

## Sr Dad

Parenting the second time around by a senior



Weekly from San Francisco

Hosted by Stan Goldberg

### TRACKING THE LIVES OF YOUNG CHILDREN

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Young children are completely dependent on their adult caregivers to keep them safe and healthy. So also are they completely dependent on their adult caregivers to fill up the hours of their lives with good feelings, coherent experiences and social interactions.

Children are awake about 100 hours in every week of life. No matter their child-care arrangements, most of that time is spent with their family at home. By three, every baby has had *fifteen thousand* hours of opportunity for learning; And by first grade, every child has had *thirty thousand* hours of learning opportunity. How empty or full of learning experience are those hours of opportunity?

When we examined the home lives of young children from a cross-section of American families we found shocking disparities in the amount of social interaction and language they had experienced – disparities that accounted for the equally large disparities in their vocabulary growth and later test scores. First I will review some of those findings, and then make some recommendations.

- 1. A lot of talk goes on between parents and children in the average American home, and at-risk children are measured against the achievements of these ‘average’ children.**
- 2. Parents who don’t talk much to their children spend little time doing anything else with them.**
- 3. The more parents talk to children, the more complex and positive their talk becomes -- *automatically* – because the ‘extra’ talk is about other things than just necessary business.**
- 4. Talkative parents produce talkative children and taciturn parents produce taciturn children – because children become like their parents in what they talk about (only business, or business *and* conversation).**
- 5. The amount of children’s expressive language practice (leading to fluent expression) goes hand-in-hand with the amount of their receptive language experience (leading to vocabulary growth).**
- 6. The amount that parents talk to their children – not their social class (or their income or their ethnicity) -- is what predicts their children’s intellectual accomplishments.**

All of us who are charged with the responsibility for children need to pay attention to all the hours of their lives – all 100 hours per week, all 5000 hours per year.

- A. During the 10, 20, 30 or 40 hours a week they are in our care, in addition to teaching them specific things, we should strive to eliminate disorganized ‘down’ time, and to fill up all the time they are with us with experience and practice and language.**

- B. But our responsibility doesn't end there. We need to worry about the entirety of their lives and use our influence with their parents to advocate for the developmental richness of the other hours of their lives.**
- C. We need to give parents many examples, simple instructions and hands-on coaching on 'dancing' with their children– and not confuse them with our academic constructs.**
- D. And, since we are 'child specialists' we need to be community advocates for parenting and childcare programs which focus not just on special experiences but on 'filling up' more of the 5000 hours per year of opportunity time in children' lives.**

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