



**BabyRead Columns
In
The Journal
Seneca, SC
(Chronological Order)**

2020

**2020 Journal Column
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Screen use and children's brain development

Screens are ubiquitous — on cell-phones, TVs, iPads, computers, videogames. The American Academy of Pediatrics' guidelines are that children from birth to 2 years of age should not be exposed to any screen time — no TVs, no cellphones, no video games or iPads.

Since everyone is using cellphones, and TVs are often on for hours at a time, parents need to consider what they can change to reduce their baby's and toddler's exposure to screens.



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"A new study using sophisticated brain scans found an association between screen use (e.g. playing with a cellphone, watching TV or using an iPad or videogame), and the development of young children's brains, especially in areas related to language development, reinforcing the messages about minimizing screen time for preschoolers."

The main author, Dr. John S. Hutton, is director of the Reading and Literacy Discovery Center at Cincinnati Children's Hospital.

"Myelination is the coating of the connections between nerve cells with a substance — called myelin — which insulates the nerve cells and increases the efficiency of the signaling. The amount of myelination around a nerve fiber is directly related to how often it is stimulated or used. The more the areas of the brain are encouraged to talk to one another, whether language

areas or executive function (e.g. decision making, impulse control), the more the coating of the nerve fibers is stimulated."

The study found that the children with higher screen exposure had poorer expressive language and did worse on tests of language processing speed, like rapidly naming objects. The children in this study were 3 to 5 years of age.

"What a young child needs is experiences that reinforce these networks more robustly. If screens are taking the place of interacting with caregivers or talking or playing, children may not be getting the full benefit of the astonishing neural plasticity and potential of those early years."

The message is that in the early years of life, there is additional evidence to suggest that nothing should squeeze out interactions, relationships and engagement — and to worry that the seductive power of screens may do just that."

(All quotes from "Screen Use Ties to Children's Development," Perri Klass, M.D., New York Times, Nov. 4, 2019)

Preschoolers need human experiences for their brains to develop optimally and reinforce neural networks.

Parents need to be aware of how important it is for their children's brain development for parents to read to, talk with, sing, ask and answer questions with their preschooler — all low-tech and low-cost activities.

BABYREAD'S GOAL is to read with moms/ caregivers and their children from birth to 2 years, when the brain grows the most, and to encourage them to read every day to their babies. We read (free) twice a month in public libraries and schools. We need volunteer readers. To help, contact director Caren von Hippel, Ph.D., at babyread@charter.net or (864) 643-8083 or visit babyread.org.

Too many toys?

Play is a critical part of a young child's development. Toys can be terrific learning tools, and, of course, they're lots of fun for kids, their friends and their parents.

Surveys show that Americans have upward of 100 toys for their children to choose from at home. But a new study suggests that when it comes to toys, it's



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better to think quality over quantity.

Like most preschoolers, Lincoln and his sister, Adeline, hit the playroom hard, checking out everything the floor and storage shelves had to offer.

Play builds spatial, motor and social skills. But when talking about toys, can there be too much of a good thing?

Social scientists at the University of Toronto studied a group of toddlers during free play sessions. In some sessions, the kids had four toys to play with. In others, they had 16.

"When there were 16 toys in the room, those incidences were much shorter, more along the lines of a minute apiece where they'd pick up the toy, give it a once over, but already be looking at where they wanted to go," explained Alexia Metz, Ph.D., an occupational therapist at the University of Toledo.

When the kids had just four toys, the interactions were almost twice as long, suggesting that the kids had time for quality play — meaning they used the toy in different ways beneficial for development.

"As they grow older, they build that into a longer attention span, better problem-solving ability, and (greater) persistence with tasks that might be challenging or frustrating," detailed Metz.

All of that helps with learning to read.

Metz said parents might put some toys away and rotate a few out at a time. (June 2019, Child Trends News Service, funded by the National Science Foundation.)

In 2018 the American Academy of Pediatrics issued a statement on toys, advising parents of children from birth to school age to go for physical toys rather than elaborate digital ones. Children need manipulative toys, blocks and puzzles that let them practice with their hands and brains. They need props for their imagination and their interaction, books to be read aloud over and over and space and scope to invent stories and act them out.

Every toddler knows that the best toys are the cabinets full of pots and pans or the big cardboard box that something else came in.

Dr. Aleeya Healey, a professor of pediatrics at Albany Medical College, said that the most essential message for parents is the importance of relationships for young children. (Dr. Perri Klass, M.D., "The Case for Creative Play in a Digital Age" 12.2018)

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BabyRead gives books to Head Start

BabyRead recently gave 70 hardboard books to all the children in the four classes at Head Start in Seneca to take home and read with their parents or others in their family.

BabyRead is an early literacy outreach program in Oconee County. We read with moms and other caregivers and their babies from birth to 2 years of age, when the brain is developing the most.



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Babies from birth to 2 years of age, when the brain is developing the most.

BabyRead volunteers meet with moms and/or caregivers for up to one hour in public libraries or schools. We are a totally free program. We provide a free book and snack at each meeting and meet twice each month with our families.

Our goal is to encourage moms and other caregivers to read every day to their children and

to raise awareness of the importance of talking and reading to your children from birth.

We are in our sixth year of operation and have grown from eight volunteers to more than 50. We have also trademarked the name BabyRead. We are having a significant influence on our families and on our community.

To contact BabyRead, reach Caren at babyread@charter.net, (864) 643-8083 or babyread.org.

Head Start, located in Seneca for Oconee County, is also free for eligible 4- and 5-year-olds. Contact Alice Lee at (864) 882-8700 or alee@sharenc.org

In addition, BabyRead is giving hardboard copies of "Welcome Little One" to some of the new mothers at Oconee Memorial Hospital. This is part of a much larger effort by the Faith Circle of St. Mark's United Methodist Women (UMW).

They prepare 12 layettes each year, one for girl and one for boy babies. Each layette contains diapers, sleepers, onesies and pants or other outfits, socks, blankets and washcloths, bottles and small toys. UMW reimburses BabyRead for the books we purchase for this endeavor.

The mission of UMW is to express Christian love for women and children in need in Oconee County. For more information, contact rhazelwood8455@att.net.

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Pictured, from left, are BabyRead volunteer Maureen McLaughlin and Head Start director Alice Lee.

Executive function in babies and toddlers, part 1

“Executive function and self-regulation skills provide critical support for learning and development. Just as an air traffic control system at a busy airport manages the arrivals and departures of many aircraft on many runways, executive function skills allow us to retain and work with information in our brains, focus our attention, filter distractions, and switch



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changing demands, priorities, or perspectives.

These skills help us remember the information we need to help us remember the information we need to complete a task, filter distractions, resist inappropriate or non-appropriate impulses and sustain attention during a particular activity.

There are a variety of activities we do with infants and toddlers that develop executive function, including lap games, hiding games, imitation or copying games, simple role play, finger plays and conversations.

mental gears. There are three basic dimensions of these skills:

- **Working memory:** The ability to hold information in mind and to use it.

- **Inhibitory control:** The ability to master thoughts and impulses so as to resist temptations, distractions, and habits, and to pause and think before acting.

- **Cognitive flexibility:** The capacity to switch gears and adjust to

Lap games: Generations of families have engaged babies in games while holding them in the lap. Repetition helps infants remember and manage their own behavior to fit the game’s rules. E.g., peekaboo. Hide-and-find games exercise working memory, because they challenge the baby to remember who is hiding and they also practice basic self-control skills as, in some variations, the baby waits for the adult to reveal him or herself; in other versions, the baby controls the timing of the reveal. This provides important practice regulating the tension around an expected surprise.

- Or try Little Miss Muffet or Rock-a Bye Baby. Predictable rhymes that have a stimulating yet expected surprise are well-loved. Infants exercise working memory as they develop familiarity with the rhyme and practice anticipating the surprise, inhibiting their anticipatory reactions while managing high levels of stimulation.

Hiding games: Hiding games are a great way to challenge working memory. Hide a toy under a cloth and encourage the infant to look for it. Once infants can find the toy quickly, hide it again. Show the child that you have moved it and encourage the child to find it again. Make more moves to increase the challenge.

As the child remembers what was there and mentally tracks the move, he or she exercises working memory.

- Toddlers may enjoy hiding and listen to you search loudly for them while they track your location mentally.”

All quotes from Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University

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COVID-19, moms, babies, toddlers and reading

During this pandemic of the coronavirus, what is happening with moms and caretakers of babies and toddlers?

Generally, moms and other caretakers of babies and toddlers are stuck at home, so being stuck at home because of the coronavirus is nothing new for them. Of course, most moms are used to going with their children to the supermarket, maybe to Hobby Lobby and other retail stores from time to time. This kind of activity has become severely limited.



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However, let's talk about what moms can do at home. Did you know that reading to your baby between birth and 18 months does more to help brain development than most other activities during the next 18 years!?

You are your child's most important teacher.

EASY WAYS TO FOSTER BRAIN DEVELOPMENT IN YOUR BABY

Talk to your baby as you dress him or change his diaper. Talk about his diaper, the world around him, anything, just so they hear your voice and lots of words.

You may feel like the baby isn't listening because she can't respond, but she is. Just talk away!

Sing to your baby. Make up a lullaby or any song. Do some movement activities like "Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes," "Wheels on the Bus" or dance around the room with your little one.

Encourage your baby to speak by imitating the sounds he or she makes. Repeat the sounds your baby makes back as if you are having a conversation. Make it a game and don't be afraid to be as silly as possible.

As you do your daily chores, such as laundry, cooking and cleaning the house, talk to your baby and tell her or him what you are doing. It may feel funny like you are talking to yourself, but your baby is listening and learning from you!

Read a book to your child as often as you can, hopefully at least once each day. Talk about the pictures to help you do more than just read the words.

FOR OLDER CHILDREN AT HOME

Have your older children read to your baby and toddler. This gives your older children practice reading and your baby loves being read to.

Have the older children play games with your baby, such as hide and seek and ring around the rosy; sing nursery rhymes with your baby such as "The Itsy Bitsy Spider" and "Rain, Rain Go Away." If you can't remember nursery rhymes, look them up on the internet or ask a friend.

THIS COLUMN was written in collaboration with former BabyRead reader Cathy Sytsma.

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COVID-19 virus, moms, babies, toddlers and reading, part 2

We will continue what we started to discuss in my May column: What is happening with moms/caretakers of babies and toddlers during the coronavirus pandemic?

Generally, they are stuck at home, so being homebound now is not new for them.



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What can moms do at home to help their babies and toddlers with language development and lay the foundation for later learning how to read? Did you know that reading to your baby between birth and 18 months does more to help brain development than most other activities during the

next 18 years?

Children who are read to and talked to more than in short sentences (like “sit down,” “eat this”) are generally exposed to more than 30 million more words than children who are not by the time they reach kindergarten. This language exposure makes a tremendous difference in children’s ability to learn how to read and be successful in school.

• “What is the bunny eating?” “Do you ever eat carrots?” “Why is the bunny wiggling his nose?” “Do you think he has a cold?” “Should we give the bunny a tissue for his nose?”

Your child can be looking at anything — a (stuffed animal) bunny she is playing with, the rug, a flower, a dog. Ask her questions about whatever it is.

• Talk about the colors, textures and size of the things in the world around him. “The doggie is brown with a white spot on her nose and tail. Can you touch the white spot on her nose? Does the doggie like it when you pet the white spot on her nose?”

• As you do your daily chores such as laundry, cooking and cleaning, talk with your toddler and tell her what you are doing. “I am putting four fresh tomatoes in the spaghetti sauce and pressing in three fresh garlic cloves. Your sister and I love fresh garlic. Do you? Do you want to hold the garlic press after I wash it?” (Use lots of vocabulary and extended language; listen to what you child says, ask questions).

Read a book to your child as often as you can — hopefully, at least once every day. While some books for babies may be somewhat better than others, the most important thing is the sound of your voice and the bond created by your holding your baby while you read or at least make eye contact with your baby while you read. This intimacy created between you and your baby is critical.

Your older children, home now, can also read to your baby and toddler.

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Reading, talking to baby has huge payoffs

During this period of COVID-19, I have been talking in recent columns about simple things moms and other caregivers of children from birth to 2 years old can do to help their child succeed, a goal that every parent has for his or her child.

I subscribe to BabyTalk, a newsletter from the University of North Carolina. You can, too.



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It's monthly, free and has great articles on babies. It's available in English and Spanish. You can subscribe via email at subscribe-babytalk@listservc.unc.edu.

A recent article states, "Reading ... playing ... and talking with your baby or toddler are fun ways to bond. New re-

search finds that simple activities like these can also help them in later life. Researchers at Purdue University studied more than 1,300 families and followed their children from one month to 15 years old. They evaluated how mother and caregivers interacted with their little ones when they were 6, 15, 24 and 36 months. Later the scientists analyzed the children's math and vocabulary scores" when they were older.

"Results show that moms and caregivers who provided a more stimulating and responsive interactions with their babies and toddlers during the first three years of life had children who performed better on both math and vocabulary assessments." (BabyTalk, April, 2020)

This is not rocket science. What matters to your children's achievement are simple things I discussed in earlier columns — regularly talking to your child about what he and you are doing and the world around, providing positive and constructive feedback, taking you cues from what your baby or toddler is doing or saying and build on that by asking questions, being supportive and responding to your child warmly, lovingly.

This is the purpose of BabyRead, a nonprofit organization I founded and run, made up of 50-plus volunteers.

What you do as a parent or caretaker in the first few years of life has huge payoffs to your child's ability to succeed later in school, in jobs and life in general.

You can read every day to your baby or toddler for 30 minutes, say, at bedtime, and this will make all the difference.

You can talk to your child as you change her diaper, go to the supermarket or make dinner. All of this can be done during this COVID-19 pandemic.

Being a good reader is at the core of almost everything your baby or toddler will do later in school.

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Easy ways to promote childhood development

Hello, everyone! All of us in the midst of this COVID-19 pandemic are thinking of ways to refashion their lives to remain safe — social distancing, wearing masks, washing hands often.

Child Trends website (childtrends.org) had an article in July, written by Asiya Kazi and Sarah Daily, about ways parents can help their babies and toddlers. Hopefully many have already been doing these activities. The article reinforces the importance and value of reading, singing and talking with your baby and toddler every day.



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“Here’s an easy, evidence-based, and low-cost investment ... to promote young children’s development, empower parents and strengthen families: Encourage parents and other caregivers to read, sing, and tell stories to their children. It’s that simple.

“Sometimes easier said than done, like when you are told to do more exercise and eat fewer calories to lose weight. What if the mom or primary caregiver is also working now, with the combined stress of economic instability and unpredictable work schedules? Not much time left over.

“The first three years of life are critical for parent-child bonding. Nurturing care and protection provided to children during this time period promote their development, mental health and resiliency across the life span.

In particular, reading, singing and storytelling to infants on a daily basis have been demonstrated to advance children’s health and socioemotional development.

“Why is that, particularly before babies have started to talk?

“Reading to infants supports their emergent literacy skills, increases parents’ positive views of the bonds they share with their infants and fosters infants’ cognitive and socioeconomic development. Similarly, singing to infants can soothe them and reduce their stress levels, while story telling can improve recall ability among young children ...” (all quotes Kazi and Daily, July 2020).

All those benefits just from daily reading, singing and storytelling? Yes.

Singing and storytelling can be done when moms and other caretakers are doing other tasks, such as making dinner, washing dishes, changing diapers, going to the supermarket with their child. The routine of reading your child, from birth, a bedtime story, has profound positive impacts on your child.

A BabyRead reader, who is a retired registered nurse, reports that when she was working in the premature baby unit of a hospital, at feeding time, the goal, of course, was to get the preemie babies to eat as much as possible. This was not easy.

She found that when she sang to each preemie, even with her “horrible” singing voice, the preemie ate more of the bottle she was giving the child. So, she continued doing this. The other nurses in the preemie unit followed suit.

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The value of reading aloud to babies and toddlers

Hello, again. Today I want to discuss the value of reading aloud to your baby or toddler, particularly during this COVID-19 period.

You may be busier than ever preparing your older children as they attend school in person, teaching them about masks and social distancing, or home-schooling your older children with the help of online learning from the School District of Oconee County or you may have only one baby or toddler, which seems like plenty.



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No matter what your situation, consider the importance of reading aloud to your baby or toddler.

“Goodnight Moon” has sold what I believe in the trade is known as a gazillion copies.

Generations of children have listened as a grown-up reads ... verses ... that describe a little rabbit’s bedtime routine of bidding goodnight to the things in his room.”

The story is soothing and lulling which makes it a great bedtime story. But, as many researchers have pointed out, beneath the seeming quiet and tranquility, an incredible dynamism is going on.

“Reading aloud really is a kind of magic elixir” for brain development. (“The Enchanted Hour: The Miraculous Power of Reading Aloud in the Age of Distraction” by Meghan Cox Gurdon, 2019.)

“Most of these things (in the brain) are going to develop normally (if there are not adverse circumstances) because they are genetically programmed. But the strength of these (neural) connections ... is very responsive to stimulation. There is a maxim in neuroscience: ‘Nerves that fire together, wire together.’” (Dr. John Hutton, pediatrician, Cincinnati Children’s Hospital.)

Dr. Hutton’s research found that “the brains of young children whose parents read aloud to them, and who had access to more children’s books, had more robust activation (of their neural connections) than their peers. They had greater capacity to process what they were hearing, and at faster speeds.” They have a cognitive advantage over peers. This is what BabyRead, a free, nonprofit program, focuses on.

This advantage is given by parents, another family member or an older sibling who every day reads aloud to the baby or toddler, even just for 20 to 30 minutes. This gift adults can give their babies and toddlers now. “Goodnight Moon” is a great book, but a person can read just about anything to a baby or toddler and have a significant cognitive impact. Since the baby doesn’t yet understand the meaning of words, you can just make up stories, although getting your child or children familiar and comfortable with books is very important to later being able to learn how to read and increases your child’s vocabulary.

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Road to college attainment starts at birth

“If we want to get more kids in universities, we should invest in preschools. Actually preschool is too late. Brain research underscores that the time of life that may shape adult outcomes the most is pregnancy through 2 or 3.”

This is the premise of BabyRead and what our volunteers are dedicated to. Encouraging moms and other caregivers to read daily to their children from birth. If your child is older, and you haven't done this, start right now. Before your child enters kindergarten, your child should be familiar and comfortable with books and stories.



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“The road to college attainment, higher wages and social mobility in the United States starts at birth,” notes James Heckman, a Nobel-winning economist (University of Chicago). “The greatest barrier to college education is not high tuitions or the risk of student debt; it's the skills children have when they first enter kindergarten.

“Heckman measures the economic savings from investments in early childhood - because less money is spent later on juvenile courts, prisons, health care and welfare - and calculates that early-education programs for needy kids pay for themselves several times over ...

“To be clear, what's needed is not just education but also help for families beginning in pregnancy, to reduce

the risk that children will be born with addictions and to increase the prospect that they will be raised with a lot of play and conversation.”

And reading by adults or older children in the family to the little ones.

“By age 4, a child of professionals has heard 30 million more words than a child on welfare. The best metric of child poverty may have to do not with income but with how often a child is spoken and read to.”

A book, “Too Many Children Left Behind” (Russell Sage Foundation) notes that “60 to 70 percent of the achievement gap between rich and poor kids is already evident by kindergarten.”

You don't have to be rich, to act like the rich people this study is discussing. Read daily to your child; have conversations with your child at any and all ages; listen to your child's responses, from coos and babbles to one word sentences and respond with interest to what your child is interested in; read with your child on your lap, hugging your child and creating unforgettable emotional bonds; don't let your baby watch TV or play with electronics. Try to put away your cell phone when you are with your child since she/he considers it toy. (Quotes from NY Times, “Too Small to Fail,” 6.2016)

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BabyRead family profile: Jordan, Braydon, Logan, London, D’Neya and Brandon

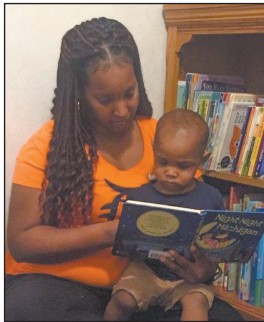
Jordan is the youngest of D’Neya and Brandon’s four children.

He is just 15 months old, but is already talking — due in large part to the attention he receives from his older brothers and sister and from all of the reading everyone is doing since joining BabyRead.

D’Neya was attracted to the BabyRead table because of the colorful display of children’s books. D’Neya loves to read and has read to all four of her children since they were little. Jordan was only a couple of months old when he and his brothers started meeting with Gina, their family reader.

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D’Neya reads to Jordan.

breaks into a big smile!

The entire family, including Dad Brandon, love BabyRead and Gina. It has far exceeded their expectations. D’Neya thought they would just be meeting at

the library for Gina to read to them. She didn’t know they would be bringing a free book home every time! She praised both the program and Gina.

Among other benefits, she thinks having her children meet adults outside their family and school associations and hearing another voice is very good for them. She delights in seeing the rapt attention all three of her younger boys pay to Gina. She knows they are not only developing a love of reading, but are gaining so much in language development. London, 12, also loves reading.

This is a reading family! D’Neya reads self-help and inspirational books. She reads one or two books to the boys during the day and someone in the family (could be Dad or Granddad) reads two to four books at night. Of course, Jordan is always present during those times. In fact, Jordan was read to from birth, as D’Neya was already in the habit of reading to her older boys and the perfect time to sit down and do that was while Jordan was being breastfed.

D’Neya grew up in Westminster and is happy to be back home after spending 10 years in Michigan. After Braydon and Logan were born, she and her husband decided that they needed the family support that D’Neya’s family provides. The entire family is looking forward to the day when they can resume face-to-face BabyRead sessions!

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Baby and you!

Hi, everyone! I read an interesting article titled “What a 4 year old should know,” and I want to share it with you. The article is by Alicia Bayer, “A Magical Childhood,” 2017.

Here’s her list of what a 4 year old should know:

1. She should know that she is loved wholly and unconditionally, all of the time.



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2. He should know that he is safe and he should know how to keep himself safe in public, with others and in varied situations.

3. She should know how to laugh, act silly, be goofy and use her imagination. She should know that it is always OK to paint the sky orange and give cats six legs.

4. He should follow his own interests and be encouraged to follow them. If he couldn’t care less about learning numbers, his parents should realize he’ll learn them accidentally soon enough and let him immerse himself instead in rocket ships, drawing, dinosaurs or playing in the mud.

5. She should know that the world is magical and that so is she. She should know that she’s wonderful, brilliant, creative, compassionate and marvelous. She should know that it is more worthy to spend the day outside making daisy chains, mud pies and fairy houses than it is to practice phonics.

6. Raise the kind of person you would like to know.

7. Every child learns to walk, talk, read and do math at his own pace, and this pace will have no bearing on how well he walks, talks, reads or does math.

8. The single biggest predictor of high academic achievement ... is reading to children. Not blinking toys or computers, but Mom or Dad taking the time every day or night (or both!) to sit and read your child wonderful books.

9. Our children do not need Nintendo, computers ... play groups or baseball practice as much as they need us. They need fathers (or any consistent caregiver) who sit and listen to their days, mothers who join in and make crafts with them, parents who take the time to read them stories and act like idiots with them. ... They deserve to help us make supper even though it takes twice as long and makes it twice as much work. They deserve to know that they are a priority for us and that we truly love them.

10. Parents, caregivers and other family members need to know that the brain of a child grows more in the first 18 months than between 18 months and 18 years. And that reading to your child stimulates brain development. Education and learning is a path out of poverty.

BABYREAD’S GOAL is to read with children and their moms starting at birth. To find out what BabyRead is doing during COVID-19, contact director Caren von Hippel, Ph.D., at babyread@charter.net or (864) 643-8083, babyread.org. We need readers! Some readers are reading face to face, outside, with masks and social distancing, others drop off books monthly to participating moms and phone/text them weekly.