

APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 2, 2017.** Please include this application form with electronic entry.

PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: _____

Program Title: _____

Program Category: _____

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: _____

Title: _____

Department: _____

Complete Mailing Address: _____

Telephone: _____ Website: _____

Email: _____

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Name: _____

Title: _____

Signature: _____

Play Smart with Toddlers

Overview/Summary

For libraries that serve neighborhoods with a large population of families with young children, Chesterfield County Public Library constructed a new and exciting program that supports early literacy and child development. The *Play Smart with Toddlers* program provides a comfortable atmosphere for parents to enjoy a session of play with their child while learning from experts about how play supports their child's development and encourages early literacy skills. Children improve their socialization skills in a safe environment, while parents connect with community professionals with various areas of expertise related to children aged 0-3. Library staff identify and coordinate the experts through partnerships with county departments and other local and regional organizations.

This monthly program is unusual for a library literacy program in that it doesn't stick to the importance of "reading." Staff and partners addresses a whole range of learning opportunities for parents in one session. Chesterfield parents can come to the library to learn parenting skills and make connections with various early childhood agencies, where they can find parenting information and support. The children benefit from a program that allows them access to developmentally appropriate play and social interactions with other children. This network of care is an innovative, holistic approach to the early learning needs of our children, and to supporting our families and caregivers.

Problem, Challenge or Situation

The Clover Hill Branch of the Chesterfield County Public Library services a community that is made up largely of families with school-aged and younger children. As a learning organization, CCPL knows the importance of learning during the first years of a child's life.

“Recent research confirms that the first five years are particularly important for the development of the child's brain, and the first three years are the most critical in shaping the child's brain architecture. Early experiences provide the base for the brain's organizational development and functioning throughout life. They have a direct impact on how children develop learning skills as well as social and emotional abilities.”(Child Development and Early Learning. (2010). Retrieved March 15, 2017, from <http://www.factsforlifeglobal.org/03/>)

Programs for children of all ages are well-attended, as evidenced by the large story time groups each week. While our storytimes are a fundamental component of our approach to early literacy, staff wanted to address the needs of preschool children and families in a more engaging and hands-on way. The goal was to provide a program for children and parents on a regular basis that provided a different level of learning and socialization to our young families, while also facilitating access to other important early childhood resources.

Implementation

The idea behind the Play Smart with Toddlers program is illustrated by the proverb “if you give a man a fish, he eats for a day. If you teach a man to fish, he eats for a lifetime.” The typical library program for children, story time, is geared towards children with the aim of teaching early literacy and other skills. This is like giving a parent a fish: the child benefits from the experience each week for the thirty minutes they spend at the library. Play Smart with

Toddlers is about teaching the parents how to foster their own child's development through play or, in other words, teaching them to fish. The goal is for parents to take the skills and knowledge they learn from the librarian and Community Professional and apply them away from the library.

Play is an important and recognized component of early learning. The Association for Library Service to Children and the Public Library Association have incorporated the latest research in early literacy and child development to create Every Child Ready to Read for public libraries. The five practices of Every Child Ready to Read are; Talking, Singing, Reading, Writing, and Playing. "Play, in addition to being fun, helps children to think symbolically. One item represents another – a block might represent a telephone. This kind of symbolic thinking is the same kind of thinking that is used for reading. Pictures and letters represent real things. Dramatic play, when children act out stories, helps them build background knowledge - how stories work. As you play with children, you have the opportunity to support their pre-reading skills." (Saroj Ghoting)

Play Smart with Toddlers focuses on parents with toddlers aged 0-3. The session provides an opportunity for toddlers to play with developmentally appropriate toys from eight different categories. The librarians model for parents how to use toys and play to teach their children different skills. Toys are provided in eight categories: blocks, puzzles, books, dramatic play, infant toys, transportation, manipulatives, and music. A variety of toys are available in each category. Each category supports a different area of a child's development. The librarian shares this information as well as early literacy tips with the parents. An activity table is also available for further exploration of appropriate developmental activities for their little ones.

Parents interact in a stress-free, non-threatening environment with a Community Professional on specific topics related to the professional's expertise about subjects of child raising and child development. Community Professionals are members of the community that have expertise in some area related to a child's development. They are asked to share information about their topic in an informal manner facilitated by one-on-one discussions with the parents while they play with the children.

The topics are chosen for relevance and interest to parents of children ages 0-3. For the first sessions, the focus was on partnerships within Chesterfield County, namely the Health department and Mental Health Support Services. Members of these departments have shared on topics such as Nutrition, Speech & Language, Building a Bond, and Play. In the future, partnerships have been set up with other local agencies or groups that serve children such as the Infant Intervention Program, Families First, and the Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU. There is also a session partnering with Chesterfield County Police department. Upcoming informational topics include Immunizations, Food Allergies & Intolerances, Officer Friendly, Gross Motor Skills, Sensory Play, Speech, and Dental all geared towards ages 0-3. Play Smart with Toddlers is open to a wide variety of subjects that may interest parents.

The first monthly Play Smart with Toddlers occurred in September 2016. The room is arranged into the eight different toy and learning categories spread around the walls. This allows parents to visually see which toys support which learning strategies. The Community Professional is introduced at the beginning with a quick explanation on their subject of expertise. Then the play time begins! The librarian and Community Professional move around

the room, interacting with children through play and sharing information with parents in informal, one-on-one conversations. The activity table is set up and children and parents can participate in the activity at any time during the one-hour program.

Financing and Staffing

The initial investment for the program is putting together a collection of toys from the eight categories. \$250 was used from the library programming budget. This only provides a small selection of toys. The library supplemented the collection with some toys that were already purchased.

The programming budget continues to support Play Smart with Toddlers with smaller purchases of supplies for the activity table and the occasional new or replacement toy estimated at \$100/year.

The majority of staff investment occurred at the planning stage for this program, purchasing supplies and organizing the community partnerships. Development of the program began seven months before implementation, in February of 2016. Library staff members coordinate the presence of a Community Professional at each event. Staff are present at each session of “Play Smart with Toddlers,” to introduce the Community Professional and to interact with parents throughout the event.

Award Criteria

Play Smart with Toddlers is an innovative, collaborative way for libraries to provide avenues of learning for parents and toddlers. The focus is on teaching the parents how to provide developmentally appropriate activities for their children and give them the knowledge and

tools to continue the learning at home. In a society that is heavily focused on book learning, play and its importance in development can be overlooked, and this program changes that. The program also gives parents community contacts with whom they can establish relationships and discuss any questions or concerns they may have about their child's development. They have a vehicle, through professionals and connections with other parents, for learning what behavior and developmental stages are appropriate for young children.

Supplemental Materials





Play Smart with Toddlers

Thursdays, Mar. 23, Apr. 27, May 25 10:30 a.m.

Smart play=smart kids! Have fun with your toddler and learn how play is important in your toddler's healthy development. A child development specialist will be available for questions.

Registration is required and begins two weeks before each session.



*Providing a FIRST CHOICE
community through
excellence in public service*

Clover Hill Library
6701 Deer Run Drive
Midlothian, VA 23112
804-318-8668
library.chesterfield.gov



