

Creating Supportive Learning Environments

Children who come to kindergarten prepared to learn are more apt to succeed in school. Children who are academically successful are less likely to engage in high risk behaviors such as cigarette smoking, substance use, unprotected sex and violent acts. These behaviors have a significant impact on morbidity and mortality in later years. In general, “individuals with higher educational attainment not only live longer but have a shorter duration of disability before death compared with individuals with lower educational attainment.” Children who are ready for school are more inclined to become adults who will be enjoying longer, healthier lives. Pediatric providers can help parents provide a supportive learning environment for their children. This is easily accomplished by offering Raising Readers books at each well child visit, modeling reading behavior for parents, and encouraging regular book use. **Studies show that children are more likely to engage in ‘book sharing’ activities in the home when counseled about reading by their pediatric providers, than when simply handed a book.** *Excerpted from Raising Readers Issue Briefs “Championing School Readiness” and “Story Seeking, Story Sharing: The Privilege of Being a Pediatric Provider” by Lisa Belisle, MD (http://raisingreaders.org/healthcare_providers/literacy_resources)*

Incorporating Books into Well Child Visits

Raising Readers books can be an integral part of a well child visit. Maximize their impact by following these suggestions.

- 1) **Give the book early in the visit.** The child often will spend some time looking through the book, giving you and the parent a chance to talk. Ask, *“Do you think she’d like to look at this book while we talk?”*
- 2) The book can be used as part of your **developmental assessment: observe parent-child interaction** while they look at the book, or **assess the child’s motor skills** as he or she handles the book.
- 3) **Compliment parents on their child’s interest and ability to physically handle books.** Help them see that these are related to intellectual growth and language. You might say: *“He’s patting at the pictures and talking.”*; *“Did you know that she would react like that?”*; *“He really likes looking at books with you.”*
- 4) Suggest reading aloud at bedtime **to deal with sleep issues.**
- 5) Emphasize the **importance of regular story time.**
- 6) **Inscribe the inside cover** with the child’s name and yours.

Everyone Can Get in on the Act

The clinician giving the book to a child at a well child visit plays a major role in Raising Readers, but there are parts for everyone. The entire staff at a medical practice can help support the importance of reading aloud in many ways. Consider trying these . . .

- When checking out a patient, a receptionist might say to a family: ***“I love reading to my kids!”*** or ***“That’s one of my daughter’s favorite books!”***
- A nurse could say, ***“Reading is one of my favorite things to do!”***
- When passing a family in the hallway, a medical assistant might say: ***“I see you got your Raising Readers book. I’m so glad and I know you’re going to enjoy it!”***
- Other possible comments: ***“You know, kids this age really like looking at picture books.”***; ***“Wow! She really likes looking at that book.”***

