



WHY EARLY CHILDHOOD MATTERS

Inspiring Action in
Your Community



Mobilizing communities to help children and families

Scientists have determined that by age 3, a child's brain has reached about 90% of its adult size. Children's earliest experiences have a profound impact on the way their brains organize and develop, and can affect their ability to learn and succeed in school and later in life.

In light of the importance of the early years of a child's life, people are coming together across the country to:

- ensure that young children and families have access to quality early learning programs;
- promote good parenting and support for parents; and
- ensure that young children grow in healthy, safe and nurturing environments.

Bringing key stakeholders together -- leaders from the business sector, law enforcement, faith-based groups, health care, etc.-- is essential to the development of broad-based community support for early childhood programs and policies and to the creation of effective partnerships to support parents and nurture young children.

In this booklet we provide some helpful hints on mobilizing your community around early childhood development issues. We have included:

- 1) Suggestions for using the "Why Early Childhood Matters" video to help inspire discussion and stimulate action in your community
- 2) Tips on convening stakeholders from diverse sectors of your community
- 3) "Talking Points" on early childhood development and school readiness
- 4) Advice on working with the media to bring attention to your community's efforts on behalf of young children and families.

Using the “Why Early Childhood Matters” DVD in your community

Hosted by Rob Reiner, “Why Early Childhood Matters” features our nation’s leaders in government, research, and crime prevention speaking about the importance of investments in the early years.

The DVD features the following leaders:

- Sheriff Lee Baca, Los Angeles County
- Dr. W. Steven Barnett, Director, National Institute for Early Education Research
- Mayor John DeStefano, Jr., President, National League of Cities
- Governor James Douglas, Vermont
- Governor Jennifer Granholm, Michigan
- Kenneth D. Lewis, CEO, Bank of America
- Commissioner Kenneth Mayfield, President, National Association of Counties
- Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi, Democratic Leader, House of Representatives
- Dr. Bruce Perry, M.D., Ph.D.
- Karen Ponder, Executive Director, North Carolina Partnership for Children
- Secretary Tom Ridge, U.S. Department of Homeland Security

We encourage you to show the DVD “Why Early Childhood Matters”:

- to kick off a community meeting on early childhood;
- to begin a meeting with important stakeholders;
- or during a workshop or general session at a conference.

Make the DVD available as a resource:

- Purchase copies for local organizations and community leaders
- Include it as reference material in your libraries

Engaging leaders from diverse sectors of your community

There are leaders in many sectors of your community who are potential champions, partners and sponsors of your efforts to make early childhood development a priority. Everyone has an interest in ensuring that our young children are nurtured in their early years.

In order to ensure collaboration and community buy-in:

- Involve stakeholder groups from the beginning. You will need input from diverse groups in order to understand the needs of your community and to develop a locally-appropriate plan to promote early childhood development.
- Think about how to frame your message to target each stakeholder group's bottom line. What are the issues and "hot buttons" for that group's constituency? For example, law enforcement officials will be interested in reducing juvenile delinquency rates, while business leaders will be interested in attracting and retaining employees.
- Cultivate champions from each sector. For example, work with a business leader who can rally his or her peers to make early childhood development a priority. Or encourage active members of a local religious group to bring the issue to their leadership.
- Ask advocates for other causes (senior citizens' groups, etc.) to share their expertise – for example, lessons learned from experiences in working with the local leadership, media, etc.
- Find ways to give credit and recognition for roles played by various leaders in your community (acknowledge them at an awards luncheon or in news bulletins, etc.).
- Keep people "in the loop" even when there is nothing happening that directly involves or affects them, by sending regular updates about your efforts.
- Assign people specific, concrete roles. Stakeholders from diverse sectors of your community can bring different skills, contacts, expertise and knowledge to your efforts, but they may not realize how many ways there are for them to contribute.

Talking points on early childhood development/school readiness

Use this fact sheet as a source of talking points for yourself or distribute it to other community leaders and champions who are raising awareness of the importance of early childhood and school readiness.

Why early childhood matters.

- By age 3, a child's brain has reached about 90% of its adult size.

Suggested “Community Action Items”

Use the list below to assign roles and generate ideas for how people can get involved in your efforts to make early childhood a priority in your community.

- Join forces with people from other sectors of the community (business, law enforcement, faith-based groups, etc.) to promote high-quality early care and education and strengthen families.
For example: *Local philanthropies* can organize a meeting for local business leaders and advocates to develop plans for a public awareness campaign on the importance of early childhood development.
- Communicate concern about the importance of early childhood development to policymakers.
- Lead by example: model “best practices” within your own organization.
For example: *Local businesses* can provide affordable on-site, quality early care and education programs.
- Offer your unique expertise (public relations, accounting, etc.) and contacts to local early childhood programs.
- Provide in-kind support (use of copy machines, meeting space, etc.) to local early childhood programs and community groups.
For example: *Fire Departments* can offer free car seat inspections and teach parents how to install car seats correctly.
- Include information about the importance of early childhood development in organizational publications, newsletters or bulletins.
For example: *Employers* can insert information about early childhood in paycheck envelopes.
For example: *Restaurants* can include information about the importance of early childhood development on food tray liners, pizza boxes, etc.
- Support, expand or create parenting classes, parenting resource centers and distribution networks. (*Parents’ Action for Children* can provide you with engaging educational materials on early childhood.)
For example: *Libraries* can create a “school readiness” section with information for parents and caregivers.
For example: *Hospitals* can distribute information about early childhood to expectant and new parents as part of “Kits for New Parents”.
For example: *Schools* can provide free prenatal parenting classes to help prepare expectant parents for what lies ahead.
- Organize volunteers to lend a helping hand at early childhood programs and family centers.
- Create a community resource guide with information on local parenting classes, quality child care, etc.

- As a result, children's earliest experiences have a profound impact on the way their brains organize and develop, and can affect their ability to learn and succeed in school and later in life.
- Children who have secure and loving relationships with parents and caregivers, along with nurturing developmental experiences, are more likely to do better in school and later contribute to society.

Why we're missing the boat.

- Even though we know that most brain growth takes place in the years *before* age 5, studies show that most public spending on children takes place *after* age 5.
- Today, about 60 percent of children under 5 in the United States spend an average of 30 hours a week in the care of people other than their parents.
- However, high-quality early care and education programs that provide children with stimulating learning opportunities as well as secure and caring relationships with qualified staff are in short supply and are often too expensive for many families to afford.
- Existing programs often fail to address children's needs in terms of early literacy, early math skills, and social-emotional readiness.
- Early childhood educators and staff are often untrained and underpaid, and adult/child ratios are often inadequate. Less than minimal care places children at risk and deprives them of the stimulating learning environments they need for healthy development.
- More than one-third of our nation's children arrive at school without the social and cognitive skills they need to fully learn and participate – they are not ready to learn. These deficiencies can have long-term effects on children's success in school and later in life.

What works?

- Sensitive, nurturing relationships with parents are important for children's healthy early development. Parents need access to resources and information on healthy early childhood development. But parents can't do it alone.
- Communities need to invest in children by expanding access to high-quality early care and education programs.
- The returns on an investment in early childhood development are significant and long-lasting. Studies suggest that for every \$1 we invest in quality early childhood programs, society benefits from between \$4 and \$7 in long-term savings because of:
 - higher rates of graduation from high school
 - decreased need for special education

- higher rates of post-high school education for teen mothers
 - lower rates of juvenile delinquency
 - delayed parenthood
 - greater earning power/financial stability later in life.
- Society benefits when children have access to quality early care and education programs, because:
 - *These children* are more likely to become adults with greater earning power and financial stability later in life. Researchers report that children in high-quality programs are projected to make roughly \$143,000 more over their lifetimes than those who don't take part in quality programs.
 - *School districts* can expect to save more than \$11,000 per child because participants are less likely to require special or remedial education.
 - *Businesses* benefit because quality early childhood programs attract workers, support employees, and create a strong workforce for the future.

Sources: National Research Council, National Institute for Early Education Research, The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, National Child Care Information Center.

G etting the Word Out



Working with the media is one of the most effective ways to:

- focus the public's attention on the importance of early childhood development;
- educate the public about local early childhood initiatives; and
- encourage community participation in your efforts.

Here are some helpful hints for working with the media:

Get to know your local media.

What radio and TV shows cover public affairs in your area? What are the community newspapers? Newsletters? Public access channels? What are their interests? Politics? Economy? Sensational stories?

Find out everything you can about the audience for each media outlet with

which you work, and tailor your messages to that audience. Reporters must be convinced that their readers, listeners or viewers will be interested in the story.

Understand that the media isn't interested in helping you get publicity for your issue, event, or report, etc. They are looking for a news story. Find a unique angle, new piece of evidence, or compelling story about a child/family to interest the media in devoting time to the subject.

Know what reporters' "lead times" are – the time it takes to get a story written, photographed and produced. For example, lead-time for a magazine can be months, whereas newspapers and TV tend to have very short lead times.

Introduce yourself to the "beat reporters". Maintain contacts with people you've worked with before, and call them before you put out your press release to give them a heads up. As you develop a relationship with the reporters, you can start asking them questions about whether or not something is newsworthy and will be more likely to get an honest, constructive answer.

Cast a wide net.

Reach out to traditional outlets (television, radio, daily and weekly newspapers, magazines, ethnic media and the internet) as well as non-traditional outlets (newsletters and partnerships with advocacy organizations).

Don't forget to try for calendar listings, op-eds and letters to the editor. Reach out to local cable as well as network television groups for public service announcement (PSA) placement. Occasionally it's possible to work out an exclusive partnership with a network to air a PSA to help guarantee its primetime placement.

Know what the media is looking for.

Keep in mind the criteria that the media use to judge the newsworthiness of your information:

- Impact. How many people does the event or idea affect and how seriously does it affect them?
- Locality. Does the story hit close to home?
- Prominence. Happenings that involve well-known people or institutions are likely to be interesting even if they are not necessarily newsworthy.
- Novelty. Is it unusual? Is it a first?

- Conflict. Disagreements and controversy are mainstays of good news.
- Entertainment Value. Is it interesting? Attention-grabbing?
- News you can use. Does it offer useful information for key audiences?

Be prepared.

When talking with the media, know in advance what one or two points you want to get across – and use them prominently in your responses. Set a comfortable pace by pausing to gather your thoughts before answering a question. If you don't know the answer, say so, or tell the reporter that you will get back to him.

The media are there to help you communicate to your audiences in the fastest, most efficient way. The easier you can make it for reporters to see the connection between your story and their audience's interests, the better chance you have of getting your message out.

Community Resources from *Parents' Action for Children*

Parents' Action for Children (PAC) has a national reputation for bringing attention to the issue of early childhood development. PAC has worked to create local early childhood campaigns across the country, with materials and public engagement strategies tailored to each community.

PAC is known for its *I Am Your Child* video series exploring critical issues in early childhood development. Millions of these easy-to-understand videos, which are hosted by popular celebrities and include parenting advice from the nation's leading child development experts, have been distributed throughout the U.S. and in over 15 countries.

Community organizations, libraries, hospitals, early care and education programs, government agencies, and private companies distribute our materials to parents and caregivers of young children.

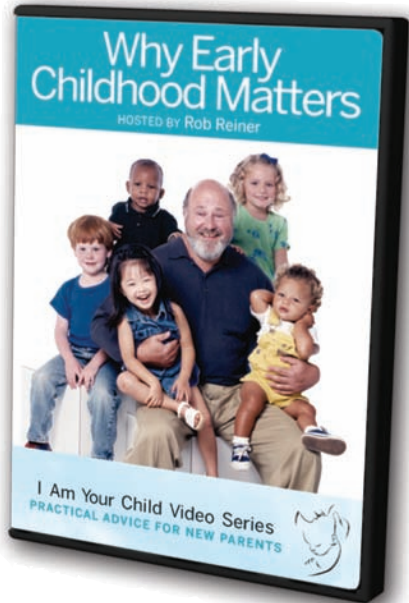
Visit us online at parentsaction.org for more information on:

- **Preparing information kits for new parents.** We can help you put together a package of information for new parents to distribute through hospitals, early childhood programs, parenting classes, etc.
- **Strengthening parent education programs and resource centers.** Independent research has confirmed that parents find the *I Am Your*

Child video series helpful and informative. Our videos and our manual for parent educators are engaging, effective tools to help parents make the most of their children's early years.

- **Promoting early childhood development in the community through public education campaigns.** We work with elected officials, community-based organizations and coalitions throughout the country to create state and local campaigns.

Parents' Action for Children understands the importance of customizing messages for unique audiences. We will co-brand our videos and print materials with the names, messages and logos of agencies, organizations and corporations that distribute our materials.





*For more information, or to order the
I Am Your Child series of educational materials,
visit our website at www.parentsaction.org
or call 888-447-3400.*