

BabySmart #2: Ms. Lisa Simons, The Process of Cognitive Development

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Ms. Lisa Simons was the guest for BabySmart #2. She is the Assistant Superintendent for Instruction for the Oconee County School District. Ms. Simons was an early childhood teacher for eight years before entering administration where she served as an assistant principal and principal before assuming her current position.

Riley Johnson and Dan Alexander were the co-hosts, Ms. Caren von Hippel, BabyRead's founder and Director, and Ms. Kathy Whitmire, director of the Center 4 ADHD organization and a BabyRead Advisory Board member. Ms. von Hippel began by noting this is BabyRead's 5th anniversary and provided a quick background on BabyRead before turning the program over to Ms. Simons.

Process of Cognitive Development. Ms. Simons discussed the process of cognitive development. That involves looking at "child immersion": how they think and understand as well as their development through their early years. **Reading is one of the biggest things in a child's development. It improves their vocabulary, it helps them problem solve, and remember information, and provides background information on their environment.** It gives them a sense of how they belong in the world, what the world is about, and how they fit into the world around them.

She stated you can tell when a child has been talked to and read to. They have a richer vocabulary. They learn how to read more effectively, and they read more. Ms. Simons stated the expectation of learning is much different than when teachers of her generation went to kindergarten – a child must be ready to read before leaving kindergarten.

Talking vs. Command Language. Ms. Simons stressed that talking to your infant and toddler is very important too. She discussed the benefits of lengthier conversations versus "command language" like "sit down", "go there", and "do this". She noted you are using a more formal grammatical structure when reading to your child. Introducing children to literature gives the child a better understanding of the meaning of language, teaches them key vocabulary, and gives them background knowledge they might not otherwise experience. It improves literacy and social skills [such as problem solving and patience] along the way.

Building Patience and Attention Span. Ms. von Hippel acknowledged that a 2-3 month-old has a much shorter attention span than a 15-18 month-old toddler. **With young infants, start out with shorter sessions of 2-3 minutes and build on it. Ms. Whitmire and Ms. von Hippel talked about "thinking out loud" and the power of describing things as you go about your chores** around the house or going shopping. Describe objects and their colors. Listen and respond.

Don't Get Frustrated. Ms. Simons said it's important not to get frustrated. **Establishing a consistent time for reading will help improve attention span, self-discipline and concentration.** It will lead to conversations later. **Reading a bedtime story is highly recommended as it establishes a routine.** Ms. Whitmire added, "Enhance the experience through experience".

Ms. Simons said **the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has observed that 1 in 3 American children aren't prepared with the skills they need for entering kindergarten.** She said it is a hefty job for teachers to fill the gaps to provide the essential skills a child needs when they get to school and are "behind". **Reading and talking to babies and toddlers can provide a real jump start on some of the**

early essential reading skills a child requires. These include phonic awareness, vocabulary and fluency (accuracy of speech and keeping a good pace).

She also said **teachers that read aloud can literally see when brain growth is happening in a child's eyes as cells are triggered.** Unfortunately, the teachers also see some children that have never been read to or seen a book. Ms. von Hippel said children in this category frequently are still struggling in the 3rd grade and later in life too which really limits job opportunities. **Ms. Whitmire reiterated the importance of bonding in the development of social skills. Her advice – read early and often.**

***What Is the Impact of Technology?* All three agreed that research shows babies under 4 years old should have no more than 1 hour of screen time per day.**

Mayor Dan Alexander made several comments about the benefits of reading to his children and now his grandchildren.

The interview session closed with all three ladies providing contact information for their organizations. Host Riley Johnson stated information about the program could be found on the City Hall website (www.seneca.sc).