Electronic Media and Your Family

May's Parent Link is all about electronic media! In this issue we are providing information on computer usage and your preschooler, computer software, online resources for you and your family, and much more!

Preschoolers and Computers: Recommended Introduction Age and How to Maximize Time Usage

By Karen Molinario, Program Manager

Computers have become an almost indispensable tool for us adults. From writing letters to finding information on the Internet, adults rely on computers in numerous ways every day. Computers are increasingly becoming a part of our children's world as well. As a parent, you are probably wondering: When is the right time to introduce my child to the computer? How much time should they spend on the computer?

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is an organization that sets standards of excellence for programs for children from birth through age eight. Their research shows that computers can have important benefits for even very young children, including language development, literacy development, social development, and the development of important problem-solving skills.

Many researchers do not recommend that children under 3 years old use computers (e.g., Hohman, 1998). During this stage of development children learn through their bodies: their eyes, ears, mouths, hands, and legs. Computers are not a good choice for the developmental skills these children are learning to master: crawling, walking, talking, and making friends.

Children 3 years of age and older are developmentally ready to explore computers, and most early childhood educators see the computer center as a valuable activity center for learning. The recommended time for preschoolers (3-5 years) is 20-30 minutes. Below are some ideas to help your family make the most of computers in their home.

Setting Basic "Ground Rules"

-Develop a few basic "ground rules" for computer usage, such as no eating food or drinking while on the computer, no computer usage during meal times, and for older children; homework must be completed first, etc.

-Discuss and agree upon the time limit for computer usage.

-Post these "ground rules" in a visible location after each family member has signed them.

-Set a timer next to the computer as a reminder of time limit.

5 Ways to Maximize Computer Time

1. Ask lots of questions as your child uses a computer or handheld device.

Get him/her in the habit of thinking about what's on the screen by asking questions like, "how do you play this game? What happens when you move there? Which character is talking?"

2. Don't let screen time substitute for physical activity.

Turn off the computer as well as your own cell phone regularly and play outdoors with your child, making arts and crafts, looking at books, singing songs, dancing to music, making up stories or exploring.

3. Introduce your child to software and websites that support creativity.

Drawing pictures, coming up with stories and making rhymes are ways for your child to convey what he/she may not be able to express through everyday conversation.

4. Get your child playing digital games alongside others.

Look for games and apps that have "explore" settings, which allow your child to play with others rather than compete against them. Encourage your child to play with siblings and friends; discourage him from using video games as fallback activity when no one else is around. Allow yourself to join in, getting to know each game firsthand.

5. Find opportunities for your child to make decisions and try something new.

Even simple choices-choosing a character, finding a background for a picture, selecting a game- are good opportunities for your child to explore. If your child seems bored with one activity, suggest something new; this could be a different level of the same game, or a new game altogether. (Unless you point them out, your child may not realize he has other choices.)

Children should be engaged in a mixture of activities and materials, such as art, blocks, sand, water, books, exploration with writing materials and outdoor play. Computers should be seen as just one of many options available and when used appropriately, the computer provides children with opportunities to learn in different ways. In order for the computer to be most meaningful to a young child, it should be used along with a parent or other grown person, or an older sibling who can answer questions, offer suggestions and be supportive. This way, the computer goes from being a solitary and possibly confusing experience to one that is very social and meaningful.

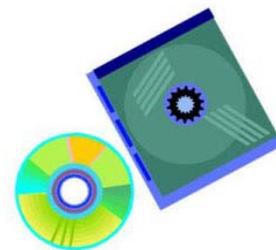## Choosing Quality Software for Young Children

By Karen Molinario, Program Manager

Quality software can offer young children opportunities for collaborative play and creative expression. It can also help with reading readiness and early math skills. Three or four carefully chosen CD-ROMs are really all that is needed to supply your young child with a variety of computer-based learning experiences.

Following are some tips to keep in mind when choosing software for your family:

-**Check for the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) rating on the box. ESRB has five ratings:**

  -EC (Early Childhood, ages three and up)

  -E   (Everyone, ages six and up)

  -T   (Teen, for ages 13 and older)

  -M   (Mature, ages 17 and up)

  -AO (Adults Only, ages 18 and up)

Also, check on the back of the box for the ESRB content descriptor. (For more information on the ESRB software rating system, go to www.esrb.org).

-**Software should be easy to use and appropriate for your child's computer skill level.**

Some software titles give a broad age range, but may not be appropriate for all children in that age range. Before you buy, read software reviews and if possible preview the software (many stores will allow you to try out software before you purchase). Parenting magazines and Family PC Magazines are good resources for software reviews and information.

-Choose titles that are both educational and fun.

-Choose software that your child will be interested in using over and over. There are many titles that are different every time they are played.

-Keep your software library well-rounded. Include:

-Creativity software (such as KidsPix)

-Single subjects (such as Bailey's Book House, Millie's Math House, Sammy's Science House, Trudy's Time and Place)

-Multiple subjects (such as the Jump Start series)

-Interactive storybooks (such as the Living Books series)

-Problem-solving adventures (Thinkin' Things)

What to avoid when choosing software:

-Avoid "drill and practice" software, or software that focuses on a few skills in a repetitive manner. Likewise, avoid programs that emphasize competition. Children are more likely to learn when they work cooperatively. Instead choose programs that allow two to play together.

-Avoid software programs or games that depict violence as fun or as a way to solve problems. Instead choose software that promotes cooperation and positive interpersonal relationships.

-Avoid flashing images or software with many moving graphics. These can interfere with a young child's ability to pay attention to tasks that require sustained attention.

If you do not own a home computer:

-There are many ways for your child to experience this technology. The local library is a wonderful, free resource for computers with Internet access and a vast assortment of educational software. Many libraries have CD-ROMs to lend. This is a great way to try a variety of types of software or to preview them before purchase.

 -In addition, many children's museums offer interactive computer stations that children can use to access information and play games.

We Give Books: A Digital Library for a Good Cause

By Yesenia Reyes, CCEP Coordinator/Communications AA

Digital libraries are a great and easily accessible resource for parents and young readers (they are available practically anywhere there is Internet access and a compatible media device). So why is We Give Books so special? We Give Books is a FREE digital library in which each time you read a book online We Give Books donates another new book to the non-profit campaign of your choice. It's that simple.

Below is the three-step process one would use on the We Give Books website:

1. Visit www.wegivebooks.org.

2. Choose a book.

-There are hundreds of books that are appropriate for children ages 0 to 10--picture books, fiction, non-fiction, seasonal, classic stories, and new classics. There is something for every reader.

3. Choose a Campaign.

When you've finished reading, become a member and select a campaign.

And there you have it! You have donated a brand-new hardcover or paperback book to a child in need.

The We Give Books library is available for free, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year; so take advantage of the hundreds of books and explain to your child(ren) that with each book read, a book will be given to another child.

References:

*We Give Books Web site-*www.wegivebooks.org.

We Give Books was created by the Penguin Group and the Pearson Foundation. Pearson Foundation is the philanthropic arm of Pearson plc. A 501(c) (3) nonprofit operating foundation, the Pearson Foundation extends Pearson's commitment to education by partnering with leading nonprofit, civic, and business organizations to provide financial, organizational, and publishing assistance across the globe.

Ask Dr. Hughes

Do you have questions for our resident expert in child development? Ask Dr. Hughes!

Each month in Parent Link, Research and Evaluation Analyst Christine Hughes, Ph.D., will answer your questions about child development. Topics can cover language, social skills, play, behavior, motor skills, and thinking and learning from ages birth to 5-years-old. Dr. Hughes earned her B.A. in psychology from Boston College, and her M.S. and Ph.D. in applied developmental psychology from the University of Miami where she currently teaches part-time. Her research has focused on the development of at-risk infants and children in early intervention. Please email your questions to info@elcmdm.org with "Ask Dr. Hughes" in the subject line. Also, include the location of your residence in Miami-Dade and/or Monroe County (e.g., Coconut Grove, Kendall, Key West).

Please note that questions may be edited, and not every question received will be answered in the newsletter. To protect the privacy of individuals and maintain confidentiality, names will not be printed, but we may refer to individuals by area (for example, "A mother in Miami Beach asked...").

The information provided in this column released by the Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe courtesy of Dr. Hughes is not intended to be used as psychological or medical advice, diagnosis, treatment, or as any other professional mental health or medical service. As laws, details and personal situations vary from person to person and state to state, articles and content contained in the newsletter are not and cannot be used as a substitute for legal, parental, health, mental health, or any other advice.

The column is not intended to be a solicitation of business or the furnishing of self-help advice. Readers are strongly urged to consult independent and qualified professionals before making any decisions. The views expressed are those of the writer and not necessarily of the ELC.

ELC and You- Using the ELC Website as a Resource

By: Yesenia Reyes, CCEP Coordinator/Communications AA

If you haven't already explored the Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe's website, www.elcmdm.org, you are missing out on helpful resources from the Coalition and its partners. Below is a small taste of what the ELC website has to offer you but don't hesitate to explore the website on your own.

Home Page

The ELC homepage is a great place to access quick information and go-to links; it contains the "Updates and News" column where you will find the latest news at the ELC; from upcoming community events in which the ELC will be participating to board meeting dates. Check for updates daily. You may also find quick links to helpful and informative web pages such as The Children's Movement of Florida, VPK website, legislative updates, and our Look before You Lock campaign, to name a few.

For Parents

-Child Care Search

Found under the "For Parents" menu, the child care search will direct you to the provider search engine on the Florida Department of Children & Families website. This search engine provides you with child care centers not only in Miami-Dade county but counties throughout Florida. With a four-step search process you can find the appropriate center for you and your child(ren).

-Parent Resources

Our Parent Resources page will lead you to the latest edition of The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation's Teach More/Love More website which is available in English, Spanish and Creole. Information includes everything from health and education for children ages birth to five (5).

-Infant Toddler Resources
Our Infant Toddler Resources page offers you information on your child's developmental stages and frequently asked questions during birth to 36 months, and information and brochures provided by Zero to Three, a national nonprofit organization. Also available on this page are the Healthy Child Care America Campaign and details on your baby's health.

-Child Care Information

Find details on our Child Care Resource and Referral website and related programs such as the Department of Children and Families, Child Care Aware, Florida KidCare and Florida Abuse Programs.

-Inclusion Directory

In this section we list different inclusion programs while informing you of support services that assist parents and teachers of children with special needs.

-How to Choose Quality Care

This webpage helps you make an informed decision by providing you with the tools you need such as a child care checklist, what to look for and listen, and other resources.

Contact Us!

Our website, www.elcmdm.org, offers you multiple ways to reach us, below are a few:

-Email: info@elcmdm.org

-Staff Directory: Find out the email or extension number of the person best suited to answer your questions.

-Office: Address for Miami-Dade and Monroe offices. We advise you to please call beforehand to make an appointment.

-Facebook & Twitter: Find us on Facebook or follow us on Twitter to stay in the ELC's loop. Send us messages or 'like' our status updates. We want you to hear from our parents!

Local Events for the Whole Family!

Come Out For Play Family Fun Day
The Miami-Dade Park and Recreation and the Department of Children and Families invite you to a fun-filled morning of games, relays, a parade and much more.
When: Saturday, May 7, 2011
Time: 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Where: Tropical Park
7900 SW 40 St.
Miami, FL 33155
305-226-8315
Cost: FREE

The Children's Trust Family Expo! Fun For the Whole Family
Features activities and entertainment for the entire family in an effort to provide parents with direct contact to health and social services as well as educational opportunities.
When: Saturday, May 14, 2011
Time: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Where: Miami-Dade County Fair and Expo Center
10901 SW 24 St.

Miami, FL 33165
Call 211 or visit www.thechildrenstrust.org for more information.
Cost: FREE

Zoo Miami: Meet-and-Greet with Diego
The star of Nick Jr.'s *Go, Diego, Go!* meets fans and poses for pictures
at the zoo's Amazon and Beyond exhibit.
When: Daily
Time: Mon.-Fri. 11 a.m. and 3 p.m.; Sat. and Sun. 11 a.m., 1 p.m. and
3 p.m.
Where: Zoo Miami
12400 SW 152 St.
Miami, FL 33177
www.miamimetrozoo.com
Cost: FREE with zoo admission (adult 13+, $15.95; Child 3-12, $11.95;
Children 2 and under FREE)

Parent Space

The Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe would like you, our
parents, to have an area in the *Parent Link* newsletter that you can
call your own. This space will provide advice, tips, jokes, stories,
and/or even job opportunities that other local parents wish to share.

So don't be shy; send us something you would like to share at
info@elcmdm.org. Please note that included submissions may be
edited for clarity, etc. We look forward to hearing from you.

About the Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe

The Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe is a nonprofit
organization dedicated to ensuring high-quality early care and
education for children in Miami-Dade and Monroe counties. Through a
variety of affordable and innovative early education and voluntary pre-
kindergarten programs, the Coalition serves more than 50,000 children
ages birth to 12-years-old and their families.

Founded in 2000, the Early Learning Coalition is among 31 similar
organizations in the State of Florida established following the
enactment of the School Readiness Act, which consolidated Florida's
early learning services into one integrated program.