

Baby Steps

Empowering Parents Community Newsletter

506 W. Monroe Street • Okolona, MS 38860 • Phone: 662-447-5040 • takebabysteps.com • Summer 2009

Why is good parenting so important?

In consideration of why good parenting is so important, I am sure that each reader's response varies. As one of seventeen children, I grew up among a family of farmers in Prentiss, Mississippi. While growing up, I didn't appreciate the ways and manner in which my parents reared us; however, as I have grown to an adult, I have come to the realization that they were excellent parents. *Their excellence had nothing to do with affluence because we had very little monetarily, but it had everything to do with their presence in our lives.* Never showing much affection by doting or hugging on their children, my parents had more of an autocratic style of parenting. When I was given a directive, I listened and responded promptly. From the early years, my siblings and I had responsibilities around the house and on the farm. I don't ever remember feeling as if I didn't know where I belonged, what I had to do, where I was supposed to be or who was going to make sure that I completed the task. My parents didn't busy themselves with meaningless chatter on the telephone, but actively engaged in work that included the children. They were there each morning when I woke and there each night as I went to bed.

My career has primarily been within the school and community setting and presently I am operating an early childhood center. I am amazed at the conversations that I have with many of the parents and how preoccupied they are with "things" and frivolous situations in their lives. It is a common occurrence for parents to be engaged in cell phone conversations while bringing and picking up their children from the center. Parents need to pay less attention to the "outside world" and focus more on their children. These children need the attention of their parents. They need to be listened to and have the sense that they belong and that they are valued by their parents.

Possibly this is a part of what good parenting is—to be present, to converse with your children, and to give them the sense that they are invaluable.

These factors are so important, and they are within the ability of every parent.

Ivy Lovelady
Deputy Director
July 2009



Baby Steps Seminar Teaches Parents and Children

Frank Williams has been reading to his three-year old niece Ashyia for about two years. Although his own children are grown and away from home, three-year-old Ashyia has lived with his family since she was about two months old.

“She’s very smart,” Williams says of Ashyia. “She asks a lot of questions and I try to keep her mind going by doing things with her.” Reading to Ashyia is one of the ways Williams seeks to nurture Ashyia’s natural curiosity and to help her develop to her intellectual potential. He was among the parents attending a Baby Steps seminar one Saturday morning in Okolona at the House of Joy Learning Center.

From the very start, the seminar focused on children, with two to five year-olds called to the front of the room to sing – with movements, of course. The “Bunny Pokie” was the children’s first song. They had no trouble hopping and turning around like bunnies.

After the children’s presentations, each age group dispersed to separate rooms in the building.

“It would be good if they could do a lot more of these,” Williams said at the end of the seminar. In the main room where parents were gathered, presenter Ivy H. Lovelady -- deputy director of Baby Steps, Inc -- literally read the popular children’s book “*Goodnight Moon*” cover to cover, with parents following along using copies distributed to them. Then, Lovelady guided parents back through the book to carefully examine the elements that make the book worthy of reading to their children. Parents did not seem to lose interest as they studied the book intently and comprehensively, under the knowledgeable guidance of their presenter. In the distance, an early childhood teacher could be heard saying, “Goodnight kittens . . .” Children in each age group were studying the book, too, and their teachers had developed special age-appropriate activities to reinforce the book’s concepts.

“Let’s look deeper,” Lovelady said gently as she guided parents to uncover items and concepts they might have missed upon the first reading of “*Goodnight Moon*.”

“Look on the first page. What do you see?”

“Comb on a table . . . three bears and chairs . . .clock . . .cow jumping over the moon.” Parents gave their answers enthusiastically. Lovelady went page by page to help parents see the concepts that the book nurtures in children.

She also gave parents a little bit of the book’s history and told them how to select good books for each age group. “This is a really engaging book,” she told parents. Lovelady

noted that before the turn of the century many books were primarily written to “punish” children. “*The Three Little Pigs*” is an example of a book that was frightening for children. In the 1900s, Lovelady noted, authors began to write stories that were appealing to children, rather than ones developed to frighten them. “*Goodnight Moon*,” written in 1947 is an excellent example of this trend.

“Go back and look at the pictures,” Lovelady instructed. “In a lot of quality books, you will find the moon, stars and outdoors.” She also noted that good books will often have elements that teach children about the “predictability” of life. “Children learn things because we name them . . . so, a child can point to a picture and ask, what is that?,” she added.

Children also “need to hear rhymes,” she said, explaining that rhymes help children learn sounds and words. Young children also need repetition and learning experiences that show them how to connect concepts. Lovelady helped parents to uncover a number of other elements in the book, “*Goodnight Moon*”: the number of clocks in the book and how they changed time as the pages were turned; how and



why the author grouped certain elements in color on particular pages and then singled them out in black and white on subsequent pages; the contrast between the vibrant colors at the front of the book and the more muted colors toward the end of the book when the objective is to get the child to sleep; and, how “picture reading” is quality literature that promotes excitement for learning in young children.

“Young children enjoy chanting, repeated phrases and the rhythmic language found in books,” Lovelady advised, explaining that these elements help children develop cognitive skills.

In the five-year-old group children were sprawled out on the floor drawing something to which they would say good-night. “Look at my moon,” one child offered. The four-year-olds in another room were drawing tubs and moons.

In the two-year-old group, children with numbers printed on cards presented their cards one by one to their teachers. “Kayla has the number six: S-I-X,” the teacher spelled. “Everybody count to six...Now let’s look for something that has six pictures on it.” Kayla pointed to a picture of six balloons on a large board that contained pictures of items grouped together. “What are these,” the teacher asked. “Balloons,” said the children in unison. “Let’s count them.”

Excitement of Learning

right books for my three and one-year old," she explained. She also said that she learned the value of being patient in reading to her children and how to develop activities around the books' themes. Johnson, who also has a seven-year-old, says she started reading to her children when she was pregnant with her three-year old. Before then, she would buy books, but they mostly ended up in the toy box and were not actively used as a learning tool.

Parent Frank Williams said, "The session was very educational. She brought out ways to teach children how to rhyme, be creative, and how to make a book if you don't have one."

Asked what she did in her session, Ashyia said, "Write."

"What did you write?"

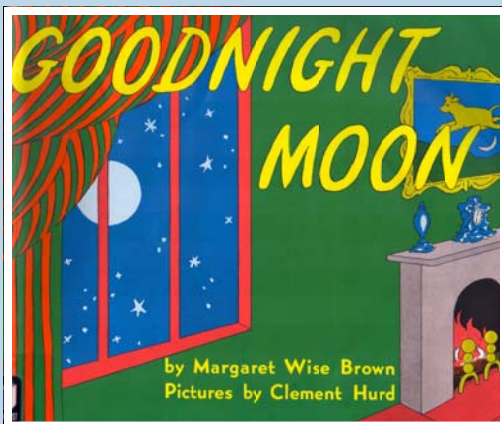
"A moon."

"What else did you do?"

"Read one book."

"What was in the book?"

"It had night."



"Stars."

"What else?"

"Green."

Parents and children left the seminar — each having experienced learning in their own "age-appropriate" way.

"And, what else?"

"Mittens."

"What else?"

"Socks."

"What else?"

"A cat."

"What else?"



The Riggo-Lynch Interfaith Chapel at Children's Defense Fund Haley Farm

A Week at the Children's Defense Fund Haley Farm

By Derric Morrison, Baby Steps Program Director

During the week of July 20 – 24, 2009 I had an opportunity, along with Rev. J.D. King, an alliance member, to attend The Proctor Institute for Child Advocacy Ministry hosted by the Children's Defense Fund. This workshop equips participants from various churches, organizations, and communities with new skills and strategies to make a difference for children.

The daily agenda consisted of a morning devotion, breakfast, bible study, morning worship service and lunch. After lunch we were given a variety of workshop options to attend from 2:00 – 5:00 pm. There was a "Resurrection Choir" made up of workshop participants who sang during the worship services and rehearsed each day from 5:15 – 6:00 pm. Also during this time, participants like me who were not blessed with "melodic voices", had the opportunity to reflect on the day's sessions and explore different areas of the farm. Dinner was served from 6:15 – 7:15 pm and each day concluded with an evening worship service. The full day agenda gave ample opportunity to meet and engage professionals from all over the country.

The Children's Defense Fund Haley Farm encourages participants to bond on the common interest of child advocacy rather than focusing on differences. I believe this concept is one that we have to pursue in our local venues. *We have to continue to encourage and challenge our community that we all have a shared responsibility for the betterment of all children.* Rev. King echoed my sentiments with a statement he made, "... it is amazing to see so many people of different denominations and backgrounds be able to come together committed and focused on one thing, children." The compelling experience of being on the farm insists that you look at the current and future challenges that confront our children. Much of the information shared by the Children's Defense Fund throughout the week affirmed the critical importance of the work that we do at Baby Steps to empower parents to help their children at "early ages." This week was life impacting because it not only encouraged and motivated, but it ultimately challenged participants to be "active" advocates for children in our daily work. I would highly recommend that anyone working on behalf of children take advantage of "a week on the farm."

5 healthy snacks for kids

When a snack attack strikes, refuel with these nutrition-packed snacks.

- Peel a banana and dip it in yogurt. Roll in crushed cereal and freeze.
- Spread celery sticks with peanut butter or low-fat cream cheese. Top with raisins. Enjoy your “ants on a log.”
- Stuff a whole-grain pita pocket with ricotta cheese and Granny Smith apple slices. Add a dash of cinnamon.
- Mix together ready-to-eat cereal, dried fruit and nuts in a sandwich bag for an on-the-go snack.
- Top low-fat vanilla yogurt with crunchy granola and sprinkle with blueberries.

American Dietetic Association or Eating Right for Healthy Weight

Published by Baby Steps, Inc.
506 W. Monroe Street
Okolona, MS 38860
662-447-5040
www.takebabysteps.com

© 2009 Baby Steps, Inc.
All rights reserved in all media.

Baby Steps Early Education and Community Health Alliance Community Health Fair A Big Success

By Carla James, Site Coordinator for Baby Steps, Inc.

On Saturday July 18, 2009, *Baby Steps, Inc.* staff along with the *Early Education Community Health Alliance* held a Community City Wide Health Fair. The Health Fair began at the Okolona City Auditorium at 9:00 a.m. with a one mile walk led by the Okolona Police Department. **Seventy nine people participated in the walk and approximately 200 children and adults participated in all events.**

After the walk, the Health Fair was held in the City Auditorium where Mrs. Juanita Head and JoAnn Jenkins, Alliance members, greeted and registered participants. Booths were set up to include CATCH Kids, Organ-Wise Guys, Blood Pressure Screenings, Diabetes Treatment Center, and Blood Sugar and others. Mrs. Shauntae Whitfield, a Baby Steps parent and Alliance member, read the book “*Does a Lion Brush*” to the children. Afterwards children participated in activities and received toothbrushes.

The children were also favored with information from the OrganWise Guys. They each received stickers for visiting the booth and were told about the different organs and what they can do to keep their organs healthy. Most of the preschool and kindergarten children were aware of the OrganWise Guys because the program has been implemented in the local child care centers and public schools for two years.

Sister Lisa Schmidt, representing Excel, gave her famous massage to those who needed a good boost for the day. After visiting the booths, participants took a stroll to the Okolona Mini Park. Activities and games were set up for the children to enjoy. **The children received school supplies for prizes.** Jump rope, toss the fruit, feed the pig, and hoola hoop were a few of the games the children enjoyed. Parent Greg Brown was challenged to complete 50 jumps without stopping in order to receive school supplies for all of his children. Mr. Brown did just that.

All participants were “cooled off” with unlimited snow cones. Across the street, events for the children included a large water slide, bouncer, and a train ride. Members of the New Era Lodge #13, Lee Wilson and Michael Ezell did a great job ensuring that our children were safe while playing on the inflatables. Members of the New Era Lodge#13 also prepared lunch for everyone. Also, a special thank you is extended to Mr. Bobby Beard who allowed *Baby Steps* to use his property on Olive Street for the waterslide and to Mr. Craig Carson who donated the hamburger and hotdog buns.

The *Baby Steps* staff, along with the Early Education Community Health Alliance and their partners, wants to thank everyone — both young and old — who participated in this healthy fun day. We encourage the Okolona Community to eat right and exercise daily and to strive to become healthier. Let’s continue to work together for the “*Love of Our Community.*” Funds from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the United Way supported this event.