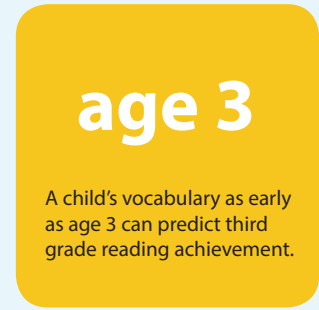
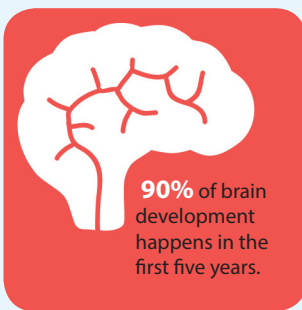




Monthly Message:  
**WHY THE EARLY  
YEARS MATTER**

In Kentucky, **50%** of children are considered kindergarten ready.



Every parent wants their child to be prepared, not behind. But what can be done to give each child a great start? A great start begins before birth. Healthy pregnancies lay the groundwork for healthy development. Pregnant mothers who make healthy choices and get prenatal care give their children the best chance of a good start. Once born, babies are eager learners. Every second, their brains make more than 700 connections. In the first five years of life, ninety percent of the brain is shaped. It develops mainly through the quality of experiences the child has with adults. Nurturing and responsive relationships help their brains grow best. Negative experiences, such as abuse and neglect, actually change the chemistry of the brain leading to lifelong impacts on learning, behavior and health. Raising children well from the start is easier and more effective than repairing the damage created later in life.

School readiness happens long before kindergarten. It begins in a child's first classroom, the home. As your child's first and most important teacher, you provide the building blocks your child needs to thrive. Many families provide the tools children need to have a great start. The key is being intentional. Brain building can be as simple as talking, reading and singing to your child daily.

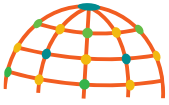
The quality *and* quantity of language children are exposed to matters. Engaging in back and forth conversations, even before your child can speak, is important. It communicates value and encourages your child to try to communicate. The more words children hear, the more words they'll know. A child's vocabulary as early as age 3 can predict third grade reading achievement. Reading at grade level by the end of third grade is an important predictor of school success. Feed your child a healthy diet of words by talking throughout the day. Changing diapers, running errands and cooking are great opportunities for conversation. While tempting, do your best to avoid using baby talk.

For many families, child care providers are partners in raising their children. The most active hours of the day should be spent engaging in high quality learning through age appropriate play. Early care programs are also great environments for children to develop social and self-regulation skills like sharing and listening. Children who attend high quality early childhood education are less likely to drop out of high school, become teen parents, go to prison or require special education. The benefits of a healthy childhood outweigh the time and resources it takes to make sure a child's physical and emotional needs are met.

# “Great Start” Tips for the Home



Read and talk to your child from birth. Make it a part of your child’s daily routine. Try bath time books or reading together before bed. Ask questions as you read to boost learning. For example, as you read ask “What do you think will happen next?”



Children are wired to learn through play. They learn important skills like sharing, problem-solving and controlling impulses. Be your child’s playmate. When adults are engaged in play, children learn more. Ask questions about what they are doing or encourage them to continue in a challenging task like building a block tower. Do your best to let your child lead the play.



If your child attends or plans to attend a child care program, learn if it is part of Kentucky’s STARS for KIDS NOW quality rating and improvement system. Participation in the rating system shows a commitment to quality and continual improvement. To find a rated center in your area, visit <http://bit.ly/STARSforKIDSNOW>.



Social and emotional development is an indicator of school success. Responsive, nurturing relationships build safety and trust in children. You can help your child learn how to express feelings. Name the emotion he or she displays. For example, “You are happy. I see you smiling and dancing.”



Healthy bodies support growth. Children need the benefits of sleep, nutritious food, physical activity and preventative care to grow up healthy and strong. Attend well-child doctor visits to keep your child up to date on required vaccines and to spot possible developmental delays early. Preventative care can help avoid health issues that disrupt learning.

Everyday moments are  
brain building opportunities!



at the park



at home



playing games

For activity ideas, download a free Parent Guide from the Governor’s Office of Early Childhood or download the free Vroom app at [joinvroom.org](http://joinvroom.org) 