.