Prelinguistic Milieu Teaching (PMT) is an early intervention method that has been studied for 10 years. It involves one-on-one services for the child and a program of parent education. Its purpose is not to make the child talk, but to build the first stage of communication. This will lead to developmental milestones, including language. PMT builds the child's motivation and awareness of a communication partner. "To be able to tell someone - even in gestures - that you are hungry is empowering," says Nancy Brady, associate research professor with the Life Span Institute at the University of Kansas [and BNCD investigator]. "In our clinical experience, we've found that young children are much less frustrated when they learn to communi- cate." Brady is fine-tuning the effectiveness of PMT in a 5-year research project with Steven Warren, director of the Life Span Institute, and Marc Fey, professor in the Communication Disorders Program at the University of Kansas Medical Center.

The PMT philosophy holds that children show progress if given specific kinds of supports in an environment that brings out their interests and abilities. The goals are to help a child make frequent, clear requests and comments with gestures and/or sounds, and to look at the person they are communicat- ing with.

PMT can fill the gap between infancy and
Effective listening helps adults communicate with children. Here are some tips!

1. Show interest in everything the child has to say, using your judgement later on to draw out the information you actually need for future planning.
2. Give children time and try not to interrupt or finish sentences.
3. Don't attempt to fill every silence.
4. When the child has finished talking, sum up what he has said and reflect it back to him, for example, 'It sounds like you felt very angry when Tommy took your ball away'.
5. Don't feel that you have to have an answer or a solution for everything.
6. Acknowledge the feelings that are being expressed and give them validity.
7. Avoid closed questions that leave you open to a yes/no answer (e.g. 'Are there things you like at nursery?); use open-ended questions instead (e.g. 'What are some of the things you like about nursery?').
8. Make eye contact and get down to the child's level (some children with autism find eye contact very difficult).
9. Remember that 'why?' questions can sound like an accusation.
10. Talk respectfully to children; they know when they are being patronized.
11. Be honest if you don't know something.
12. If you make a mistake, apologize.

This list was taken from Listening as a way of life (for the full text, visit http://www.ncf.org/core_files/listening-disabled.pdf)
For more information, visit www.ncb.org.uk.

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PRELINGUISTIC MILIEU TEACHING...

(Communication, Continued from page 1)

age 3 when more intensive early intervention often begins. "Doctors and educators are reluctant to offer a child augmentative devices when they see delays at age 2. They often tell parents to wait and see if their child will develop spoken language on his own," says Brady. Sign language and picture pointing are two kinds of augmentative communication. With PMT, a therapist can work with children as young as 18 months and establish the first stage of communication that is prelinguistic. "If a child hasn't learned what communication is, he will have a hard time knowing how to carry on a conversation with sign language or other techniques," says Brady. She has seen children with autism repeatedly point at a picture card, unaware they must show it to someone if they hope to make their request known.

Here are three basic principles of PMT. First, follow the child's lead. Children focus best on things that interest them. The PMT therapist spends time observing the child when they are together and waits to begin a session until he sees what the child is looking at or playing with. Face to face, at eye level with the child, he talks about it. Second, set the stage for communication. By putting a favorite toy in the room, but out of reach, the PMT therapist encourages the child to come ask for it. When a therapist puts things out of order in the room, this may elicit a comment from the child. Finally, use social games like Pat-a-Cake strategically. Children learn how the game ritual goes and when the adult interrupts or changes it, the child will communicate to be able to keep playing. Pat-a-Cake and Peek-a-Boo also reinforce face-to-face contact with give and take, like a conversation.

PMT has proven helpful in building the child's capacity to initiate communication with clear, frequent acts. "The technique is most effective when parents notice the changes in their child and reinforce this growth and development at home," says Warren. Several researchers are validating its effectiveness with specific clinical populations. Paul Yoder has a project like KU's underway at Vanderbilt University. He is working specifically with children with autism, whereas Warren, Brady and Fey have focused their study on children with Down's syndrome and other disabilities resulting in language delays.

Progress between the ages of birth to 3 years may affect how well a person uses the tools of communication throughout his whole life. This can include vocabulary, reading comprehension, and fluent self-expression. For a child with developmental delays, early intervention is considered best practice. "The earlier the better," says Steven Warren. Research shows that parents may be able to stave off behavioral problems and school failure, if they can build support for their child's prelinguistic development in the early stages of life.

This is the final segment in a four-part series with Steven Warren and Nancy Brady, scientists at the BNCD. You can read the original article at http://merrill.ku.edu/IntheKnow/sciencearticles/PMT Intervention.part4.html.
preventing reading and academic failure.”

Storkel will conduct a series of studies of children with and without impairments and adults to build a framework for practitioners based on what she discovers about how individual sounds, words and word meanings contribute to learning spoken language.

Storkel describes the relationship of words to each other as sound, word and meaning neighbors. She will be exploring how these neighborhoods affect learning to determine whether words are learned more easily if they have many or few neighbors of each type.

“Children learn which sound combinations are more or less common in their language by the time they are about nine months of age,” Storkel said. “We want to know if more common or rarer sound sequences help you learn new words.”

Storkel said that an earlier adult study showed that if a word has a unique sound pattern, it triggers word learning, immediately leading to more rapid learning. However, with whole words and meaning, it is better to have many neighbors because the neighbors help reinforce what has been learned.

In addition, Storkel is interested in whether all neighbors are equally influential on learning. For example, in word meaning it is hotly debated whether physical or functional similarity is more important, according to Storkel. Do kids learn the meaning of words like dog and cat more easily because they are both furry animals with four legs, or do they learn words like chair, sofa and stool because you can sit on all of them?

The project could fundamentally change the way children are assessed and treated for vocabulary impairments.

“Current assessments tell you that a child doesn’t know enough words but not why. If an assessment were based on knowledge of what factors influence word learning, you would have a better idea of why the child had trouble learning words, giving you a clear direction for treatment.”

This article was originally published May 3, 2006 by University Public Relations. You can read the original article at: http://www.news.ku.edu/2006/may/3/storkel.shtml. Karen Henry can be reached at kahenry@ku.edu or (785) 864-0756.

Upcoming Events for Parents and Kids!

Train Rides:
11 a.m. and 2 p.m. Saturdays and 2 p.m. Sundays in June, July, and August at the Belton, Grandview & Kansas City Railroad Co. Train departs at 502 S. Walnut in Belton. Round-trip lasts about 45 minutes. Fares are $7.50; free for children younger than 3. Also, Ice Cream Social Train, at 7 p.m. on Fridays. Fares are $8.50 and include ice cream served on the train.
Call: (813) 331-0630.

Waldo Fall Festival:
10 a.m. - 5 pm. on Sept. 16, at Waldo area, 75th and Wornall, Kansas City, MO. Children’s activities, including, a climbing wall, moon walk, giant slide and more. Be entertained with puppets, clowns, and musical groups. Admission is free!
Call: (816) 523-5553 or See: www.waldokc.org

Fireworks in Cartoon:
Sept. 30 at 7:30, From Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck to Porky Pig and Elmer Fudd, Cartoon will highlight the lively music from the classic Looney Tunes and Merrie Melodies cartoons. Ticket prices range from $11.50 - $28.
Call: (785) 864-2782 or See: www.lied.ku.edu

Pumpkin Patch:
From October 1st through October 31st, Schaake’s Pumpkin Patch is will be offering hayrack rides through 15 acres of pumpkins. Pick out your favorite one and take it home! Schaake’s Pumpkin Patch is open 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. and located at 1791 N 1500 Rd., Lawrence, KS and admission is free!
Call: (785) 843-2459

Gross Science:
On October 21st, get into the Gross! This is a hands on class that will have you making fake snot, blisters, and scars to take home and impress friends and just in time for Halloween! Classes at 11 a.m. & 2 p.m. Located near Crown Center at Union Station, 30 W Pershing Rd., KCMO.
Call: (816) 460-2020 or See: www.unionstation.org

Cats & Bats:
The Lawrence Arts Center is putting on two plays in one bringing Halloween to life as Lucy the cat tries to put up with the antics of her new pet, Belfry the bat. Great fun for the very young (3 & up) and the whole family! Happening October 28th & 29th at 2 p.m.
Call: (785) 843-2787 or See: www.lawrenceartscenter.org
Making Bathtub Boats!

- Talk with your child about floating and what items are "floaters." Collect some of these items, including small pieces of wood, and invite your child to experiment with making boats in the bathtub.
- Extensions to this activity are limitless. Provide glue and invite your child to construct some small boats using the same materials. Try them out in the tub once the glue is dry. Or, try making boats using only aluminum foil. What shapes of foil work best?
- Try testing the boats by adding pennies on top of them one at a time. How many pennies can they hold before they sink?

Guessing What Floats

- Choose a variety of familiar objects from inside and outside the house (cotton swabs, small rocks, a penny, a pencil, a plastic cup, an orange, a potato, a spoon, a leaf...) and place them in the bathtub one by one.
- Talk with your child about what you both observe using the words "sink" and "float." Separate the objects into a "sink" pile and a "float" pile and make some guesses with your child about why you each think some things float and some things sink. Collect some other objects and see if you can predict what they will do in water.

Dropping Objects

- Gather a variety of items of different shapes, weights, and materials, like a feather, a piece of paper, a small rock, an eraser, a ball, or anything else that isn't too heavy or won't be damaged by being dropped. Have your child feel and hold each item. Then drop the items one at a time. How does each item move on the way down?