Rise and sign: Lawrence parents trying signals before speech with youngsters

When her son Aiden was 9 months old, Kari Mack decided to teach him sign language as a way to make communication easier. She used flashcards, books and videos for almost two months but didn’t seem to be getting anywhere.

Then one day it happened.

“I had just come home from an exhausting day at work. As soon as he saw me he started signing milk with both hands for the first time, like he was milking a cow. He had such a serious look on his face, I couldn’t help but laugh,” recalls Mack, who quickly picked up on her son’s message and breastfed him.

Now 18 months old, Aiden frequently uses sounds to express feelings and needs, and Mack has found this has minimized the tantrums that are common to this age group.

Now they’re on to other matters.

“We’re working on please and thank you and sorry,” Mack says, “so when he takes a toy away in play group or makes a mess on the floor he can say sorry.”

Holly Storkel [BNCD investigator], an associate professor of speech, language and hearing at Kansas University, says children typically say their first word around the time they are 1 year old, whereas they may make their first sign up to three months earlier.

“You don’t need the same level of coordination to produce signs as you do to produce speech sounds,” says Storkel, who has found the use of signs particularly helpful in her own family.

When Storkel adopted her now 2 1/2 year old son Alex from China last March, his cleft lip and palate made it difficult for him to produce all the different speech sounds. When added to the impending challenge of learning a new language, Storkel quickly decided signing would be an ideal starting point for their communication.

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Researchers to establish model center on language and early literacy development

LAWRENCE — Helping infants and toddlers with disabilities develop communication, language and early literacy skills is the goal of a new federally funded project at the Life Span Institute at the University of Kansas.

Dale Walker, associate research professor at the institute’s Juniper Gardens Children’s Project, and Steve Warren [BNCD investigator], vice provost of research and graduate studies, have been awarded a four-year, $1.6 million grant to establish a Model Demonstration Center for Promoting Language and Literacy Readiness in Early Childhood. Funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Special Education Programs, the center will provide staff development and technical assistance to early childhood programs in Kansas City, Olathe and Topeka, Kan., and North Kansas City, Mo. It will be one of only three model demonstration centers in the United States to be funded by the Office of Special Education Programs on the topic of early language.

The center will collaborate with practitioners in home-based and early childhood education and preschool settings on the use of evidence-based techniques to enhance the communication and early literacy skills of children with disabilities and those at risk for language delays.

“This center will evaluate the use of language

(Language Development, Continued on page 3)
Imagine avoiding that potential meltdown due to immediately understanding that your 13-month old is signing that he wants to wear red socks (yes, specifically the color red) and not the blue socks you have already picked out!

You can start teaching your child sign language as early as 6 months. Based on your child's age, you will see your child sign within a few weeks to a few months. Then, the conversation begins! But even before your child signs back, she can understand you and may acknowledge your words and signs through grunts.

• www.mybabycantalk.com  
  Another useful resource on baby signing and also includes a video “dictionary” program.

• www.signingbaby.com  
  Want to learn American Sign Language? Learn it here, with resources for finger-spelling, ASL dictionary and grammar guides, and baby-signing tips as well. Created by a signing mother, this Web site includes articles, signing stories and photographs of babies signing. Updated often.

• www.signwithme.com/002_browse_signs.asp  
  This site provides short video clips of adults demonstrating various sign gestures. Physical motions behind the correct execution of each gesture are described.
and early literacy intervention strategies in programs serving infants and toddlers and how to provide continuity of those interventions as children move into preschool,” said Walker.

The grant will extend the groundbreaking work by Life Span Institute researchers Betty Hart, professor emeritus, and the late Todd Risley, former professor and senior scientist. Their 10-year study, documented in the seminal 1995 work “Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of American Children,” showed that children who heard more language from early infancy through age 3 developed substantially larger vocabularies than those who did not. The differences between children persisted after they entered school and through the third grade according to a follow-up study by Walker, Hart and fellow KU researchers Charles Greenwood and Judith Carta.

“The early work of Drs. Hart and Risley inspired us to test ways to increase the amount and quality of language learning opportunities for very young children in community-based child care,” said Walker. “Their work showed a connection between early educators’ use of language-promoting strategies and corresponding increases in children’s communication. This new center will permit us to extend this work to infants and young children with disabilities.”

The center will work with early childhood educators to evaluate strategies to promote early language and literacy readiness with 225 children with disabilities. The center will ultimately benefit 1,200 young children and their families. More than 150 early childhood educators and other intervention specialists are expected to participate.

The Life Span Institute is one of the largest research and development programs in the nation for the prevention and treatment of developmental disabilities. The institute includes 12 centers and more than 140 programs and projects located on the Lawrence and medical center campuses and in Kansas City, Kan., and Parsons.

This article can be viewed online at: http://www.news.ku.edu/2008/april/3/literacy.shtml

Published April 3, 2008
Contact: Mary-Margaret Simpson, (785) 864-0697; or Karen Henry, (785) 864-0756.

**Upcoming Events for Parents and Kids!**

**Shawnee North Family Aquatic Center Opens**
Shawnee North Family Aquatic Center Opens
**When:** 5/23/2009 - 9/05/2009
**Time:** Noon - 8 p.m. Sunday-Saturday
**Where:** 300 NE 43rd Street, Topeka, KS
For more information: 785-286-0676
Or visit: http://www.scpfoundation.org/shawnee-north-facilities/aquatic-family-center

**July 4th Celebration**
A picnic, music and fireworks extravaganza! Admission is free.
**When:** 7/4/2009
**Time:** Fireworks begin at dusk
**Where:** Sesquicentennial Point Park, Lawrence, KS
For more information: 785-749-1504

**Fiesta Mexicana and Carnival**
A Topeka tradition since 1933, the week long Fiesta Mexicana celebration features authentic Mexican foods, crafts, children’s corner, mercado, entertainment on three stages and carnival excitement for all ages.
**When:** 7/14/2009 - 7/18/2009
**Time:** 4 p.m. - 11 p.m.
**Where:** Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish, 201 NE Chandler, Topeka, KS
Visit: http://www.olg-parish.org/fiesta/index.html

**2009 Day Out With Thomas the Train**
This is an exciting way for children and grown-ups to enter the world of Thomas & Friends. Kids can ride on board a train led by Thomas and have their picture taken with Sir Topham Hatt! Thomas and friends can be found at Midland Railway in Baldwin City.
**When:** 5/29 - 31 & 6/5 - 7
**Time:** 8 a.m. - 6 p.m.
**Where:** 1515 W High Street, Baldwin City, KS
Visit: http://www.midland-ry.org/

**2009 Douglas County Free Fair**
Live music, carnival, 4-H exhibits, demolition derby, antique tractor pull and a variety of races and contests.
**When:** 8/1/2009 - 8/9/2009
For times, visit: http://www.dgcountyfair.com/schedule.html

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**Honk! Junior**
Honk! Junior is a fun-filled musical about a young duck named Ugly who must find his way home.
**When:** 8/14/2009 - 8/23/2009
**Time:** 7 p.m. Show Friday & Saturday 2 p.m. Show Sunday
**Where:** Topeka Civic Theatre, 3028 SW 8th Avenue, Topeka, KS
For more information: 785-357-5211
Or visit: www.topekacivictheatre.com

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About this Newsletter:
The BNCD newsletter is designed to keep you informed about the ongoing research projects that are being conducted by BNCD researchers at the University of Kansas. Participants who have been part of recent research projects conducted by BNCD researchers, parents who have expressed interest in participating in future research, and individuals from organizations such as schools and daycare centers that have an interest in BNCD studies will receive this newsletter from time to time to keep them up-to-date about the research activities at the BNCD. If you do not wish to receive future newsletters, please call or e-mail the BNCD to have your name removed from our list. Research at the BNCD is supported in part by grant number 5 P30 DC05803 from the National Institute on Deafness and other Communication Disorders (NIDCD) at the University of Kansas.

Summertime Fun!
Find the hidden words within the grid of letters.

B U I L D A F O R T K J V U S
G O T O B E A C H N V U F W C
P L A Y B O A R D G A M E S A
V L G R E S Q R G J L P W R V
S Y A O T K G F J L G R D E E
D G K N O S I N A R I O X A N
U N U R T U A B O T K P C D G
O I R B M S T N E S B E I B E
L P N I T E E S D D G L N O R
C M G U K C T E I C I N O O H
H A A S R O E C D D R R I K U
C C A E R R I L N S E A F S N
T B E I F S A R L A R G F R T
A S E L B B U B W O L B E T T
W S K R O W E R I F C Q G T S

ARTS AND CRAFTS
BASKETBALL
BLOW BUBBLES
BUILD A FORT
CAMPING

COLLECT BUGS
FIREWORKS
GO OUTSIDE
GO TO BEACH
JUMP ROPE

PLANT SEEDS
PLAY BOARD GAMES
READ BOOKS
RIDE BIKE
SCAVENGER HUNT

SING SONGS
WATCH CLOUDS
WRITE STORIES

Created with Discovery Channel School's PuzzleMaker.