

# big PLANS in print

Connecting Big Plans' Parents to their Communities

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## Families Matter

Strengthening Families Through Life's Many Transitions

### Did you know . . .

- Approximately 18,000 babies were born last year in Calgary? That is one every half hour for an entire year.
- More Calgary families have both parents working?
- Calgary is a new home for 1000's of immigrant families?
- Calgary Dad's are more active in the raising of their children?

Families Matter, a not-for-profit society delivering learning opportunities to Calgary families, realizes that families today are requiring extra support. They are committed to strengthening families through life's many transitions and recognize that families come in many sizes, face many challenges and opportunities, and span the full spectrum of life's many stages and ages – from babies to grandparents.

Whether it is the resource line that gives parents immediate parenting information and referrals to other agencies, the support groups for moms experiencing postpartum depression, the parenting education classes that are facilitated throughout the city, or the unique programming for Dad's; Families Matter is working to help families live and grow together.

Another fundamental area in which Families Matter is impacting families is through the operation of three Multi Service Resource Centres serving Calgary families. These are welcoming places for children and their parents/caregivers to come together and learn. Each centre has a variety of programs and options that families can take part in from September through June each year, including:

- **Infant drop-in** - For parents or caregivers with infants. This is a time of learning in an infant-safe environment. Guest speakers are often part of the program, and topics in the past have included: infant massage, picky eating for toddlers, naturopathy, feeding your baby, and the Calgary Public Library.

- **Drop In Play/Recreation Time** - this is a program of informal time for families to come together and engage in play with their children (ages 0 - 6 years), as well as an opportunity for parents and children to build community and friendships. Families are welcome to come in, have a cup of coffee, ask our qualified program staff for resources and information, take a class, or just enjoy some time with their neighbours and small children. In addition to child-led play, the program includes developmental screening for children, monthly visits from a speech language pathologist and even guest speakers. A healthy snack is always put out and the program wraps up with circle time songs, stories and rhymes before families go home.



Creative play at the Families Matter NW Resource Centre

- **Kindergarten Readiness Drop-In Program** - for children 3.5 - 5 years old who will be starting kindergarten the next September.



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Priority is given to children who speak English as a second language. Watch future issues of Big Plans in Print for more on this program.

- **Programs such as “Terrific Toddlers”** - For parents or caregivers of children 1.5 to 4 years old. We know toddlers are challenging but they are also terrific! This 5 week course aims to increase confidence and skills in parenting toddlers, leading to a strong, healthy, life-long relationship. When offered in a Resource Centre, childcare is available. These special programs will have an additional registration cost.

Activities in the centres are primarily designed around children ages 0-6 but opportunities for older children to participate are often available. The cost to attend any of the resource centres is minimal, at \$40 per family per year; however, fee programs are always subject to subsidy on a sliding scale as Families Matter believes that cost shouldn't be a barrier to participation in their programs. In addition, families are welcome to try out the centre before registering.



*Rania had only been in Calgary for two months, but was finding it difficult to connect with other families. Her husband often worked out of town, and she was doing her best to manage their three year old son and newborn baby. When a neighbor told her about the Families Matter resource centre, she decided to try it out. After a warm welcome from the staff, Rania soon found out that the resource centre allowed her four year old to enjoy engaging activities in a beautiful space with other children, while she had the option of attending parenting classes in the next room with her newborn. This allowed her time to spend with her newborn and to talk with other adults, all while her son was being cared for by a staff member and having fun playing. By the end of the year, Rania had connected with some other families in similar situations and gained valuable knowledge from guest speakers and workshops while her son made new friends and had the opportunity to engage in a variety of creative play.*



## Families Matter Resource Centres

**Family Pride Parent Link - NW HUB**  
Bowcroft School 3940 73 Street NW (Parent Link funded)

**Riverbend Location – SE**  
Riverbend School 65 Rivervalley Drive SE (Parent Link funded)

**Trans Canada Mall – NE location**  
(just opening in 2013)  
1440 - 52 Street NE (United Way funded)

If you have never been to a resource centre and wonder what it is really like, Families Matter put together a short video so that you could take a look inside one of the centres from the comfort of your own home!  
<http://youtu.be/CdZKv7f0SeM>

Stay tuned to Big Plans in Print for information on more programming offered by Families Matter, including L.E.A.P. - Literacy - Engagement - Attachment - Play and the Kindergarten Readiness Program.

## The Reggio Emilia Philosophy

Families Matter resource centres are based on the Reggio Emilia Approach to learning. The Reggio Emilia philosophy is based upon the following set of principles:

- Children must have some control over the direction of their learning
- Children must be able to learn through experiences of touching, moving, listening, seeing, and hearing
- Children have a relationship with other children and with material items in the world that children must be allowed to explore
- Children must have endless ways and opportunities to express themselves.

The Reggio Emilia approach to teaching young children puts the natural development of children as well as the close relationships that they share with their environment at the center of its philosophy. Parents are viewed as partners, collaborators and advocates for their children. Teachers respect parents as each child's first teacher and involve parents in every aspect of the curriculum. This philosophy does not end when the child leaves the classroom as most parents incorporate many of the principles within their parenting and home life.



# In Sync

## Helping Parents Build Healthy Attachments with their Children

The interaction between a parent and their child is an interesting one to observe. Seeing the subtleties and the nuances with an attuned, mindful parent along with their child who is achieving social and emotional milestones is a magical thing to watch. It's what we hope for as a parent as we move along this path called parenthood.

The dance of a child physically moving close to a parent for a reassuring hug or for comfort, and then receiving a kind loving response that says all is well is just enough for a child to have their "emotional cup filled". This rhythm of "coming in", then "moving out" is very simple yet powerful message that creates security and happiness in children. This is what is called a secure attachment. Attachment is having an emotional connection with your child, which is the foundation for their emotional and social development. When a child's needs are met they learn to feel safe and trust the world they live in. This creates a sense of value and meaning in their life. Parenting in a way that creates strong connections can help children gain confidence as they grow and have fewer social or emotional challenges as they get older. (Perry, 2001)

Babies are born with 100 billion cells ready to make connections. **Every interaction a parent has with their child creates a connection in the brain. Having loving, playful, engaging interaction with a baby or a child increases your child's brain development.**

**Did you know that the eyes can say it all? Without words the eyes can communicate love, joy and acceptance. A mother's gaze with an infant actually connects mom's brain with baby's brain! You are actually wiring your child's brain – preparing them to live in our world.** Sometimes life can take us on an interesting journey and we find parenting is tougher than expected and stressors in life outweigh the joys as a parent.

### References

- Perry, B.D., M.D., Ph.D., (2001). *Bonding and Attachment in Maltreated Children. The Child Trauma Academy*, 3, 1-17.
- Burgess Chamberlain, L., PhD, MPH, (2008), *The Amazing Brain: What Every Parent and Caregiver Needs to Know. Philadelphia, PA.*
- Calgary Health Region, 2005, *Growing Miracles. Calgary, Alberta. grafikom.Calgary*

Calgary Family Services offers a program for families called In-Sync, which can help parents find their way and build healthy attachments with their children. In-Sync is a play-based, multi-sensory program aimed at building, enhancing, and strengthening the parent-child relationship. Through the program, parent(s) and their child (ages 0 to six) engage in planned, playful, and multi-sensory activities that help foster healthy development and attachment in young children.

A healthy and secure parent-child relationship points to the importance of sensitive, responsive and engagement on the part of the parent.

In Sync teaches the parent to respond to their child's needs at an emotional level, and to do so with excitement, pleasure and full engagement. The goal of this program is to provide many opportunities for children to view themselves as lovable and competent, in a world that is trustworthy and an exciting place where it is safe to explore, and with a parent that is reliably available and responsive to their needs.

*Rachel contacted the In Sync program after her family was in an automobile accident with their one year old son. Since the accident Rachel could see that her son Ethan was having challenges which were creating stress at home and he was showing*

*distressing behavior in which Rachel had difficulty managing. Rachel could see that her son had fewer moments of joy at home, difficulty following mom's boundaries, and wanting to be held by mom on an ongoing basis, and having little interest in exploring or playing on his own. After many sleepless nights due to Ethan's nightmares and not able to sleep on his own Rachel asked for support from In Sync.*

An In Sync counselor worked with Rachel and Ethan in their home for four months. Rachel began to feel more confident in her parenting and was better able to help soothe her son when he was distressed. Ethan began to show ability to regulate his feelings with mom's help and spend more time playing and exploring. Rachel and Ethan began to laugh more, and find more joy in their day to day interactions. Ethan gained more trust and confidence in following Rachel's direction which made daily routines much easier. Ethan continues to struggle with bed times but Rachel is better equipped with ideas of how to soothe him and "fill up his emotional cup" to go back to sleep in his own bed.

**For further information on attachment resources or to contact the In Sync program, call: 403.205.5238. In Sync is a free program for families with children ages 0-6 who live in the Calgary area. Support is provided for families in home or in our office.**

## Did you know . . .

A baby's brain uses **THREE TIMES** the amount of energy that your brain does!!

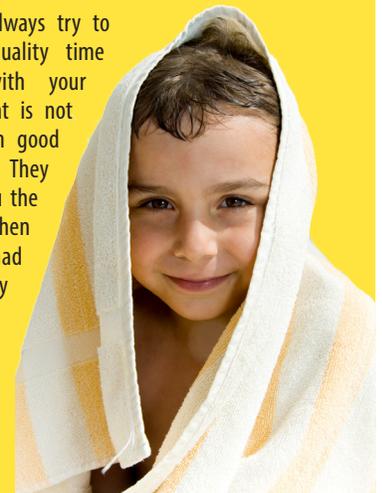
By 6 years of age, a child's brain will be **95%** of its adult size and have more connections than all the stars and planets in the galaxies.

Children who watch more television during the first three years of life are more likely to have problems with attention deficit disorders when they are 7 to 9 years old. (Chamberlain, 2008)

## Try This At Home

*The following are a few simple play activities to enjoy with children during busy times of the day that can keep the connection a positive one!*

- Playing red light green light on the way to brush teeth makes it a little more fun
- Counting sparkles as you comb hair to avoid those power struggles
- Wrap your little ones up in their towel at bath time and pretend to eat a taco, don't forget to add some tasty ingredients
- At bed time offering a soft back rub or drawing shapes with your finger on their back can be soothing and relaxing
- And...always try to spend quality time daily with your child that is not based on good behavior. They need you the most when they've had a tough day



Calgary Family Services

Calgary Family Services develops and implements programs that are holistic and serve the city of Calgary throughout all life cycles. Services are designed to: enhance individual and family relationships; help children reach their full potential; engage older adults in contributing to their communities and assist vulnerable citizens to maintain their dignity and respect. Individuals, families and communities turn to us for support through childhood, adulthood and elderhood.

# Early Literacy at the Calgary Public Library

Talk. Sing. Read. Write. Play. These are the five behaviours outlined by the American Library Association that parents can use to help their children develop crucial early literacy skills. Early literacy is what a child knows about reading and writing before they can actually read and write. The early experiences that children have with literacy and books are critically linked to their later success in school. By talking, singing, reading, writing, and playing with your children, you are providing them with the knowledge and skills they will use for the rest of their lives.

## Talk

Talking with your child is one of the best ways to help develop language. It doesn't matter where you are, all you need is to take the time, ignore any distractions, and focus on him or her.

## Sing

Singing slows down language so children can hear the different sounds in words. Children who are sung to hear these different sounds, and they find it easier to break words into sound groups later on when they learn to read.



## Read

Children who are read to are the children who will grow up reading. Try to make reading aloud to your child a part of your daily routine. Young children may only have the attention span to spend a few seconds at a time looking at a book with you, and that's fine. Those few seconds count and add up throughout the day.

## Write

As children scribble and draw, they practice eye-hand coordination and exercise the muscles in their fingers and hands. This helps develop the fine motor control they need to hold a pencil or crayon, and to write letters and words.

## Play

Play comes naturally to children; it's the way they learn about the world. When children create stories by imagining they are in another place or pretending to be someone else, they are exercising all of their language skills. You can get involved by playing with them, and encouraging them to tell you more about their imaginary world.



These five early literacy behaviours can easily be achieved with your little one by introducing a few simple habits to your day, and the Calgary Public Library is always here to help. The Calgary Public offers free Storytimes for children up to five years old at all of our 18 locations. Storytimes are early literacy programs that include

songs, stories, and rhymes, and run from 20 minutes to an hour. You can find both register and drop-in programs to suit your individual needs. Storytimes introduce new language and concepts to your child, and are a great way to grow your parent-child bond and meet other members of your community. While you're at the Library, let your child choose some books to take home; we have board books for babies made of durable cardboard and picture books for your toddler or preschooler. And don't forget to pick up some parenting books, DVDs, or magazines for yourself.

If English is not your native language, be sure to talk, sing, read, write, and play with your child in your home language. Research shows that the more proficient a child is in his or her home language, the easier it will be to learn English later. Literacy in a child's home language establishes a knowledge, concept, and skill base that a child can then transfer from his or her native language into English.

To find out more information or to register for a Storytime, check out our website at [www.calgarypubliclibrary.com](http://www.calgarypubliclibrary.com). And remember, library cards are always free for children 12 and under.

By Valerie Viccars

Manager of Early Literacy and Children's Services  
Calgary Public Library- November 2012



## At home Activity

### Inviting Learning: Natural Materials and Sensory Activities

As children work with material they are learning about themselves and their role using the physical properties of their world. Children are transfixed by looking at smelling, touching, tasting, moving, along with rearranging things.

#### Sensory Ideas:

1. Colored water in a basin with colored fish along with plastic fish and rocks.
2. Flour: When using a sifter, the flour becomes soft and fluffy like flowing rain.
3. Flour: Becomes soft and silky, a delightful texture on the skin.
4. Rice: along with dried lavender; add jewels then scoop, dig, dump and fill containers.
5. Shaving cream: Using a table or containers.
6. Aquarium gravel: Using rocks, spoons, cups of different sizes.

Natural material that engage the sense such as: leaves, gravel, pine cones and different types of dried flowers, can all be used to explore the child sensory feeling.



Activity courtesy of Families Matter.