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The Connecticut  
Commission  
On Children



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The Connecticut  
Department of  
Education,  
Bureau of  
Early Childhood  
Education and  
Social Services

Every  
Grownup

Is a Famous  
Storyteller

The  
Connecticut  
Commission  
On Children



Photo Exhibit

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# The Importance of Early Language

**L**anguage acquisition begins long before the first babbles or the first words. A baby's brain is preparing to speak before any speech sounds are uttered. As human beings, we communicate with all of our senses. We can begin a dialogue with a touch, a special look, a silly sound, or a sentence. The dialogue is continued with a rhythmic response:

mother smiles—baby smiles,  
mother blows raspberries—baby smiles,  
mother smiles and blows raspberries—baby puckers,  
mother smiles—baby smiles,  
mother smiles—baby looks away.

The dialogue ends when one partner turns away or there is no response. It is the simple back-and-forth of the early exchanges between the parent and baby that prepare the baby for the complexities of communicating with language.

A newborn's brain is pre-wired to pay attention to all language sounds. Over the first few months of life, an infant learns to pay particular attention to the special sounds of the family culture and language. Early pleasurable experiences, such as hearing the sounds of language, looking at a parent's smile, playing "peek-a-boo," lay pathways in the brain that facilitate later learning.

Recent research highlights the importance of early language stimulation for brain development and later learning. In the first three years of life, when the child makes the most dramatic gains in language development, the child's brain is producing most of the synapses, or pathways between brain cells. At birth, an infant has approximately 100 billion neurons, or brain cells. Each one can produce almost 15,000 synapses. Those synapses that are used repeatedly tend to become permanent. Those that are not activated tend to disappear.

## Reading Readiness Begins Long Before Kindergarten

**J**ust as with language, the rhythms and practice of reading books are learned long before a child can "sound-out" their first word.

Children learn to sit in the parent's lap to listen to a story. They learn that if they point to pictures, their parents will name the pictures for them. They learn to turn the pages of a book. Often a very young child will practice turning the pages of an upside-down book while babbling. This is the beginning of reading.

Often a child will insist on hearing the same story over and over and over even after he or she has committed the story to memory. In this way, the child is an active participant in anticipating the story as it unfolds from page to page. A child who is exposed to books, songs, rhymes and family stories is given a wonderful gift. That child's world of knowledge expands beyond the routines observed in the household and neighborhood. In the early years, these stories and images become part of the shared experiences in the family.

While the brain researchers expand our understanding of neural networks, we can all enrich the healthy development of the very young children in our lives. Listen and respond to start a dialogue – you can respond with a smile, a tickle, an imitation of a baby's babbles, a word, a hug, or an offer to read a book. The best news is, the benefits of positive communication are not only for babies. You might find yourself smiling, laughing and enjoying yourself.

**Alice S. Carter, Ph.D.**  
**Yale University**  
**Department of Psychology**



Babies rejoice  
in the sound  
of your voice.



Dabble in babble  
Talk to babies.



Talk to babies.  
Look how  
they listen.



Stories aren't just  
for bedtime.



Give your baby a strong  
book beginning.  
Read early and often.



Take time to talk  
with a child.  
It's more than  
child's play.



Talk with your child  
wherever you go.  
They hear  
everywhere.



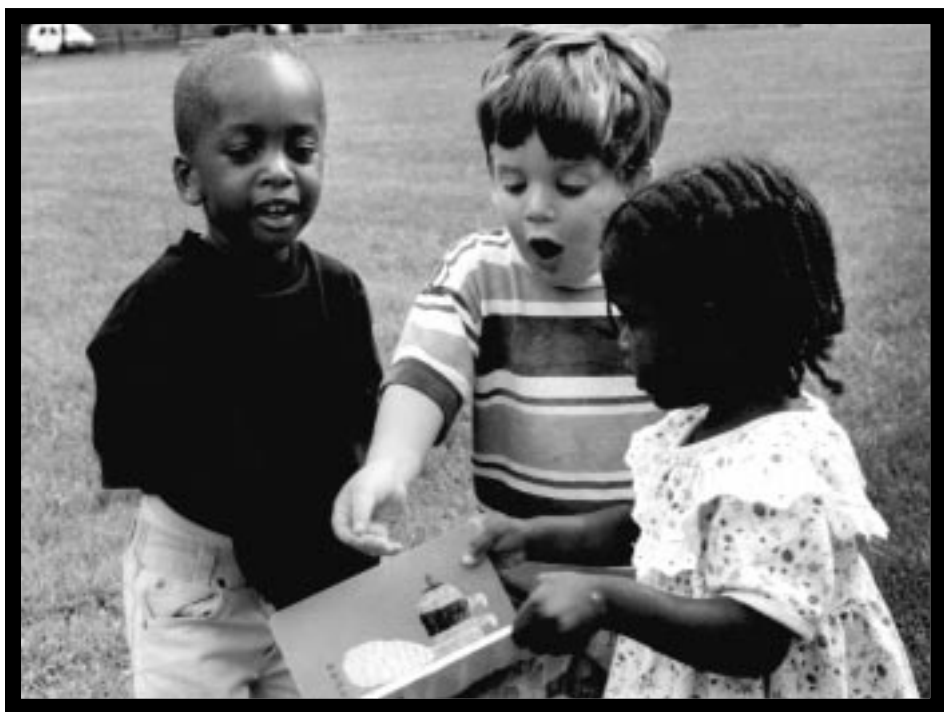
Children outgrow  
everything but stories.



Every grownup  
is a famous storyteller.



Stories are more  
than child's play.



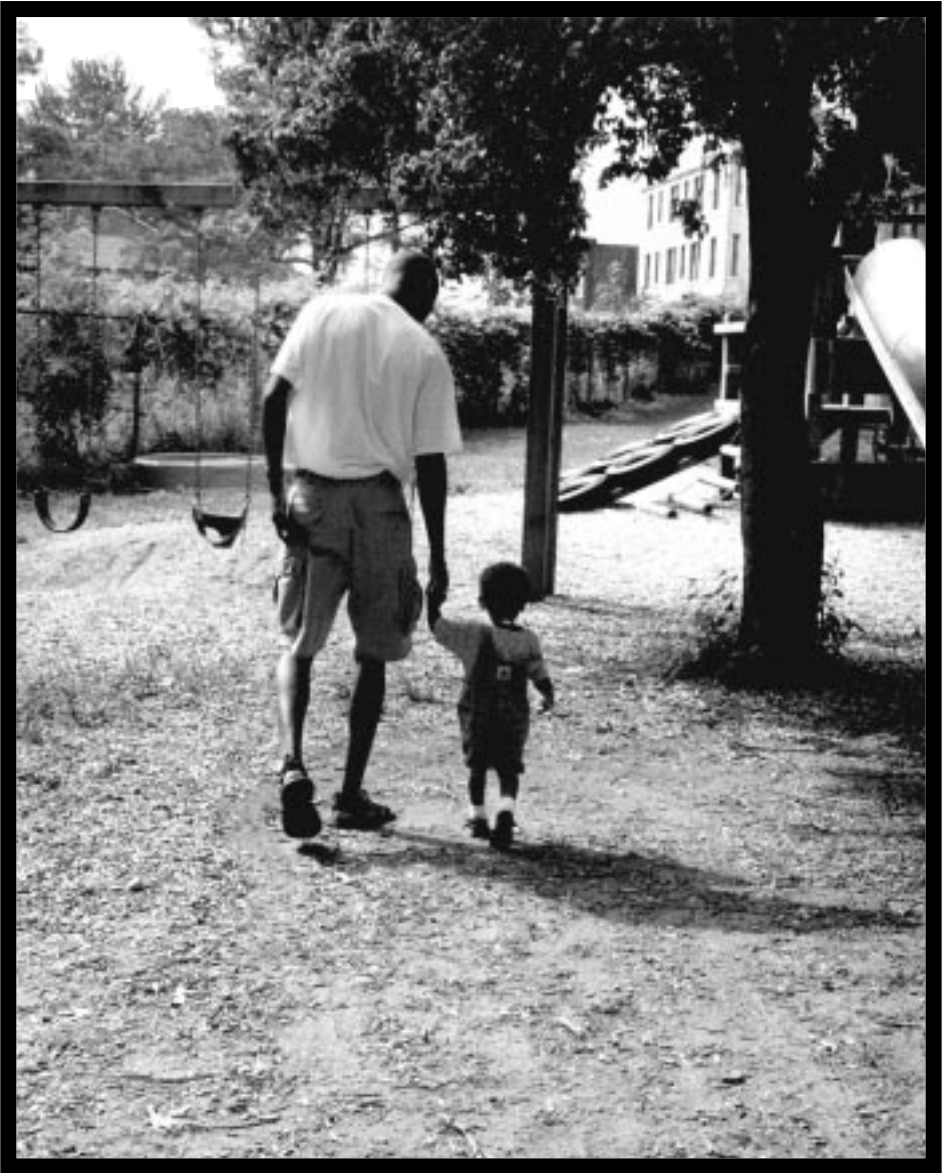
Words help them  
get the picture.



Every child has a story.  
Every child has a song.



They laugh.  
They sing.  
They learn.  
They grow.



Go on long talks  
together.

## Credits



The Connecticut Commission on Children is grateful to those who helped create the Early Language and Literacy Campaign and the photo exhibit, "The Gift of Early Language," including:

**Decker, America's Premier Micro Ad Agency**, for crafting the slogans for the campaign;

**Reach Out and Read**, a pediatric early literacy program from the Boston Medical Center, for the slogan "Children who are read to learn to read."

**The Junior League of Connecticut**, for supporting literacy efforts in Connecticut;

**Jane Gross**, for photographs on pages 3, 4, 5, 8, 11, 12, 17, cover;

**Frances B. Haviland**, for photographs on pages 6, 9, 10, 13, 15, 16;

**Beth Bye**, and the children in the Trinity College Child Care Program;

**Kate S. Haviland**, for the photograph on page 7;

**The Connecticut Children's Medical Center**, for the photograph on page 14;

**Alice S. Carter**, for writing "The Importance of Early Language." The full text version of this piece is available on the Connecticut Commission on Children internet site. [www.state.ct.us/coc/](http://www.state.ct.us/coc/)

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The Connecticut Commission on Children

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Guilford, CT 06437



Children  
who are read to  
learn to read.