



May 2005

PARENTING PRACTICES THAT SHAPE THE LIVES OF YOUNG CHILDREN

Parenting practices and daily routines are important influences on a child's social, physical and cognitive development.¹ Having familiar patterns and rituals provide children with the security of knowing what to expect, and help to build their sense of identity and responsibility. The 2002-03 Los Angeles County Health Survey (LACHS) asked parents and guardians of children 0 to 5 years of age about some of their child's and family's routines. Parents reported that 43% of children were read to daily by a parent or family member, 73% went to bed and 75% had meals the same time every day, and 57% of households ate at least one meal together as a family every day. Among children ages 2 to 5 years, 97% ate breakfast and,

among children 6 months to 5 years old, 73% watched less than 3 hours of television each day (Table 1).

School Readiness

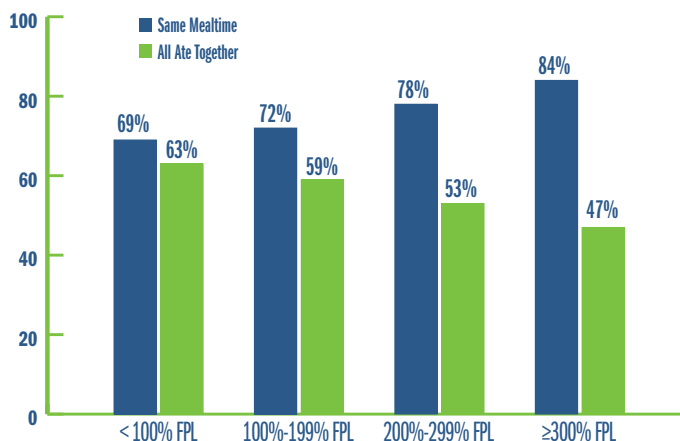
Children's readiness for school and early academic success are influenced by parental involvement and the home environment. Experiences such as reading or book sharing, and having routines for meals and bedtimes promote school readiness by encouraging emotional, social and cognitive development in children.²

Meals

Children who eat a nutritious breakfast every day have a lower risk of obesity and perform better in school.³ The survey found that, regardless of parent's education or household income, over 95% of children ages 2 to 5 years ate breakfast.

Spending mealtime together as a family encourages open communication and strengthens the relationship between parents and children. The survey found that children who reside in lower income households were less likely to have regular mealtimes, but more likely to eat together at least once a day (Figure 1). The latter finding may reflect dual income households in which both parents work outside the home.

FIGURE 1
Mealtimes for Children (0 to 5 Years of Age) by Federal Poverty Level,* 2002-03



*Based on 2002 Federal Poverty Level (FPL) thresholds which for a family of four (2 adult, 2 dependents) correspond to annual incomes of \$18,859 (100% FPL), \$37,718 (200% FPL), and \$56,557 (300% FPL).

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TABLE
1

Daily Routines for Children (0 to 5 Years of Age) by Selected Demographics, 2002-03

	Read to Daily		<3 hrs TV/Day [‡]		Same Bedtime		Same Mealtime		All Eat Together	
	Percent	95% CI	Percent	95% CI	Percent	95% CI	Percent	95% CI	Percent	95% CI
Los Angeles County	43%	± 3	73%	± 3	73%	± 2	75%	± 2	57%	± 2
Child's Race/Ethnicity										
Latino	37%	± 3	70%	± 3	68%	± 3	72%	± 3	61%	± 3
White	59%	± 6	84%	± 5	87%	± 4	81%	± 5	46%	± 5
African-American	44%	± 10	67%	± 11	73%	± 10	75%	± 10	40%	± 8
Asian/Pacific Islander	50%	± 9	74%	± 8	77%	± 8	78%	± 8	56%	± 8
Parent's Education										
Less than high school	33%	± 5	71%	± 5	60%	± 5	69%	± 5	65%	± 4
High school	40%	± 6	69%	± 5	74%	± 5	73%	± 5	55%	± 5
Some college or trade school	45%	± 6	70%	± 6	77%	± 5	76%	± 5	53%	± 5
College or post graduate degree	59%	± 5	83%	± 5	86%	± 4	84%	± 4	51%	± 5
Federal Poverty Level⁺										
0-99% FPL	36%	± 5	70%	± 5	64%	± 5	69%	± 5	63%	± 4
100%-199% FPL	35%	± 5	68%	± 5	70%	± 5	72%	± 5	59%	± 4
200%-299% FPL	51%	± 7	75%	± 6	78%	± 5	78%	± 6	53%	± 6
300% or above FPL	59%	± 5	81%	± 4	88%	± 3	84%	± 4	47%	± 5
Service Planning Area										
Antelope Valley	37%	± 12	70%	± 12	74%	± 11	79%	± 10	56%	± 11
San Fernando	46%	± 6	75%	± 5	74%	± 5	76%	± 5	54%	± 5
San Gabriel	42%	± 7	70%	± 7	81%	± 5	77%	± 6	56%	± 6
Metro	44%	± 8	75%	± 8	71%	± 8	69%	± 8	61%	± 7
West	66%	± 11	87%	± 9	84%	± 9	84%	± 10	47%	± 11
South	35%	± 8	70%	± 7	66%	± 7	72%	± 7	62%	± 7
East	36%	± 7	74%	± 6	68%	± 7	72%	± 6	61%	± 6
South Bay	46%	± 7	70%	± 7	71%	± 7	74%	± 6	52%	± 6

⁺ Based on 2002 Federal Poverty Level (FPL) thresholds which for a family of four (2 adult, 2 dependents) correspond to annual incomes of \$18,859 (100% FPL), \$37,718 (200% FPL), and \$56,557 (300% FPL).

[‡] Responses for children 6 months - 5 years

Bedtime

Adequate sleep is essential and following a regular bedtime schedule not only lets a child know what time he or she is expected to go to sleep, but helps to develop good sleeping habits. More than one-in-four (27%) of parents reported their children did not have a regular bedtime. The prevalence of children having a regular bedtime ranged from a high of 84% in the West Service Planning Area (SPA) to a low of 66% in the South SPA.

Reading

According to the National Commission on Reading, reading aloud to very young children is the single most important activity for language development and eventual reading success.⁴ The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that parents read daily to their children beginning at six months of age.⁵ Reading to a child as an infant contributes to the development of later literacy and language skills.^{6,7}

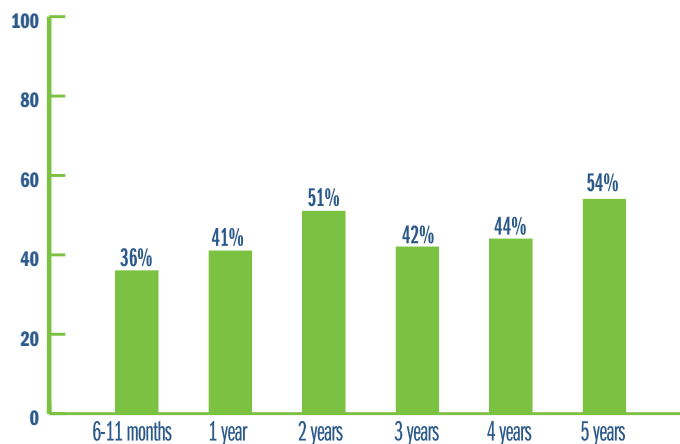
4. Kuo AA, Franke TM, Regalado M, Halfon N. Parent Report of Reading to Young Children. *Pediatrics* 113 (6 Suppl):1944-1951, 2004.

5. Fortman KK, O.Fisch R, Phinney M, DeFor T. Books and Babies: Clinical-Based Literacy Programs. *Journal of Pediatric Health Care* 17:295-300, 2003.

6. American Academy of Pediatrics, *Learning to Read—Age by Age Guide*, 2000.

7. Klass P, Needleman R, Zuckerman B. *Reach Out and Read Program Manual*. 2nd ed. Boston, MA: Reach Out and Read National Center, Boston Medical Center; 1999.

FIGURE 2 Percent of Children (6 Months to 5 Years of Age) who are Read to Daily by a Parent or Other Family Member by Child's Age, 2002-03

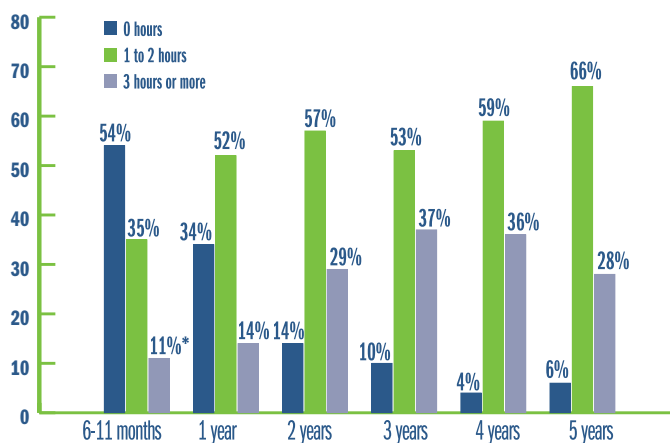


In the survey, parents reported that 36% of infants 6 to 11 months old were read to daily, and more than half (54%) of 5 year olds were read to every day (Figure 2). As parents' education level increased, so did the likelihood of daily reading to their children.

Television Viewing

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no television viewing for children under two years, and less than 3 hours per day of television viewing for children two years and over.⁸ The survey found that 46% of 6 to 11 months olds and 66% of one year olds watched at least 1 hour of television a day (Figure 3). Furthermore, one-third of 2 to 5 year olds watched 3 or more hours of television daily. Excessive television viewing among children can contribute to sleep disturbances, decreased physical activity, obesity and poor school performance.^{9,10}

FIGURE 3 Hours of Television Watched Daily Among Children (6 Months to 5 Years of Age) by Child's Age, 2002-03



*Estimate is based on a cell size <20, corresponding to a relative standard error >23% of the point estimated, which may be statistically unstable.

What Can Be Done?

Education efforts are needed to increase parents' awareness and understanding of the relationship between early childhood experiences and later school readiness. Parents can promote daily routines and activities that are consistent, yet flexible to accommodate their child's individual needs. Reading or telling a child's favorite story can be a part of the bedtime routine. Getting a library card for a child and making visits to the library can be a weekly activity. Many public libraries have group story hours for toddlers and preschoolers that use songs, puppets and other activities. Parents with infants can use cloth or board books with simple, colorful pictures that the infant can follow and easily hold.

As a role model, parents shape and influence their children's behavior. If children see their parents reading newspapers or books and not watching television, they will better understand the value and importance of reading. Teachers and librarians can advise parents on choosing age-appropriate books that are suitable for their child's reading level. Parents can limit their child's television watching, use a program guide to select appropriate shows for viewing, and encourage other options such as reading, playing or learning a hobby.

Health care, preschool and other early care providers, and community-based family resource centers can provide information to parents about early childhood development, nurturing environments, emotional and cognitive well-being, and good health. Continued community efforts are needed to promote child-centered literacy programs especially among children from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds who are at risk of not developing essential literacy skills. The Reach Out and Read program is a pediatric clinic-based literacy promotion program targeting at-risk infants and toddlers. The program utilizes the primary care setting where health care providers educate and support families to make daily reading part of their children's lives by disseminating handouts and age-appropriate books at each scheduled well-child visit between 6 months and 5 years of age.¹¹

Program and policy initiatives that promote the social and cognitive well-being of young children, particularly among those in low-income families, can

8. American Academy of Pediatrics, *Television—How it Affects Children*, 2002.

9. Christakis DA, Zimmerman FJ, DiGiuseppe DL, McCarty CA. Early Television Exposure and Subsequent Attentional Problems in Children. *Pediatrics* 113:708-713, 2004.

10. Owens J, Maxim R, McGuinn M, Nobile C, Msall M, Alario A. Television-viewing Habits and Sleep Disturbances in School Children. *Pediatrics* 104: 3, 1999.

11. Atkinson PM, Parks DK, Cooley SM, Sarkis SL. Reach Out and Read: A Pediatric Clinic-Based Approach to Early Literacy Promotion. *Journal of Pediatric Health Care* 16 (1):10-5, 2002.

on the web



The First 5 LA is designed to promote, support, and optimize the early development of children from the prenatal stage until their fifth birthday. First 5 LA focuses on programs in the areas of learning, health and safety of children throughout L.A. County www.first5.org

First 5 LA Connect helps pregnant mothers and parents of children ages 0-5 years in Los Angeles County find answers to their parenting questions. The 1-888-FIRST5-LA (1-888-347-7855) number and First 5 LA Connect website provides assistance on a wide range of topics to parents. www.first5laconnect.org

Los Angeles Universal Preschool (LAUP) is a groundbreaking new nonprofit organization, funded by First 5 LA, to provide a high-quality, part-day preschool experience to every four-year-old living in Los Angeles County whose parents choose to participate. The program will launch in Spring 2005 in 100 sites. www.laup.net

The Los Angeles County Children's Planning Council is a countywide public/private collaborative dedicated to improving the lives of children and families by encouraging partnerships, promoting the use of data, developing resources and tools, and emphasizing the importance of outcomes and results. The Council is developing measures and indicators to track and assess school readiness among children in the county. www.childpc.org

KCET's A Place of Our Own (and Los Niños en Su Casa in Spanish) is a daily television series and an extensive outreach program devoted to helping children acquire cognitive, social, emotional and physical skills, as well as nurture language and literacy development. www.aplaceofourown.org

California Head Start Association advocates for the interests of Head Start and Early Head Start agencies by supporting collaboration and strategic partnerships that bring quality services to children, families and communities. Head Start/Early Head Start is a federally funded child development program for very low-income young children and families. www.caheadstart.org

PBS Parents Guide to Children and Media provides tips parents can use to encourage positive TV habits among preschoolers by letting the children know that TV watching can be an active experience rather than a passive one. www.pbs.org/parents/issuesadvice/childrenandmedia/tvmovies-preschool.html

The National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL) works with educators and community builders through an array of services to design and sustain quality literacy programs for at-risk children and their families. www.familit.org

increase their later school readiness and academic success. State and local governments can utilize existing resources, such as WIC and Early Head Start, to provide expanded services that enhance family support as a part of a strategic school readiness policy agenda. In Los Angeles County, as part of the Early Start program, parent-to-parent support is available through a network of 13 Family Resource Centers. These centers provide educational and referral services to

Tips for Reading to Young Children

Create Reading Rituals

Set aside a special time and place to read together every day.

Get Close

When you cuddle with a child while reading a story, the child begins to associate reading with a sense of security. Children learn better when they feel safe.

Provide Sound Effects

Use silly voices and sounds to keep the child interested in the story. Hearing different sounds in language also helps the child develop critical listening skills.

Make Connections

Help the child connect to the text by following along with your finger as you read to show how text moves from left to right. Point out the pictures in the book and talk about what you see.

Talk About It

When reading or telling a story, pause to talk to the child about it. Ask open-ended questions like "what do you think happens next?" Put things in your own words to help make the story clearer for the child.

Read It Again

Children need to hear favorite stories over and over. This helps them recognize and remember words and gives them confidence about reading.

Keep It Active

Let the child touch and hold the book. Ask him/her to help turn the pages. Try clapping or singing to the words.

Be Creative

You don't always have to read a book. Tell a story that you know or make one up together. Making up stories with children helps stimulate creativity. It's also a nice change.

Follow the Child's Pace

Don't push the child to read beyond his reading or listening ability. Let the child choose books that are interesting to him/her. Encourage the child's reading and congratulate him/her when he/she learns a new word or masters a new skill.

Source: National Center for Family Literacy; www.familit.org



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In this issue:

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families of children ages 0 to 36 months.

Another County program, First 5 LA, has developed a comprehensive set of early childhood indicators to track school readiness. Community leaders, and state and local

policymakers can use these indicators to monitor trends over time and identify problem areas that require further intervention, and thus improve developmental outcomes among young children in the county.

The Los Angeles County Health Survey is a periodic, population-based telephone survey that collects information on sociodemographic characteristics, health status, health behaviors, and access to health services among adults and children in the county. The most recent survey, conducted between October 2002 and April 2003, collected information on a random sample of 8,167 adults and 5,995 children. Interviews were offered in English, Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean, and Vietnamese. The 2002-03 survey was supported by First 5 LA, the California Department of Services (through grants to the Maternal, Child and Adolescent Health Program, the Tobacco Control and Prevention Program, and the Alcohol and Drug Program Administration) and the Public Health Response and Bioterrorism Preparedness federal grant. The survey was conducted for the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services by Field Research Corporation.

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**For additional information about the
L.A. Survey: www.lapublichealth.org/ha**

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