



Babies and toddlers need more reading time

A recent national study shows there's good news and challenges when it comes to families reading daily with infants, toddlers and preschoolers.

The good news is parents recognize that reading with young children is important in developing language and literacy skills. The challenge is families aren't starting early enough.

Scholastic recently released the *Kids and Family Reading Report*, its annual survey of children's reading. The report shows that while 73 percent of parents say they started reading aloud to their child before age 1, more than 50 percent say they didn't start until their baby was 6 months old.

First Things First reminds Arizona families that 90 percent of a child's critical brain development happens by age 5 and daily interactions with caregivers have a huge impact on building vocabulary and language. When infants hear and use language, their brains develop the connections needed to learn how to read.

Families can help foster early language and literacy skills in various ways. Read with young children from the day they are born. Even very young babies respond to the warmth of a lap and the soothing sound of a book being read aloud. And, no matter your child's age, help their vocabulary grow through your daily interactions: describe what you're doing; read signs and labels aloud; sing songs; and, make up rhymes.

There are several resources to help families instill a love of reading in their children. First Things First's YouTube page hosts videos that demonstrate how to read with infants, toddlers and preschoolers. And, Read On Arizona, an FTF partner that engages communities in supporting early literacy for kids birth to 8 years old, has an early literacy guide and book suggestions for every developmental stage on their website, readonarizona.org.

Maybe it is fitting that First Things First is sharing this information close to beloved children's author Dr. Seuss' birthday (March 2). The good doctor said it best, "You're never too old, too wacky, or too wild, to pick up a book and read to a child." And to add a different twist, a child is never too young, either.