

NURTURING INTERACTIONS

THE ABECEDARIAN APPROACH GIVES CHILDREN A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR A LIFETIME OF LEARNING.



“A good experience in early learning is the basis for a lifetime of learning,” says Dr Joseph Sparling, the American professor who developed the Abecedarian Approach with Professor Craig Ramey.

The Abecedarian Approach is not a curriculum but rather, an interaction strategy that focuses on language and high quality adult-child interactions, which Dr Sparling terms the “active ingredients of any effective early educational programme”.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Dr Sparling explains the four elements of the Abecedarian Approach and how we can apply them in our daily interactions with children.

► **Language Priority** emphasises the central role that language plays in every interaction with your child. It is the ground from which the other elements of the Abecedarian Approach grow. Every interaction is an opportunity for talking, listening and learning language. For example, sing a song to your baby and make

sure he is looking at your lips while you sing.

► **Enriched Caregiving** is to consciously bring in positive emotions and educational content to the daily routines of care. The routines can range from the time your child starts the day until he goes to bed — it includes feeding, bathing, diapering, dressing and playing. Caring and learning are inter-woven. When your child is getting dressed, name the items you are helping him put on (shirt, shorts, socks) and describe your actions, e.g. “I am buttoning your shirt now”.

► **Conversational Reading** involves having conversations while reading a book with an individual child or a pair of children. The communication goes back-and-forth. For a younger child, you can name the pictures and describe them. For an older child, you can extend his responses by asking questions such as “Why do you think that...?” or “How does it make you feel?”. Encourage your

child to also describe what is happening in the picture.

► **LearningGames®** comprise 200 experiences or learning games played between an adult and one or two children (see box below). The sustained, fun and interactive play between adult and child contains important educational content and also supports other aspects such as his socio-emotional, cognitive and physical development. The experiences range from describing a baby’s actions while she reaches for a toy, to planting seeds and talking about the changes as they grow.

Because of its flexible nature, the Abecedarian Approach can complement existing curricula or stand on its own. The Abecedarian Approach can help refocus caregivers and parents back to the most important component of care: high-quality interactions between adult and child that are individualised, intentional and frequent.

Dr Joseph Sparling



Dr Joseph Sparling co-developed the Abecedarian Approach



STRENGTHENING FOUNDATIONS

Research shows that the Abecedarian Approach can give children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, a significant boost to their cognitive and socio-emotional growth which can improve child outcomes and have long-lasting developmental returns.

“It is important to start young because there is greater opportunity

and flexibility in brain development in the first three years of life than at any other time,” says Dr Sparling. “Positive brain development is based on the positive and responsive experiences that we provide for the child.” This approach works best when early childhood professionals work alongside parents, supporting each other to build a strong and lasting foundation for the child in their early years. ♥

PLAYFUL INTERACTIONS IN PLAY

The Abecedarian Approach has been implemented in selected preschools to contribute to the holistic development of children in their early years, forming a strong foundation for a good start in life.

ECDA Consultant Puspavalli Namasivayam, who trains educators in the Abecedarian Approach, shares her insights on the Abecedarian Approach.



- It provides personalised and individualised interactions with each child. The intensive, one-to-one interactions through daily routines and the selected activities, cater to the child’s learning and developmental needs, and strengthen adult-child bonding.
- It increases the frequency of rich language interactions. This sustains the back and forth conversations between adult and child, and builds on his growing language and communication skills as well as vocabulary.
- The elements in the approach can be used in any conversations or situations where children are cared for, be it at home, preschool, play or outings.

ABECEDARIAN APPROACH IN PRACTICE

AN EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONAL AND A PARENT FROM PCF SPARKLETOTS PRESCHOOL @ JURONG SPRING BLK 553 SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH THE ABECEDARIAN APPROACH (AA).

Since adopting the Abecedarian Approach, we observe that the children have become more confident in their speech and it has increased their vocabulary. It is satisfying to see the children being able to express themselves. The strategies in the Abecedarian Approach provide teachers with a framework to have meaningful engagement with children. Professionally, it has improved their pedagogical practices.

Ms Suhartina Binte Buang, Centre Leader

The Abecedarian Approach has provided me with practical ways to interact, communicate and also compliment my child. When I want my child to be more cooperative, I sing or role play with her. I have learned to use warm, positive language when speaking to her. Our bond has become stronger. It reminds me, as a parent, to focus more on the child and the way we interact with her.

Ms Fauziah Binte Zubir, parent of toddler, Husniyah Aaisyah Binte Salfudin