TAVIS SMILEY FOUNDATION

PARENTS: Every Child's First Teacher
At Home Education Strategies from Birth through High School

Developed by the University of Illinois at Chicago Reading Clinic

TOO IMPORTANT TO FAIL
SAVING AMERICA'S CHILDREN EDUCATION
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DEVELOPED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO READING CLINIC

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This year the Tavis Smiley Foundation introduced the Too Important to Fail Parent Education Summits as an extension of its work in youth leadership development and education. During the last 11 years, we’ve witnessed extraordinary accomplishments of the high school students who have participated in our programs.

From starting and managing their own non-profit organizations and businesses to serving on community boards and holding key administrative positions in the White House, what was common to all of the achievers was that they earned a high school diploma and had the support of parents or other caring adults who wanted to see them succeed.

Sadly, however, this is not the case for all students in America. Studies show an astonishing 1.3 million students drop out of high school every year. High school dropouts cost between $320 billion and $350 billion in lost wages, taxable income, health care, incarcerations, and other social services. According to the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics, the 2009 dropout rate for African Americans stood at 9.3 percent compared to whites at 5.2 percent. Also in 2009, the dropout rate for low-income students was five times greater than their high-income counterparts — 7.4 percent compared with 1.4 percent.

While there are a number of contributing factors to these grim statistics, one thing most experts do agree on is that parents have the ability to impact at an early age their child’s academic achievement. Recognizing that critical role, we organized the Parent Education Summits as a means to connect parents with experts who can provide them with training and resources on how to strengthen their role as their child’s “first teacher.”

This booklet is one of the tools. It was developed by the University of Illinois at Chicago Reading Clinic and is designed to assist parents in supporting the language, reading, writing and development of infants, children, and teens. It is organized around major topics of reading and writing and each section includes strategies that parents can implement immediately. It’s not the only strategy available but we believe it’s an important step to ensure that children not only survive but thrive as academic achievers.

We are grateful to the support for this project provided by the Open Society Foundations, American Hyundai Motor America, the NEA and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting through the American Graduate: Let’s Make it Happen initiative.
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ORAL LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT  
(BIRTH TO KINDERGARTEN)

DEFINITION: Spoken aspect of language that can be heard, interpreted and understood.

IMPORTANCE: Language development is important for later reading and writing achievement.

Two Types of Language

- Expressive Language – what we say
- Receptive Language – what we hear and understand

Both types of language require that infants, children, and teens have knowledge of words.

Strategies to Use at Home

Talk with students frequently. (Please, NO BABY TALK)

Give rich explanations.

“I was late arriving because there was an accident. All cars have to stop and wait for emergency vehicles to pass before they can continue.”

Encourage children to share complete thoughts.

Identify a colorful and interesting picture. Have your child describe the picture using at least 20 words. It is important that you model a description including as many details as possible. This is called Picture Talk and Rich Description.

Language poor description – I see a man and boy. (6 words)

Language rich description – I see a man dressed in a nice suit and boy standing together in the crowd. The man is hugging the boy who looks sad. He is probably telling the person holding the microphone that we must protect our young boys to ensure they grow to be strong men. (53 words)

Encourage children to use language to solve problems.

Child – “I can’t do that.”
Parent – “What would you need to do that?”
Parent – “Is there someone you could ask for help?”

Walk and talk. Take a 10 minute walk with your child and play the game, what do you see?

Encourage your child to provide descriptive words.

You begin the conversation.

Parent – I see the blue car near the curb.
Child –
Parent – I see the tree with the long trunk.
Child

Repeat the process until the walk ends.
READ ALOUDS
(BIRTH THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL)

DEFINITION: A read aloud is a planned oral reading of a book or print excerpt, usually selected for pleasure or sharing information.

IMPORTANCE: Parents who read aloud to their children provide a strong, positive influence. Read alouds nurture curiosity and bonding. Lastly, read alouds provide a chance to model reading fluency and share excitement and joy over a piece of text.

Strategies to Use at Home

• Read to infants every day. 100 words a day keeps the reading and language problems away.
• Make sure that reading is as much a part of an infant’s day as eating and sleeping.
• Select books with colorful pictures and “juicy” words to read to infants and children.
• Keep the read aloud short and engaging. 5 to 10 minutes is a good time frame.
• Ask the following question to children during the read aloud
  What picture did you see in your head while I was reading?
  What do you think will happen next?
  Did I read that part with the right voice?
  Wow! Did you hear that word? That was a gorgeous word!
• Read both fiction and nonfiction texts to infants, children, and teens.
• Read an interesting newspaper article, poem, comic strip, song lyrics, magazine article, or Internet post with your child.
BOOK AND PRINT CONCEPTS  
(BIRTH TO KINDERGARTEN)

DEFINITION: General knowledge of book and print concepts. This general knowledge includes knowledge of the front of the book, where to begin reading, knowledge of reading left to right in English, concept of a letter, word, and sentence, and knowledge of lower and upper case letters.

IMPORTANCE: Book and print concepts are very important in learning to read. Children need to understand that print carries meaning.

Strategies to Use at Home

- Make sure you show your child the title of each book, and point to the title of the book. Say, the title gives us the name of the book.
- Make sure you show your child the author’s name. Say, this is the name of the author or the person who wrote the book.
- Make sure you share the table of contents. Say, this page gives information about what’s in the book.
- Have the child point to the place where you should begin reading. Say, show daddy where to begin reading.
- Have your child point to a letter.
- Have your child point to a word.
- Have your child swipe his/her finger under a sentence.
- Show them print-to-speech match.
- As an example the child will point to each word in the sentence as you read it – The big dog was barking.
ALPHABET KNOWLEDGE
(3 TO 5 YEARS OLD)

DEFINITION: The ability to recognize upper case and lower case letters.

IMPORTANCE: Alphabet knowledge is the foundation of reading and writing.

Strategies to Use at Home

- Mark small brown paper bags with letters of the alphabet. Find pictures of common items (e.g., apple, football, fan, door, window, etc.). Have your child place the picture in the bag with the same beginning letter.
- Point out the letters in your child’s name.
- Sing alphabet songs.
- Have your child cut out words from magazines that have the same letters in his/her name.
- Have your child write his/her name.
- Read alphabet books with beautiful pictures in them.
WORD SOUND AWARENESS
(BIRTH TO KINDERGARTEN)

DEFINITION: The ability to hear and manipulate individual sounds in words

IMPORTANCE: It improves children’s word reading and reading comprehension.

Strategies to Use at Home

• Sing songs and manipulate sounds.
• Help your child clap the sound in each word as you say the sound of each letter in the word.
• He or she should clap three times for each sound in the word top - t o p
• Engage in word play by having your child change out the beginning, middle, and ending sounds in words.
• Tell your child to say the word ball. Have your child change the b sound with a t sound and share the new word. Your child should say tall.
• Engage your child in silly word play. Ask them to help you with your words.
• Go get your “shears birt” instead of “bears shirt”
• I am cooking “pinner in the dot” instead of “dinner in the pot”
SIGHT WORD DEVELOPMENT
(3 TO 8 YEARS OLD)

DEFINITION: A sight word is any word known by the reader automatically.

IMPORTANCE: Knowledge of sight words or the most commonly used words makes a child a faster and more fluent reader.

Children should become familiar with 220 of the most frequently used words. They are found in the DOLCH List. The words are listed below:

Pre-kindergarten: a, and, away, big, blue, can, come, down, find, for, funny, go, help, here, I, in, is, it, jump, little, look, make, me, my, not, one, play, red, run, said, see, the, three, to, two, up, we, where, yellow, you

Kindergarten: all, am, are, at, ate, be, black, brown, but, came, did, do, eat, four, get, good, have, he, into, like, must, new, no, now, on, our, out, please, pretty, ran, ride, saw, say, she, so, soon, that, there, they, this, too, under, want, was, well, went, what, white, who, will, with, yes

1st Grade: after, again, an, any, as, ask, by, could, every, fly, from, give, giving, had, has, her, him, his, how, just, know, let, live, may, of, old, once, open, over, put, round, some, stop, take, thank, them, then, think, walk, were, when

2nd Grade: always, around, because, been, before, best, both, buy, call, cold, does, don’t, fast, first, five, found, gave, goes, green, its, made, many, off, or, pull, read, right, sing, sit, sleep, tell, their, these, those, upon, us, use, very, wash, which, why, wish, work, would, write, your

3rd Grade: about, better, bring, carry, clean, cut, done, draw, drink, eight, fall, far, full, got, grow, hold, hot, hurt, if, keep, kind, laugh, light, long, much, myself, never, only, own, pick, seven, shall, show, six, small, start, ten, today, together, try, warm

Strategies to Use at Home

• Plaster the words on the wall in your child’s room. Have your child read his or her wall before going to sleep.
• Play sight word bingo.
• Play a matching game with the sight words.
PHONICS
(3 TO 8 YEARS OLD)

DEFINITION: Relationship between letters and sounds they represent

IMPORTANCE: Phonics are important for reading and spelling.

Strategies to Use at Home

• Practice saying the sounds that each letter makes.
• Help your child make lists with words with short vowel sounds (big, dig) and long vowel sounds (bik, lik). Work with 6 to 10 words for approximately 10 minutes.
• Help your child break apart longer words (e.g., information) into smaller chunks (e.g., in / for / ma / tion).
• Encourage your child to write to practice sound-symbol relationship.
• Make two list of words that will allow your child to create compound words (e.g., hotdog, backpack).
VOCABULARY
(BIRTH THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL)

DEFINITION: A set of words in a language that are familiar to a person

IMPORTANCE: Vocabulary is important to reading comprehension.

Four types of vocabulary
- Listening
- Speaking
- Reading
- Writing

Strategies to Use at Home
- Encourage your child to read a lot of fiction and nonfiction. This is the number one way to increase vocabulary development.
- Place a “word snack” on your child’s pillow or some other place each night. This will be their special gift from you each day.
- Use rich vocabulary with and around your child.
- Discuss new words when you read to your child.
- Have your child apply their “new” vocabulary word.
- Scattered is the new word.
  - Step 1 – Provide an example of scattered (e.g., things laying around in no particular order).
  - Step 2 – Give an example (e.g., papers were scattered all over the table)
  - Step 3 – Ask your child to use scattered in a sentence.
  - Next step – Be sure to use the word in future conversations.
- Use words from words lists provided by your child’s teacher in natural conversation.
- Keep an “interesting word” journal with your child. Record news words as they are learned.
- Find pictures or YouTube videos that will help your child understand meanings of words.
- Replace “ordinary words” with “sophisticated words.”
  - “irate” for “mad”  “mediocre” for “average”  “superb” for “great”
- Have your child download a vocabulary app on his or her cell phone.
- Reward the usage of new and exciting words. Make a big deal about vocabulary words.
- “That was a dollar word,” is an expression to use with children when they use their vocabulary knowledge.
READING COMPREHENSION
(PRESCHOOL THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL)

DEFINITION: Level of understanding of texts

IMPORTANCE: Reading comprehension is important for academic and personal success. Children who have difficulty reading and understanding texts often struggle in school.

Types of Reading Comprehension
• Oral reading comprehension
• Silent reading comprehension
• Listening comprehension

Strategies to Use at Home
• Have your child retell a story that you read to him or her. Encourage your child to use the following language to learn story structure:
  • In the beginning of the story...
  • The next that thing that happened...
  • In the middle of the story...
  • This was followed by...
  • The story ended with...
• Have your child act out the text you read to him or her.
• Engage your child in a discussion about the character’s thoughts, actions, and feelings.
• Encourage your child to look at pictures, graphs, and charts while reading.
• Have your child draw an image that captures the main points of the story. Then, ask your child to explain his or her image. You want to make sure your child is constructing an image in his or her mind while reading fiction.
• Ask your child what more they want to know after reading a story.
• Have a deep conversation around meaningful texts.
• Make sure your child is paying attention to what he or she is reading. This is important for building a strong concept of reading. Have your child complete an exercise similar to the one below.

Fill in the blanks with a word that makes sense in that blank.
• The boy was sitting in the park. The barking ____ ran by chasing a____. Before he reached the ball, he bumped in to the ____ man with a cane.

Answer: The boy was sitting in the park. The barking dog ran by chasing a ball. Before he reached the ball, he bumped into the old/blind man with a cane.

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WRITING (PRESCHOOL THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL)

DEFINITION: Using words and ideas to create written text

IMPORTANCE: Writing is an important form of communication and personal expression. Also, the writing demands in society have increased, especially for high school students who want to successfully complete college and enter the workforce.

Strategies to Use at Home

- Place crayons, pencils, and paper in front of your child as early as possible.
- Encourage your child to write his or her name and the names of family members.
- Let your child see you writing.
- Write a story together with your child.
- Write a message or letter in front of your child. Then, read the letter to your child.
- Have your child write a letter to one of the authors of his or her books.
- Ask your child to write a caption for a photo or picture.
- Have your child write about his favorite person.
- Make sure you listen and respond to your child’s writing.
  - “How did you come up with that idea?”
  - “I like your character.”
  - “That was a beautiful word.”
- Have your child interview one of his relatives and write the responses.
- Have your child help you write the shopping list.
- Have your child label family photos.
- Engage your child in “mirror writing.”
- Read a poem – write a poem.
- Read a short story – write a short story.
- Read a children’s story – write a children’s story.
- Encourage your child to create his or her own blog.
- Encourage your child to keep a writer’s notebook.
- Share your fictional writing with your child.
- Write to each other using the “old fashioned” notebook paper.
- Provide positive and honest feedback to the young writer.
- Ask your child to read as a writer.
  - What did the writer have to know and do to write his piece?
  - Why did the writer use certain words?
  - What image did the writer want to create for his reader?
  - How did the writer want the reader to feel after finishing his or her piece?
**Children’s and Young Adult Literature**  
*(Birth Through High School)*

**Definition:** Children’s literature - Books written for children up to 12 years old, chosen by children, or chosen for children.  
Young adult literature – Fiction written for teens and young adults from ages 14-21-years-old.

**Importance:** Children’s and young adult literature are important for young people to understand and appreciate the world and those who share it with them.

**Strategies to Use at Home**

- Purchase books as gifts and write a special note in the book.

- Spend at least 1 hour a month in the children’s section of a book store or library. These are really fun places to be.

- Give your child access to children’s and young adult literature by creating his or her personal home library. Milk crates are great storage places for books.

- Read at least 3 books a year with your older child (i.e., 10-14) by alternating pages or chapters.

- Select one reading for the entire family and discuss the book over dinner. The Hunger Games is a great selection for this activity.

- Make reading fun, not a chore or punishment.
MOTIVATING AND ENGAGING YOUNG READERS
(Grades 4-12)

DEFINITION: Motivation – a driving force by which people achieve their goals. Engagement – being actively involved with a purpose.

IMPORTANCE: Motivated and engaged readers enjoy learning and they believe in their reading ability. Motivation and engagement are essential for effective learning.

Children who are more motivated and engaged perform better in reading in school.

Strategies to Use at Home

• Select texts that build on your child’s interests.

• “Sell” texts to your child by giving them a short description or by sharing an interesting paragraph from the text.

• Place “pillow pages” on your child’s bed once a month. Pillow pages are short and interesting pieces that you have read or selected for your child. Limit the pillow pages to 3-to-5 pages.

• Ask your child to visit different Internet sites and identify three “kernels of wisdom” that he or she did not know. News websites are useful for this.

• Use music lyrics to connect children to reading materials. Consider visiting www.lyrics.com.

• Find graphic novels, comics, or other printed materials that appeal to your child.

• Get your child excited by sharing what you learned during your reading and how your reading makes you think about things going on in the world.

• Make sure you separate reading at home for enjoyment from reading at school for assignments.

• Give your kids choice in what they read.
TALKING TO TEACHERS
(PRESCHOOL THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL)

DEFINITION: Communicating with teachers in school and giving them access to you during out-of-school hours.

IMPORTANCE: You are sending an important message that you care about your child’s school success. Your conversations with your child’s teacher provide an important bridge between your child and teacher.

Strategies to Use at Home

- Share your cell number and email address with your child’s teacher.
- Visit your child’s school within the first three weeks of the school year to introduce yourself and observe your child’s classroom. This is important because the focus is placed on your child, not your child’s grades.
- Send a note to your child’s teacher every other week seeking information about your child’s progress.

Sample Note

Date:

Dear Ms. or Mr. ______________________ (teacher’s name)

I am writing to inquire about ______________________ (child’s name) progress.

Will you please check one of the lines below:

____ My child is making excellent progress.

____ My child is making satisfactory progress.

____ My child needs to make improvements (Please provide a brief note if you check this statement).

- Find out about the teacher’s expectations for your child early during the school year?
- How will my child’s grade be affected by homework?
- Are students allowed to bring their books home?
- How often will they take tests?
- What major projects will my child have to complete this semester?

- Do you provide extra support for students who need it?
RESOURCES FOR PARENTS

http://www2.ed.gov/parents/read/resources/edpicks.html
I-Resources for parents of students K-12: Articles related to the following topics in English and Spanish:
Prepare My Child for School
Find Schools & After-Care
My Child’s Academic Success
My Child’s Special Needs

http://www.scholastic.com/parents/
This website offers resources to parents addressing a wide variety of topics including the following:
Books & Reading (includes Book Lists and Books for Parents)
Child Development
School Help (includes guidelines and suggestions for Parent-Teacher Relationships)
Activities
News & Blogs
Kid’s Sites

http://www.readwritethink.org/parent-afterschool-resources/
Grades Kindergarten through 12th
This website provides tips for parents of students K-12 and afterschool resources including the following sections:
Games & Tools
Activities & Projects
Tips & How To’s (includes Spanish)
Print-outs
Podcasts

www.khanacademy.org
The Khan Academy is a not-for-profit organization with the goal of changing education for the better by providing a free world-class education to anyone anywhere. All of the site's resources are available to anyone. The Khan Academy's materials and resources are available to you completely free of charge.

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/680/01/
This website is a resource that will be most helpful to parents of middle school and high school students. It is an Online Writing Lab with links for parent resources including topics in the following categories:
Beginning Writing
Conducting Research
Proofreading
Grammar and Mechanics

http://www.shelfari.com/
This website is a social cataloging website in which you and your child can keep track of the books you’re reading by creating a virtual bookshelf. It is also a place where you can discuss the books you are reading with friends and find great book recommendations that meet you and your child’s interests.

http://www.wegivebooks.org/
This website offers a wide variety of children’s books that you can read online. You can read the entire book online as you and your child flip through the pages, enjoying the beautiful illustrations and story. Every time you read a book, a book is donated to a child in need.

http://www.happybirthdayauthor.com/
This website is a blog written by a former teacher who is now a stay at home dad. The goal of this blog is to encourage families to read a variety of books together. The website celebrates the birthdays of famous children’s book authors and provides tips for families in how to establish a “Routine for Reading” at home.
RESOURCES FOR PARENTS CONTINUED

http://tweentribune.com
This website provides a section for both tweens and teens in both English and Spanish with nonfiction articles about current event topics that are relevant and informational to young adults. As children progress through grade levels, nonfiction text often becomes the larger percentage of the type of text they are required to read. Encourage your children to read nonfiction articles to increase their background knowledge and strengthen their nonfiction reading ability.

http://www.goodreads.com/
This website is an online community of readers in which you can add friends to see their latest reads and get ideas for your next pick. Also, you can create a bookshelf for the books you have read and are reading and give each book a rating based on your formed opinion of the book. The website will give you recommendations for books you might want to read based on your previous ratings which indicate your reading preferences. It’s a great way for you and your child to keep connected in a community of readers and to keep your recommendations coming for future reads.

http://www.teachmentortexts.com/search/label/Parent%20Involvement
This website is a blog created and maintained by a dedicated teacher who reads hundreds of books every year and decided to share her love for reading and knowledge of books with parents, teachers, and students. Many other teachers contribute to this blog as well with valuable suggestions and book recommendations. The blog includes a Partnering with Parents series that provides helpful information and tips for parents and includes the following topics:

Tips to help promote literacy skills in your children
Tips for reading with your children
Tips for parents of children with special needs

http://bookwhisperer.com/
This website provides resources to inspire and motivate readers. One especially helpful feature of this site is the “Book Recommendation” section with offers ongoing, continuously updated book recommendations for both younger children and young adults.

http://www.mywonderfulworld.org/parents_welcome.html
This website is a National Geographic-led website for parents regarding a campaign called “My Wonderful World”. It provides “10 Ways to Give Your Kids the World” which offers valuable suggestions for activities to do with your kids (younger children) that incorporate Geography in ways that will also support their literacy development.

http://www.mywonderfulworld.org/kidsteens_welcome.html
This website is a National Geographic-led website for kids and teens regarding a campaign called “My Wonderful World”. It provides activities for children that will help them understand their world better while strengthening their literacy skills.

The Tavis Smiley Foundation provides summer enrichment youth leadership development and training programs for teens ages 13 -18. Through it annual Leadership Institute teens learn skills common to effective leaders and how to us their talents to address pressing social issues relevant to young adults. www.youthtoleaders.org
RESOURCES FOR PARENTS
CONTINUED

http://www.kellygallagher.org/
This website was created by a high school English teacher who has been very successful in helping his students achieve success as readers and writers. He has also helped many teachers across the country grow as teachers and help their students. He recognized that many of his high school students were coming to his class with little background knowledge about history and simply things that were going on in the world around them. Their lack of prior knowledge inhibited their reading ability, so he decided to start something called the “Article of the Week”. Every week, he gives his students an article to read that relates to real-world events along with some meaningful way to respond to the article. These articles provide excellent informational text for your adolescent children to read and discuss with you. This text should provide meaningful discussion for you to engage in together while building your child’s background knowledge and literacy skills. 
*To access the articles:
Select “Resources” in the upper right corner
Select “Article of the Week”
Select “Article of the Week” Archive (you find this link about half-way through the page)

The following websites are online venues where students can submit their writing for publication on the website. It is free to submit their writing and it motivates them to write as the writing experience becomes more authentic when they are writing with the purpose of submitting for publication for others to read. Please encourage your children to write and to work toward publishing their writing online as a way to engage them in the writing process.

Writing Publication Links:
http://www.teenink.com/
http://KIDSBOOKSHELF.COM
http://allpoetry.com
http://poetrypoem.com/
http://poetry.com/

The following websites are great places to find book recommendations for young adults. Choice is key in your child’s literacy development, and educating that choice is often just as important. The more you get to know young adult books and the more you indulge in these books, the more you will be able to connect to your child and engage him or her in reading.
http://www.teenreads.com/
www.ala.org/ysla/booklists/bbya
http://www.nationalbook.org
http://www.reading.org/resources/booklists/youngadult
schoices.aspx
http://www.yabookscentral.com/
http://booksaplenty.blogspot.com/
http://www.yareads.com/
http://youngadultbookreviews.com/

The following websites are kid-friendly Web news sites that will keep your child up to date on what is going on in the world while strengthening literacy skills in nonfiction reading and building background knowledge. These will be great places for you to find articles for you and your child to read together and discuss.
http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/
http://www.timeforkids.com/
http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/kids/