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THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF
PEDIATRICS
ARIZONA CHAPTER

Dedicated to the
Health of
Arizona Children

PEDIATRIC DIGEST

AzAAP Strategic Priority: Early Brain & Child Development



Pediatric professionals play a pivotal role in early brain and child development promotion which is essential for the health and well-being of children.

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First Things First: A Pediatrician's Partner in Promoting Positive Brain Development

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As a mother and a pediatrician, I know that early childhood experiences impact whether a child's brain develops in ways that promote future learning. Higher quality experiences generally result in increased cognitive development.

Pediatricians are among a family's most trusted voice for early childhood information – second only to their own parents. Because of this, we are in an excellent position to share information and resources that can help parents feel more confident in their role as their child's first teacher.

One of the most substantial resources that I continue to experience is First Things First (FTF). FTF represents Arizona's largest public investment in early childhood development. Working through local volunteer councils, FTF prioritizes and funds programs that strengthen families and improve the quality of early learning in child care settings and preschools, including scholarships for low-income children. FTF also helps families access preventive health care such as oral health and developmental and sensory screenings.

As pediatricians, we focus on providing quality medical care, conducting regular screenings and using the Bright Futures guidelines and materials to promote positive interactions between families and their young children. Now, we can also use FTF as a resource to help families understand the importance of infant brain development and gain access to programs that support their child's health and learning.

Here are a few suggestions on how pediatricians can partner with FTF:

- ⇒ **CONNECT FAMILIES TO HIGH QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD INFORMATION:** Encourage families to visit FirstThingsFirst.org, and follow First Things First on Facebook or Twitter, so that they have access to a steady stream of high quality early childhood information and resources.
- ⇒ **REMINDE PARENTS OF SUPPORTIVE RESOURCES AT THEIR FINGERTIPS:** FTF provides the Arizona Parent Kit – free of charge – to parents of all newborns in the state before they leave the hospital or birthing center. It is also available for checkout at libraries statewide. The Kit includes early childhood development information and a magnet with the Birth to Five Helpline telephone number. The Helpline offers parents an opportunity to ask a nurse or other early childhood professional their toughest parenting questions at times when parents often need an answer the most.
- ⇒ **SPREAD THE WORD:** Locate your local Regional Partnership Council at FirstThingsFirst.org and use your region's Family Guide to Services to learn more about the early childhood programs funded in your community. Share the information with parents and offer the guide to families in your clinics and waiting rooms.
- ⇒ **SERVE ON A REGIONAL COUNCIL IN YOUR COMMUNITY:** Decisions about which early childhood programs are funded in each area are made by local councils comprised of community volunteers. By law, each of these regional councils must include a health care representative. By serving on a regional council, you can help inform and improve the system of early childhood health and development in your community. You can also help build and expand partnerships with other public and private agencies that ensure children in your area arrive at kindergarten healthy and ready to succeed. Visit FirstThingsFirst.org/serve to learn more.

AS PEDIATRICIANS, WE WORK DILIGENTLY TO ENSURE INFANTS, TODDLERS AND PRESCHOOLERS ARE AS HEALTHY AS POSSIBLE. BY PARTNERING WITH FTF AND CONNECTING PARENTS TO THE FTF RESOURCES IN OUR COMMUNITIES, WE CAN ALSO HELP ENSURE THAT OUR KIDS ARRIVE AT SCHOOL PREPARED TO SUCCEED IN KINDERGARTEN AND BEYOND.



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