

Learning Doesn't Begin with the First Day of School

"It takes more than nine months to grow a baby," said USC's Stanley Dubinsky in a recent mid-afternoon training session at EdVenture Children's Museum. "Unlike calves or colts who take their first steps within minutes of birth, humans are not born with fully developed brains. The first years are critical for learning. Adult interaction in the first three years makes a difference!"

That brings us to a term used for many children's products and activities marketed to the modern family. That word is "enrichment." But, what is it, why do I need it, and, finally, where can I get it?

As research on early childhood development continues, we're understanding more and more that a timeline exists for physical and cognitive development, and that early interaction on the part of parents *and* other caregivers is crucial.

"Putting children in circumstances where they're no longer the center of attention with someone other than mom explaining things to them can be a great way to engage young children," says Kim Myers, five-year-old kindergarten teacher from Irmo Elementary School. "When playing - when actively engaged - the children remember better and they come up with more questions which extends the learning experience."

Now that we understand *why* play is so important, all we need is the *how, what, when* and *where* to play in the Midlands.

Believe it or not, our community offers a great deal of resources, starting with EdVenture and the world's largest child. In addition to being a tool for teaching anatomy and physiology, EdVenture's 40-foot-tall Eddie is somewhat representative of a mindset at EdVenture. That mindset can be summed up in a simple equation. $PLAY = LEARNING$. If we all take a moment to be big kids, like Eddie, with the little kids in our lives, we'll not only lay the groundwork for strong brain development, but we'll give the children the tools they'll need for learning when they are old enough to go to school and in the years to follow. When learning is fun, we all reach a little further to eat from the tree of knowledge.

Put these on a flash card, if you must.

It's a list of great places to play and learn with your pre-schooler:

Columbia Marionette Theater
401 Laurel Street
Columbia, SC 29201

The Columbia Marionette Theater aims to "entertain and educate children and adults across the state of South Carolina through the long-standing tradition of artistry and puppetry." Adaptations of classic fairy tales, new works, and innovative shows are sure to spark the imagination of any child. Public shows are every Saturday at 11am and 3pm, as well as the third Monday of each month at 10am. Call 803-252-7366 or visit www.strungout.com for more information.

Columbia Museum of Art
Corner of Main and Hampton Streets
Columbia, SC 29201

The Art Museum offers many summer programs for children of all ages. Specifically for 4-6 year olds is the Art Express Summer Camp. This weeklong camp introduces children to different art terms and techniques. Campers begin the day learning activities in the galleries followed by art instruction in studios. Look for Wee Wednesdays to resume in fall. Call 803-343-2186 for registration information, or visit www.colmusart.org.

EdVenture Children's Museum
211 Gervais Street
Columbia, SC 29201

The ninth largest children's museum in the country and the South's largest, EdVenture is home to more than 350 individual hands-on exhibits designed to stimulate a child's curiosity and love of learning. EdVenture offers unique daily activities for children 12 and younger as well as Special Saturdays, workshops, camps for all ages in both June and July and a summer-long GAMES theme that promises big fun for the whole family. Call 803-779-3100 for more information or visit www.edventure.org.

Girl Scouts of the Congaree Area, Inc.

3920 Forest Dr.
Columbia, SC 29204

Many of us are familiar with the Girl Scout program for the Daisy age level (the 5-year-old program that comes before Brownies). Currently, The Girl Scouts of the United States of America are piloting a new Daisy program for four-year-olds. The test troops must be affiliated with a Head Start or another formal Pre-K program. Look for age-exclusive 4-year-old Daisy troops in the years to come. Call 782-5133 or visit www.congaree.org.

Lexington County Public Library
Main Branch
5440 Augusta Rd.
Lexington, SC 29072

From May 24-August 7, all of the branches of the Lexington County Public Library will be hosting special events each week as part of their "Step to the Beat...Read!" summer reading program. Times vary by branch, but the Main Branch offers story time for 4-6 year olds every Thursday in June and July at 10am. In addition, there are special events every Wednesday at 2pm geared towards ages 6 and up. Special guests, artists, and performers will bring music, puppetry, dance, and storytelling to the Library. Call the Main Branch at 803-808-2600, or visit www.lex.lib.sc.us.

Richland County Public Library
Main Branch
1431 Assembly Street
Columbia, SC 29201

The Richland County Library also offers a wide range of summer programs for children. At the Main Branch, every Saturday from May 29-August 28 at 10:30am is story time for all ages. Also for ages 2-5 is a special Hands-On Art session on June 29, July 13, and August 11 at 11am. Each branch has different schedules and activities, so check out www.richland.lib.sc.us for information on all of them, or call the Main Branch at 803-799-9084.

Riverbanks Zoo and Botanical Gardens
500 Wildlife Parkway
Columbia, SC 29210

Columbia's Riverbanks Zoo is a great place to stimulate a young mind! In addition to general family visits, the zoo offers weeklong summer camps for many different age groups. New for 2004 is a program just for 3 to 4-year-olds called Sprout Camp. The camp, which runs Wednesday - Friday, 9:30-11:30am, takes place at the Botanical Gardens, where each child (and their parent) learns all about plants, bugs, and all things gardening. The cost is \$80 for members of the Zoo, and \$130 for non-members. For more information on this camp or other activities, call 803-779-8717, or visit www.riverbanks.org.

South Carolina State Museum
301 Gervais Street
Columbia, SC 29201

In addition to being open all summer with great exhibits and activities, the SC State Museum also offers weeklong programs for children in grades 1-3 and 4-6. There are three different "Adventures" to choose from: Art, Science and History. Each program offers a different version for the two grade groupings. These programs are separate from regular museum admission (\$5 for adults, \$3 for children ages 3-12, and free for anyone under 2). Call 803-898-4921, or visit www.museum.state.sc.us for more information.

Written by: Penny Delaney Cothran