



Smart Start Update --- August 2014

www.SmartStartAlabama.org

Building Strong "Ready" Children

**Gail Piggott, Executive Director
Alabama Partnership for Children**

When we share research about the critical importance of the first three years of a child's life, there is rarely any argument. The scientific evidence on the developing brain and body is extensive, and it lights our path to improved child and adult outcomes.

There is also wide agreement and understanding that early experiences have life-long consequences, and that rotten experiences affect children's health, development, and future, impacting them for a lifetime. Also, no one argues that nurturing, supportive parenting and positive interactions from families and other caregivers offer children the best chance to reach their potential.

There is also rarely an argument about which skills are necessary for school success: literacy, numeracy, social/emotional skills - all are necessary, and the "soft skills" are emerging as just as important and predictive as cognitive skills. Building protective factors and resiliency in our families and communities is foundational and can be transformational.

With few arguments about *what* young children need to develop to their fullest potential, and years of evidenced-based programs that show us *how* we can make a difference, we must wonder *why* we cannot seem to redirect our resources and invest more during the years proven to have the greatest impact. This is an argument whose time is *now*.

*Below is the sixth video in the **Economic Impact of Early Care & Education Industry on the State of Alabama** series, featuring Gail Piggott, Executive Director of the Alabama Partnership for Children. Ms. Piggott highlights recommendations that came about as a result of this study. To read the full report and view other videos in the series [click here](#).*

Zero to Five Matters

*~A newsletter
focused on our most
valuable
investment~*

Follow us:



Don't Forget
to follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#). The APC launched a social media campaign in November that targets parents, early childhood professionals, business leaders and our partners in the state. 'A Tweet a Day for Learning and Play' provides early education tips and research, including information on our initiatives and partners. Check it out today!

August FOCUS

Check out this month's Smart



Partner Focus:

Child Development and Family

Involvement

Jeri B. Jackson, MA
Program Consultant, United Cerebral Palsy of
Greater Birmingham

Families are the first and best teachers and advocates for their child, hands down. They are there to observe, initiate, correct, and seek help when needed. Families get to know their child from when he or she is in the early stages of development. They are there during the good times and the bad. Because of this, they are the best ones to monitor developmental milestones. Whether using developmental charts or just observing and playing, parents are the most important advocates for their child's needs. As we all know, parents know their child the best, and when it comes to monitoring for any signs of need, parents are the ones who can notice first. There is no special equipment or training required, and it is one of the most useful and pleasurable activities parents can do.

It's important for families to learn about the ages and stages of child development and to monitor their own child in comparison. Getting to know their child's uniqueness will help in individualizing their expectations and notice any early signs of concern. The earlier that concerns are identified, the sooner that they can be addressed, and we all know that earlier is better when it comes to developmental intervention. It's important to note that when children have special needs, they don't always follow the development charts exactly as laid out, and may also have delays in some areas, but not all areas. For example, if a child has autism, he or she may not communicate or be as social as the developmental charts suggest, but they may be over the top in other areas. The same with cerebral palsy, where motor skills may be lagging behind, but cooing and other communication and social skills are right on target.

The [National Parents as Teachers Program](#) has developed some guidelines for families to use when observing their child, some "how-to's" for observing,

Check out this month's Smart Start FOCUS [Packet](#) on Developmental Milestones Matter!

Mark Your Calendars:

[Department of Children's Affairs Home Visiting Conference](#)

September 23-25, 2014
Montgomery, AL

[2014 Strengthening Families Leadership Summit](#)

October 7-8, 2014
Chicago, IL

[2014 Alabama Pre-K Conference](#)

October 15-17, 2014
Montgomery, AL

[2014 NAEYC Annual Conference & Expo](#)

November 5-8, 2014
Dallas, Texas

Did you receive this email from a friend?
[Click here](#) to subscribe to future APC updates.

Special Thanks to:

[HIPPY USA Houston County](#) & the [Saliba Center for Families](#) for inviting the APC to speak at their Kindergarten Readiness Workshop Event on July 26, 2014. The APC shared information on Help Me Grow and Books, Balls & Blocks. Over 100 teachers in the Dothan area attended the event.



[Forward this message to a friend](#)

[Click to view this email in a browser](#)

recording development and addressing questions with the pediatrician. The first of these strategies is for families to just take time to watch their child. Get down on the child's level and observe his or her environment. Also, spend time each day observing from a distance, being close enough to observe but not part of his or her play. Write down what is seen and heard, observations about what seems to be a strength, and also anything that seems to be a concern based on typical childhood milestones. Secondly, observe how their child responds to different settings. Try to be objective and not to judge, but just observe if there is a problem in certain settings or in transitioning from one setting to another. Thirdly, keep a list of their child's favorite things, words, foods, likes, dislikes. Keeping a child development book is fun at the time and fun to look back on later. This list will be helpful in planning and carrying out any special strategies should there be areas of concern. Fourth, observe their child's personal style when it comes to routines, interests, natural rhythms, etc. These are important pieces of information when it comes to facilitating development and making the home life as smooth as possible.

By learning about childhood milestones, observing their child's behaviors and skills, and by acting early should there be signs of concern, families can help their child flourish. Family involvement is key.

Initiative Focus:

Alabama Access Guide to Early Childhood Services



- The Access Guide is a two-sided, 34"x16" poster that was adapted for Alabama by the Help Me Grow state leadership team. The team was comprised of leaders representing years of experience in policy and service for children and families.
- On the back of the Access Guide, you will see:
 - **Purpose:** The Access Guide is designed for service providers to help families understand the appropriate resources and avenues of assistance available to them when a child's need arises.
 - **Vision:** Service providers strengthen a family's ability to identify and address concerns regarding their child. Service providers empower families to understand and navigate Alabama's system of services.
 - **Goal:** Improve promotion, prevention, transition, and treatment of children and families.
- We hope every Alabama service provider that comes into contact with

young children and families has this tool available to help them navigate the system of resources and provide guidance to appropriate referrals.

- Too many families are intimidated and overwhelmed by the system and "fall through the cracks", and too many children are given too little, too late. The Access Guide is designed to streamline the connection of children and families to needed supports.

How it works:

- The **front** of the Access Guide has eight columns which identify statewide resources.
- Starting with the Family, every column flows from top-to-bottom and highlights relevant programs and services.
- The Access Guide is color-coordinated. Each column has a primary color. Shapes in different colors connect you to other areas of the Access Guide.
- No part of the Access Guide is all-inclusive. The services named on the front are not the only existing resources, but they are available in many areas of the state.
- The **back** of the Access Guide has more detailed contact and program information than the front. Agencies listed on the front that do not include contact information are expanded in more detail on the back. Other agencies relevant to young children and families are listed as well.
- The "Local Contacts" section is meant for quick reference. Fill in local information in order to easily provide families with a phone number or name.

Email info@smartstartalabama.org or call toll free 1-866-711-4025 with any questions you have or to order Access Guides. Please visit www.SmartStartAlabama.org/feedback to let us know how you use this guide or how we can make it better.

Our Mission: To work in partnership with other public and private entities to maintain an effective state and local system of resources and support that enables parents, families, and others who care for young children to ensure that they are healthy, protected, nurtured, and offered every opportunity to succeed in life.

Phone: 866-711-4025 | social@smartstartalabama.org

[Click to view this email in a browser](#)

If you no longer wish to receive these emails, please reply to this message with "Unsubscribe" in the subject line or simply click on the following link: [Unsubscribe](#)

Alabama Partnership for Children
2529 Bell Road
Montgomery, Alabama 36117
US

[Read](#) the VerticalResponse marketing policy.

vertical DELIVERED
response BY
Try It Free Today!