

A word in your ear, reading to children helps them develop

By **Alan Roden**
Scottish Political Reporter

TODDLERS who read bedtime stories and sing with their parents are likely to develop more quickly, according to a Scottish Executive study.

In light of the findings, ministers yesterday urged parents to swap expensive toys and hobbies for simple activities, which also include painting or kicking a ball in the park.

According to the report's authors, a trip to the library can be just as valuable as an expensive outing to the zoo.

The Growing Up in Scotland study, which is following thousands of youngsters through their childhood, revealed that toddlers who were read books from as early as ten months did better on language skills and problem-solving by the time they were three.

The results are expected to inform the Executive's future policy-making on welfare and education.

Yesterday, Children's Minister Adam Ingram hailed the research as good news for parents facing financial difficulties.

Mr Ingram, a father of four, said: 'As parents, we all want the best for our children - and there's no greater responsibility than bringing them up.'

'Yet children do not come with an

instruction manual and I know how daunting it can be.

'We know the uncertainty that the recession is bringing for families across Scotland but this demonstrates parents needn't spend a fortune on young children - it's time and attention that form the building blocks of development.'

'There's often a notion parents need to spend lots of money on expensive toys and activities to stimulate their children but this report shows that's just not the case.'

'It's the simple things, like reading bedtime stories, kicking a ball

about in the park or having a singalong that really makes a difference.'

'Experiences during the early years of a child's life can have a striking impact on future chances and it can be startling how quickly disadvantaged children fall behind.'

'By breaking these cycles of disadvantage, we can help all of our young people play their part in a more successful Scotland.'

The survey is tracking 5,000 babies born between June 2004 and May 2005 and 3,000 toddlers through childhood and into their teens.

It aims to follow their development and look at the opportunities, difficulties and challenges that influence how they grow up.

The sample was carefully selected

to represent Scotland's urban, rural and economic backgrounds. But the study revealed that bedtime stories and singalongs have a positive impact, regardless of socio-demographic factors.

Catherine Bromley, deputy director of the Scottish Centre for Social Research, described the results as 'surprising'.

She said: 'The overarching finding is more to do with the range, variety and number of activities.'

'You don't have to be playing very intellectual games with your children. It's just a case of singing or reading or drawing, as long as they're doing it regularly.'

'It's about getting the message across that these kinds of things are important, while pushing the

message that it's not about punishing parents for not being able to afford trips to the zoo.'

Meanwhile, a campaign will be launched today, aimed at getting families excited about reading.

SPL footballers, including Celtic's Gary Caldwell and Steven Naismith of Rangers, have put forward their favourite children's and adult books as part of the Big Plus literacy campaign.

Tory education spokesman Liz Smith said she welcomed any measures to help youngsters get



more engaged in learning basic skills in reading, writing and arithmetic, 'particularly those which encourage families to help their children to become enthusiastic about books'.

But she added: 'The most important focus needs to remain within the primary school curriculum and with ensuring that there is much more rigorous testing of these skills before the pupils move on to secondary school.'

a.rodan@dailymail.co.uk
Comment - Page 14



Storytime: Giving children books helps them to develop more quickly

