

Literacy Inserts

To UW-Extension's Just-in-Time Parenting Newsletters

UW-Extension's new literacy inserts are:

- ❖ 12 one-sheet (double-sided) fliers,
- ❖ for parents of children ages zero to three,
- ❖ to help them raise future readers.

The inserts are age-paced: We have produced 4 inserts for each year, matched to the child's developmental age (i.e. they are quarterly, matched to a three-month period of development).

The inserts are suitable for insertion with our existing parenting newsletters.

Why Literacy?

Learning to read is one of those goals that all parents share for their children, and well it should be. Early reading ability is one of the key predictors of how children will succeed in their later schooling and life. And while schools and child care programs can have a big effect on the development of literacy, families still have the biggest impact. In particular, parents differ greatly in the amount of oral language stimulation they provide their young children, and the extent to which their homes are a print-rich environment, and these strongly predict children's later reading performance in school.

Research of the last 2 decades provides useful advice for parents who want to promote their young children's language and literacy development. Our inserts translate that advice into easy explanations and activities.

A continuing partnership with Kiwanis.

The idea for this project came from discussions in the spring of 2003 with our long-time partner, the Wisconsin-Upper Peninsula District of Kiwanis. Over 160 Kiwanis Clubs help us distribute our age-paced newsletters, with both financial support (for printing and postage) and volunteer labor (with the mailings).

The incoming governor of the district, Gail Pachucki, had worked for many years as a children's librarian and has a continuing interest in the issue of literacy, as does Beth Kindschi, chair of Young Children Priority One. They came to us for advice on how Kiwanis and Extension might collaborate on a project aimed at children and literacy. In answer, we have developed these literacy inserts. In August 2003, one of us (Carol) gave a presentation to the Kiwanis District Convention, so many clubs in the state have already heard of this project. In the months ahead, we will ensure that their District newsletter

has articles about the project too. In other words, we are preparing the way for you to talk with your local Kiwanis partner about this extension of our mailed newsletter project.

(We also anticipate creating a Spanish language version of these inserts in the coming months.)

Recommended first steps.

If you wish to pursue this project in your county, here are some recommended steps. (Of course, you will know best how to modify our suggestions to fit your own community.)

If you do not currently distribute our *Parenting the First Year* newsletters:

- ❖ You could think of some other way to utilize these inserts, perhaps using them as handouts for a workshop, or sharing them with local child care providers, your child care resource & referral agency, local libraries, etc.
- ❖ You could begin distributing *Parenting the First Year*, and then add the inserts. If you want to learn more about how to begin distributing our parenting newsletters, contact Dr. Carol Ostergren at <costergr@wisc.edu>.

If you distribute *Parenting the First Year*, but not *Parenting the 2nd & 3rd Years*:

- ❖ You can immediately begin using the first 4 (of 12) inserts. See our advice below on how to start.) As above, you could use the remaining 8 inserts in other ways (in workshops, or distributing through other organizations).
- ❖ You could also think about beginning distribution of *Parenting the 2nd & 3rd Year*. If you want to learn more about this, contact Dr. Carol Ostergren at <costergr@wisc.edu>.

If you already distribute our two just-in-time parenting newsletter series, then:

- ❖ We suggest you start by meeting with your project partners. In most counties this will include one or more Kiwanis clubs, a maternity hospital, often a health department, and sometimes other local organizations. (A regular meeting with partners is a good idea anyway; most Family Living Agents hold such a meeting at least annually). Make copies of the inserts and share them around the table (or you could mail them in advance of the meeting). Ask if they like the inserts, and if they like the idea of distributing them in your county.
- ❖ Think about new groups who will have an interest in the issue of children's literacy, and who might be invited to the meeting. For example, you might invite a representative from the School District and the public library.

- ❖ Discuss the logistics. Who will make copies of the inserts? What about the people who handle the monthly mailing: how do they feel about adding this insert? Should we experiment with this and see how easy or difficult it is? (By the way, the inserts don't have to go in the middle of the newsletters between pages 4 and 5). They can as easily be laid on top of the newsletter, which is then folded over and stapled before getting its address label and stamp).
- ❖ Discuss postal options.

Bulk Rate: If you are already mailing the newsletters using bulk rate, adding the literacy inserts in with the newsletters won't increase the postage costs. Bulk rate allows each mailed piece to go up to 3.3 ounces without being pushed into the next price category. There is an annual fee of \$150 for bulk rate. To use bulk rate you need to mail a minimum of 200 pieces of presorted mail per mailing (each month). Local postmasters may interpret this rule differently, with some allowing that Parenting the First Year (PFY) and Parenting the Second and Third Years (PSTY) are really part of the same mailing. Others go to the opposite extreme, contending that issue 1 and issue 2 of PFY should be treated as different mailings. With bulk rate, if you have non-profit status the cost is 16.5 cents per piece. If you are a business, the cost is 26.8 cents per piece.

First Class: On the current weight paper the newsletters are printed on, each newsletter weighs .9 ounces and each literacy insert adds an additional .2 ounces for a total of 1.1 ounces. If you are not using bulk rate, this increases the first class postage from 37 cents to 60 cents for each newsletter plus insert. To keep postage costs from going up, you might consider having the newsletters printed locally on lighter weight paper. If the newsletters are printed on 24 lb. weight paper and the insert on regular 20 lb. paper the total weight stays at one ounce for first class postage. This means the cost remains at 37 cents for each newsletter plus insert mailed.

- ❖ Discuss the wider vision (see next section).

An expanded vision.

The distribution system for our newsletters is a powerful tool in its own right. To our own surprise, we seem to be operating a highly targeted mail delivery system that reaches most parents of young children in Wisconsin every month. Marketing firms would pay good money to own our mail lists because (a) we are precisely targeted to families with young children, and (b) people love our mailings. If a marketing firm owned our distribution system, they would use it for more than just the monthly newsletter. They would find all sorts of other uses for it. Why shouldn't we do the same?

These quarterly inserts are the easiest extension of our monthly mailings. The inserts “piggy-back” on our existing delivery system, adding almost zero additional cost while expanding our educational value quite a bit.

If this works, then we can begin to think about other expansions of this system.

- ❖ We could produce quarterly inserts on early feeding behavior (perhaps directed to prevention of childhood obesity).
- ❖ We could produce quarterly inserts on parenting a temperamentally challenging child (aimed at promoting competent parenting and preventing childhood behavior problems).
- ❖ You could produce a quarterly calendar of upcoming parenting events (parenting education workshops, library story hours, immunization clinics, etc.).
- ❖ You might want to write your own quarterly insert on family issues (including articles on consumer economics, housing issues, nutrition, etc.). This is a way for you to experiment in localizing the content of your newsletter project.

If you do experiment with either the literacy inserts or other inserts of your own invention, please let us know so we can share your experience with others.

Forward!

Carol Ostergren, Ph.D.
Interim Extension Specialist

Dave Riley, Ph.D.
Extension Specialist (on sabbatical leave)