



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.

Building brain capacity for language development starts at birth

When babies are born, their brains are primed to learn language, including millions of brain cells for controlling language. During the first years of life, the baby's brain cells connect with other cells to form complex pathways for language. With the brain primed for language acquisition, the ball is now in the court of the adults and caretakers in the baby's life. As the baby hears people speak, the brain strengthens these pre-wired language connections. Without activity in these brain cells, those cells can wither away within the first 10 years of life. The bottom line is, talk to your baby or young child all the time.

TIPS FOR BRANIACS

TIP: Watch and listen to see how your baby communicates what she is thinking and feeling. Repeat the sounds and words your child uses, and have a back-and-forth conversation.

WHY IT MATTERS: This shows that words have meanings attached to them. This is one of the critical building blocks for a child's later reading lessons.

TIP: Read, sing and tell stories.

WHY IT MATTERS: Making language fun for a child paves the way for him to become a lifelong reader.

TIP: Talk to your baby or young child all the time.

WHY IT MATTERS: Don't feel silly talking to a baby who can't talk back. Hearing language sparks the creation of pathways between brain cells.

SOURCES: "Better Brains for Babies," University of Georgia; "From Neurons to Neighborhoods," Jack P. Shonkoff and Deborah A. Phillips; WestEd: The Program for Infant/Toddler Care, Ronald J. Lally; 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.