An invitation to organizations working with young children, parents and caregivers.

The mission of Marion & Polk Early Learning Hub is to increase commitment to early learning, and to create strong emotional bonds in preparing children for kindergarten and life.

Over the last several months, we have listened to the input of nearly 100 stakeholders who are connected to early learning as part of their organizational missions. We've also consulted with regional, state and national experts, including Vroom and Mind in the Making, to ensure we have the latest scientific input.

What follows is a set of Key Messages that resulted from that work. We know that our messages are more likely to resonate with parents and caregivers if we are sharing them consistently, repetitively and collectively.

As an organization committed to serving as an early-learning hub, we invite you to use these messages in your communication efforts to help reinforce them with parents and caregivers.

The messages do not have to be shared verbatim. We encourage you to adjust the wording as appropriate for your audience. Our hope is that you incorporate the essence of these messages in to the work and communication you are already doing.

This is not a brochure intended for public distribution. It is a guide for organizations in Marion and Polk Counties whose work includes early learning and building emotional bonds between children, parents and caregivers.

For more information, please contact:

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The importance of early learning and emotional bonds. What all parents and caregivers need to know.

A Key Message Guide for organizations who work with parents and caregivers of young children.

Core Messages

- **Learning to read and write happens long before kindergarten.** Babies are born learning. Infants and toddlers learn through play, exploration of their environment and, most importantly, through interactions with the significant adults in their lives. As parents, you are your child's first teacher.

- **Every child has remarkable potential to learn and succeed in school—the key is to start early.** Building the basic foundation of literacy, math, language, communication and social skills is critical to preparing children for kindergarten and life.

- **Having a strong emotional bond and connection with your child builds the self-esteem needed for learning and development.** Incorporating brain-building moments into every day interactions with your child lets them know you love them, and will better prepare them emotionally and physically for life.

- **Even the littlest things matter.** The way you interact with your child impacts them for life. The simple truth is that it's important to avoid harsh discipline, to hug them often, and to read or sing to them every day.

- **Keeping children healthy and safe is critical to their ability to learn.**

- **Science shows that the first five years of life is when the brain grows fastest.** This brain development is influenced by a child's relationships, experiences and environment. It's important to build those early connections.

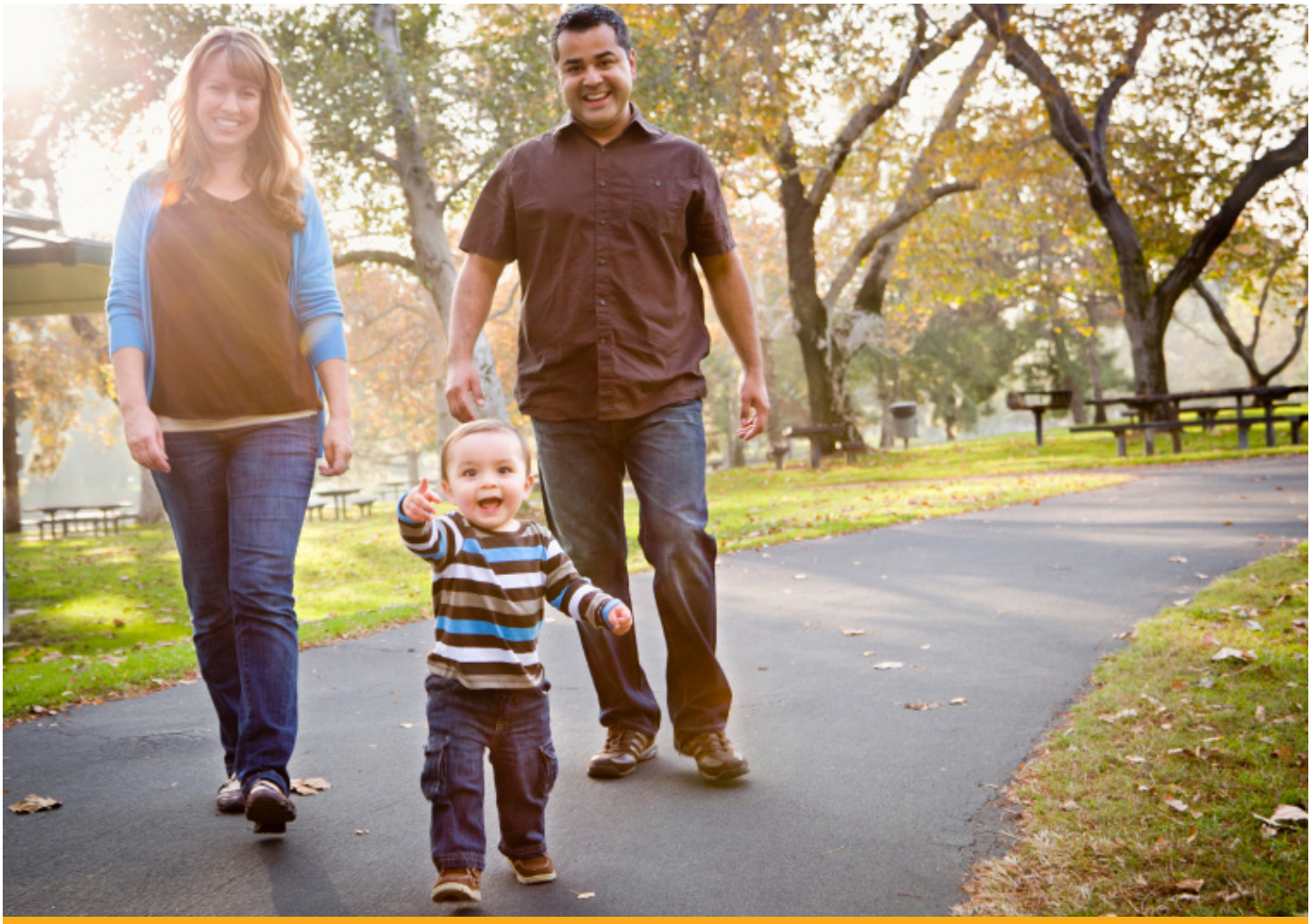
- **Parenting can sometimes be overwhelming.** Balancing the demands of work, childcare, financial and emotional stress, may be all you think you can handle. But with support and small adjustments, you can also help prepare your child to realize his/her potential, and to do well in school and life.

- **Don't be afraid to ask for help.** You are not alone. There are people and resources available to make it easier. Parenting classes, new parent groups, conversations with your childcare and healthcare providers, and online resources such as earlylearninghub.org, vroom.org, zerotothree.org and babycenter.org offer ideas, suggestions and tips to support you. Libraries also offer parent/child reading times, classes, workshops and, of course, books to support you as well.

Seven Ways to Become a Brain Builder.

You have what it takes in your heart.

Hold your child and read to them every day. Developing language and literacy skills begins at birth through everyday loving interactions such as sharing books, telling stories, singing songs and talking to one another.



Show your child the world and tell her all about it. Children start developing literacy and cognitive skills from day one. Talk to your child throughout the day, describe what you are doing. Tell them what colors things are and how many there are. As they grow older, ask them questions constantly.

Play with your child. Children are more than busy when they're playing. When your child plays with you, they are also learning that they are loved, important and fun to be around.

Easy as 1-2-3. Count the stairs, count their toes, give them blocks and then take them away. Even before they start school, most children are developing an understanding of addition and subtraction through everyday interactions.

Eat, drink, sleep, repeat. Good nutrition and a regular routine are essential to your child's ability to learn. Create colorful plates of real, fresh food for your child. Ensure they drink lots of water and avoid sugared drinks, including too much fruit juice. And nothing helps build the brain more than a predictable routine and a good night's sleep with consistent bed times and wake times.

Attendance matters. Regular dentist and doctor appointments provide important opportunities to ask questions about your child's health, wellness and behavior. And as your child grows older, regular attendance at pre-school and kindergarten are critical to building the foundation for doing well in school and life.

Get social. Play dates, park gatherings, pre-school and family events are wonderful opportunities to develop your child's social skills. These skills, including self-control and making friends, help children succeed in both school and life.