

# big PLANS *in print*

*Connecting Big Plans' Parents to their Communities*

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## Singing to Children May Help Development of Language Skills

New book claims that 'signature' melodies and inflections of traditional rhymes prepare children's brains for language

Parents should sing to their children every day to avoid language problems developing in later life, according to a consultant. Too much emphasis in the early years is placed on reading, writing and numeracy, and not enough on the benefits of singing, according to Sally Goddard Blythe, a consultant in neuro-developmental education and director of the Institute for Neuro-Physiological Psychology.

Singing traditional lullabies and nursery rhymes to babies and infants before they learn to speak, is "an essential precursor to later educational success and emotional wellbeing", argues Blythe in a book. "Song is a special type of speech. Lullabies, songs and rhymes of every culture carry the 'signature' melodies and inflections of a mother tongue, preparing a child's ear, voice and brain for language." Blythe says in her book, *The Genius of Natural Childhood*, to be published by Hawthorn Press, that traditional songs aid a child's ability to think in words. She also claims that listening to, and singing along with rhymes and songs uses and develops both sides of the brain. "Neuro-imaging has shown that music involves more than just centralised hotspots in the brain, occupying large swathes on both sides," she said.



Growing numbers of children enter nursery and school with inadequate language and communication skills, according to the National Literacy Trust, often because their parents have not helped them develop communication skills. Blythe believes that singing to and, later, with a child is the most effective way to transform their ability to communicate.

"Children's response to live music is different from recorded music," she said. "Babies are particularly responsive when the music comes directly from the parent. Singing along with a parent is for the development of reciprocal communication."

Beverley Hughes, the former children's minister who established a national curriculum to set down how babies are taught to speak in childcare from the age of three months, agreed that nursery rhymes can "boost child development".

Hughes cites research showing that music and rhyme increase a child's ability in spatial reasoning, which can enhance a child's mathematical and scientific abilities.

"Singing nursery rhymes with young children will get them off to a flying start," she said.

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Daniel Dwase, editor of the online Child Development Guide, agreed that nursery rhymes set to music can aid a child's development. But, he added, teaching a child to dance is also important.

"Music assists in the development of a child's speech," he said. "Singing nursery rhymes and simple songs teaches children how language is constructed and assists with the acquisition of language. Singing songs with your child will also teach them about tone, beat and rhythm.

"Even better than just singing, though, is to teach songs with actions and encourage your child to dance along to the music, they will learn balance, co-ordination, body awareness and rhythm," he said.

*Article written by Amelia Hill and can be found at: <http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2011/may/08/singing-children-development-language-skills>*

## Try This At Home

*Rhymes can be a great way to break the ice and have some fun! You can use a welcome song to learn everybody's names, call everyone to eat with a rhyme, or just be silly. Here is a rhyme for you to try. Feel free to create your own actions, rhythm, or verses.*

### My Fingers Are Starting to Wiggle

(To the tune of: The Bear went over the Mountain)

Great song for learning body parts! Wiggle whatever body part you are singing about:

*My fingers are starting to wiggle,  
My fingers are starting to wiggle,  
My fingers are starting to wiggle,  
Around and around and around!  
My elbows are starting to wiggle,  
My elbows starting to wiggle,  
My elbows are starting to wiggle,  
Around and around and around!*

Continue with other body parts; let you child suggest some parts. Silly suggestions: tongue, nose, ears etc.

Reprinted with permission from: <http://www.familit.ca/blog/?cat=8>



## Magic Carpet Ride: Helping Families Prepare Their Children For School

When Michelle\*, mother-of-three, first enrolled her children in the Magic Carpet Ride program she thought it sounded too good to be true. After all, how could so much be available to her family at no-charge? Michelle, however, soon became an advocate of the program after attending her first session. Not only did she enjoy play-based learning with her kids, but she left feeling encouraged and inspired with new ideas to try at home. Michelle's children were also enthusiastic. They called Magic Carpet Ride 'their school' and couldn't wait to go back each week.

Michelle's family is only one of many that are participating in the Magic Carpet Ride program this year as it runs for its 16<sup>th</sup> year. This fun family literacy program is provided at no cost; however, offers invaluable rewards as parents and caregivers bring home new strategies to encourage learning in their preschool and kindergarten-aged children.

Throughout the year, families have the opportunity to learn together in sessions that include stories, songs, play, and activity centres. Flexible in nature, this program is unique in that it responds to the cultural and linguistic needs of participating families while considering age ranges of children enrolled. Since the program runs once a week, parents and caregivers are encouraged to take away a variety of skills and ideas for play-based activities to use with their children at home between sessions.

Each session is run by a family literacy facilitator and there is always something new to look forward to. From art, cooking, science experiments, and holiday themes to dramatic play, prewriting skills, print

awareness and sensory activities; children learn to explore and discover at their own level. As children are given the opportunity to make their own choices, parents and caregivers will learn how to follow their child's lead. During each session, there will be a focus on conversation to help kids and adults expand their vocabularies – from storytelling and rhymes to small group activities and conversation starters. Parents and caregivers will also have the opportunity to learn skills in technology throughout the year. In support of family literacy, several special guests will visit the program, including: the Calgary Public Library, Share the Magic, and a speech language pathologist.



In all aspects, Magic Carpet Ride has an educational focus that supports every member of a family involved in a child's early learning both at home and school and aims to provide a positive transition from home, and other early care settings, to school.

The Magic Carpet Ride Program is funded by the Alberta Government and the City of Calgary and is run by the CanLearn Society (formerly known as the Calgary Learning Centre).

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# magic carpet ride

2014-15 Locations & Dates



The Magic Carpet Ride program is offered in the following locations:

CUPS (1001 10th Ave SW)

*Mondays, 10:00am - 12:00pm*

North of McKnight Community Resource Centre (95 Falshire Drive NE)

*Tuesdays, 9:30 - 11:30 am or 1:00 - 3:00 pm*

CCIS Parent Link Family Resource Centre (1111- 11th ave SW)

*Tuesdays beginning September 11, 2012  
10:00 am - 12:00 pm*

Keeler School (4807 Forego Avenue SE)

*Tuesdays, 1:30-3:00*

Valley View School (4105 26 Avenue SE)

*Wednesdays, 9:30 - 11:30 am*

GW Skene School (6226 Penbrooke Drive SE)

*Wednesdays, 9:30 - 11:30 am*

Erin Woods Elementary School (25 Erin Park Drive S.E.)

*Wednesdays, 1:30 - 3:30 pm*

Ranchlands Elementary School (610 Ranchlands Blvd NW)

*Wednesdays, 1:30 - 3:15 pm*

St Mark Elementary School (4589 Marbank Drive NE)

*Thursdays, 12:45 pm - 2:45 pm*

1000 Voices - Genesis Centre of Community Wellness (7556 Falconridge Blvd NE)

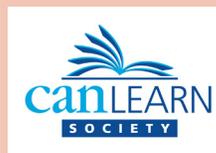
*Fridays, 10:00 am - 12:00 (noon)*

*Magic Carpet Ride continued from previous page...*

Magic Carpet Ride began mid-September and runs until the end of May for children ages 0-5 and their parents/caregivers. Please see the sidebar on the right with a complete list of locations and times. If space is available, there is an opportunity to register mid-way through the year.

For more information and to register, please contact Nada Jerkovic, Manager, Family Literacy at 403 686 9300 x 128 or email at [njerkovic@canlearnsociety.ca](mailto:njerkovic@canlearnsociety.ca)

*\*Names in this story have been changed.*



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## BRINGING A BOOK TO LIFE



Stella Queen of the Snow by Marie Louise Gay tells the story of Stella and her little brother Sam. It is Sam's first snowstorm and there are many new experiences waiting for him. This book provides a base for activities that enhance a child's literacy development and an opportunity to spend time together as a family!

As you share the story together, expand on what your child sees in the illustrations. Talk about the animals, plants, colours, and shapes. Discuss whether or not your child has participated in any of the same winter activities as Stella and Sam. If the weather permits, go outside and try one or more of the activities together.

Try making a craft together. One idea is to choose an activity or winter scene to illustrate. Make a snowman by pulling apart some cotton balls and gluing them onto a piece of construction paper. Drawing or gluing additional accessories for the snowman and a background are also fun.

Extending the story with a variety of activities will engage your child's imagination and build their literacy and language skills. It is the perfect way to celebrate winter!



Courtesy of The Centre for Family Literacy: [www.familit.ca](http://www.familit.ca)

## Tips for the Holidays

We all know that the holiday season is supposed to be a time of joy and great fun, but it can also be a season that is stressful. This is especially true for parents of children with special needs. During the holidays, children can become over excited and over stimulated and for children with special needs this can create sensory overload. To help families with holiday stress, we have attached some suggestions that may help ease some of the stress:

**1. Keep Activities Simple.** Don't over schedule with holiday activities. Pick activities that your family enjoys together.

**2. Keep Schedules Regular.** Routines are very important for children, especially children with special needs. It is important to keep your child as close to his or her normal routine as possible. Even though your child will be on school break during the holidays, try to match his or her schedule at home with their school schedule. Take one day at a time and don't be afraid to adapt holiday plans for what will work best for your family.

**3. Let Others Help.** If Christmas parties or dinners always happen at your house, have someone else do the hosting for a change. Ask for help with, shopping, wrapping, baking or cooking. Take up any offers of childcare. Use your respite time if you have some.

**4. Go Easy on the Expectations.** Don't expect your child to be able to socialize with everyone. Talk to your family and friends about your child's special needs. Knowing what to expect will help everyone be more comfortable. Remember, the goal is for everyone to enjoy the season together. If some people in the extended family are hard to be with, maybe avoid being with them if it will make

the holiday easier. Remember; do whatever you feel is right for your own immediate family, even if others don't understand.

**5. Be Prepared.** If you are attending a family function, be sure to prepare your child a few days in advance. Explain where you're going, who will be there, and how long you plan to be at the family function. Let your child know what to expect, and what you expect of him or her. If your child has something that is comforting, like a favourite toy, game or book, bring it along. Talk to others before the gathering. Let people know who are attending the function what will help your child, for example, sitting next to a favourite cousin, getting some one-on-one attention from an adult, or reading a certain story. Remember, you may have to structure situations carefully to make success achievable. Let your child know he or she can go to a quiet room to read or watch television when needed.

**6. Be Flexible.** Expect the unexpected. No matter how well you may try to plan your holiday activities sometimes change is needed. Even in the worst situation, you have a choice in your attitude and mood. By keeping a sense of humour and trying to look for the good things that are going on, everyone will benefit.



*Holiday tips courtesy of Children's Link*

Stay  
**ACTIVE**  
during the  
holidays!

### Commercial Break Challenges

We know your little ones might want to spend some time watching their favorite TV shows, like Dora the Explorer, The Backyardigans, or Little Einsteins on their holiday break. That doesn't mean they need to be on the couch the whole time! Each commercial break, challenge your child to run on the spot, do imaginary jump rope, stand on one leg, do jumping jacks (see if they can beat their record for how many they can do each commercial break), or even stretch during the commercials of their favourite television show. This will help reinforce an active home where your child can continue to grow and develop their skills.

