

# Early Learning Parents' Pages ADA Edition

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## "Hopes and dreams" for the new year

Families often make New Year's resolutions and share them with one another. Help your family focus on them this year by talking about them as "hopes and dreams" or goals. Then ask family members to share their progress on a weekly or monthly basis. Younger children may draw a picture of a dream, hope or goal for their resolution. Look at the drawing together and talk about the steps your child needs to make to achieve that goal. Family members can discuss ways everyone can pitch in to support the child in reaching the goal. For example, your child's resolution may be to keep his room neat and tidy. Dad may offer to put additional shelves in the child's room for more storage space for toys. Mom may give the child plastic bins that will fit on the shelves to store toys and supplies. Label each bin with a picture of the items that belong in it to help the child remember where things go. An older sister may offer to help her brother sort and arrange his toys in the bins initially. This teaches the child that families help each other and models ways to solve a problem like a messy room.

Not all goals are reached overnight, though. Practicing ways to encourage steady steps towards a "hope or dream" is an important experience for children. Celebrate the days your child cleans her room before bedtime. Place a rewarding sticker on a calendar each day your child's room is tidy at bedtime. Parents may have a "dream" that their young child will be a college graduate. An important part of that dream is academic success. A great way to ensure academic success is to read with your child at least 15 minutes a day starting in infancy. Taking little steps along the way and supporting each other will help family members realize their dreams.

Visit <http://www.readaloud.org/index.html> to learn more about the importance of daily reading.

## Start a home library

Children who have access to books and other reading material in their homes and whose parents read to them regularly have an advantage when they begin school. Research shows these children have a larger vocabulary and are more interested in reading than children who have not been exposed to books and reading in the home.

Seeing parents and siblings reading at home sets the expectation that everyone reads and that the child will be able to read on his own one day. Reading to a child daily is the single most important thing a parent can do to improve a child's readiness to read and learn. Having a space in the home for books and reading makes reading time special for the child. The corner of a room or a shelf for books can work as a personal library for your child.

You can use a cardboard box or wooden crate if there is no room for a shelf and help your child decorate it. Select age-appropriate books and show him how to care for his books by teaching skills such as turning

pages without tearing them, washing hands before reading, never leaving books on the floor, not breaking the spine of a book and keeping it safe from pets.

Children learn how to handle books by watching their parents, so remember to be a good reading role model for your child. Here are two websites that help you find age-appropriate books and have other tips for developing young readers: <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/creating-home-library> and <http://www.ala.org/alsc/building-home->

## What's in a box?

The gifts were open and the excitement of the day was winding down. Your child had already forgotten about the new toy and begun playing with the box it came in. Turning the box over, she put a piece of paper, some crayons, a toy phone and a jingle bell on top of the box. Kneeling on the floor in front of the box, she rang the bell, picked up the phone, and said, "This is Sarah's office. How may I help you?"

She has just used the box to create a desk play "office." Having visited her mom's work, she is now pretending to work there. Pretend play allows children to practice new social roles and concepts. Sarah is practicing the role of office manager by answering the phone and writing things down as she observed her mother doing at work.

Early childhood theorists, such as Vygotsky and Piaget, tell us that this type of play is essential to developing social skills and self-regulation in children. Vygotsky (1978) theorized that young children use private speech in play to regulate their behavior, eventually transforming this private speech into self-regulation through internal thought.

Sarah's older brother, Tim, found a box he used to make a robot costume by adding empty paper towel rolls for arms and legs. He received a small remote-controlled robot as a gift and used it as a model for the costume.

Tim's friend, Jared, gathered boxes from his family's recycling bin and put them together to make a space station for his new astronaut action figures. Children use their imagination to create props to enhance their pretend play.

Older children will work together to create large structures to make play more realistic. Boxes of all shapes and sizes can be the blank slate children use to build imaginary places to play. Babies and toddlers love to crawl in and out of boxes and play hide and seek with mom and dad or siblings.

Often, it is not what's inside, but the size and shape of the box that captures a child's imagination. Parents who find space for left-over boxes will be encouraging the pretend play so vital for young children's development.

Read and watch videos about pretend play at <http://illinoisearlylearning.org/faqs/pyage.htm>.

## Celebrate Literacy Week

January 26 -30 is Celebrate Literacy Week! in Florida. Many early learning coalitions are having special literacy events to remind parents and community members of the importance of reading with children. Check with your local early learning coalition to find out what events they may have planned. To find your local coalition, visit the Office of Early Learning website

[http://www.floridaearlylearning.com/parents/find\\_quality\\_child\\_care/locate\\_a\\_child\\_care\\_resource\\_referral\\_program/countys\\_early\\_learning\\_coalition.aspx](http://www.floridaearlylearning.com/parents/find_quality_child_care/locate_a_child_care_resource_referral_program/countys_early_learning_coalition.aspx).

During this week (and every week) read with your child daily. Visit the local library to check out age-appropriate books for your child and have your child participate in the library's "story time" for children. For free children's ebooks,

try these websites:

<http://www.astorybeforebed.com/storytime>

<http://en.childrenslibrary.org/index>.

## Scholarships Available

Step Up For Students administers the **income-based Florida Tax Credit Scholarship**, a program created in 2001 that allows parents to choose from two scholarship types: one for up to \$5,272 assistance for private school tuition and fees, or one for up to \$500 to help with transportation costs to attend a public school in another county. (These amounts are for the 2014-2015 school year. The private school scholarship amount may increase for 2015-16. If a family's household income qualifies for the free- or reduced-price school lunch program (185 percent of the federal poverty guidelines) or if the family receives food stamps, TANF or FDPIR, the student may be eligible. Children in foster care or out-of-home care, or those who are homeless may also be eligible. Step Up For Students is a nonprofit company approved by the state to help administer both programs. To learn more about the scholarships, please visit [www.StepUpForStudents.org](http://www.StepUpForStudents.org).