**Looking Forward**

This time of year is a great time to reflect back on the year that was and look forward to the year ahead.

Bright Beginnings has taken off full steam ahead and we are very excited about the opportunities and possibilities for 2011.

We’re looking forward to serving more families in Memphis and the Mid-South, continuing to provide quality therapy services in your child’s most natural environment and continuing to develop new programs to meet the needs of each child.

The Bright Beginnings team sends warm wishes to each of you throughout the Christmas Season!

~ Elizabeth McMahon, MA, CCC-SLP  
Owner and Speech-Language Pathologist

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**Season’s Eatings**

*By: Elizabeth McMahon, MA, CCC-SLP and Rebecca Thomas, MOT*

The holidays are here and families will gather around a table of food. However, getting a toddler to eat a well-balanced and healthy meal or snack can be a challenge for any parent.

The most common feeding issues include difficulties coordinating their oral motor skills and difficulties with sensory processing.

Oral-motor skills include moving the tongue and lips in coordinated movements to bite and chew food.

*(continued on page 3)*
Developmental Toy Presentation

Presented by:
Bright Beginnings, LLC
DSAM
The Village Toymaker

On Tuesday, November 16, the Bright Beginnings team partnered with The Down Syndrome Association of Memphis and the Mid-South and The Village Toymaker to provide a developmental toy presentation at the Memphis Central Library.

Each therapist from Bright Beginnings created a list of toys targeting specific developmental skills from birth to early elementary school ages. Pat Monz, the owner of The Village Toymaker, loaded her van full of these wonderful developmental toys and brought them to the library for a hands-on demonstration.

As therapists, we are often asked, “which toy should I get?” or “where did you get that toy?” This time of year is a great time to look for wonderful toys that your child will enjoy and you know these toys will benefit your child’s development.

The handouts that were provided during the developmental toy presentation are available on our website: www.bbmemphis.com and at The Village Toymaker store locations. You can find the store closest to you by visiting their website: www.villagetoymaker.com or by calling 901-761-1734.
If your child coughs, chokes or gags while eating or drinking, please consult with your child’s speech-language pathologist and pediatrician. These signs may indicate the need for a “swallow study” to fully evaluate your child’s swallowing safety.

Others may have sensory issues surrounding feeding. They may be sensitive to food textures and reject all foods that are mushy or crunchy. Some are sensitive to temperatures or even strong smells. Many toddlers may reject foods on sight, or are resistant to trying anything unfamiliar.

The reasons behind eating difficulties can be as varied as the children themselves, but the treatment is the same – positive, guided interactions with a variety of foods in a supportive environment. Children also need to be taught and encouraged to appropriately refuse foods they are not ready to try. Force feeding should never be an option.

Dr. Kay Toomey, a psychologist and creator of the SOS (Sequential Oral Sensory) Approach to Feeding, has developed the following strategies for parents to use at home (Toomey, 2004):

**Structure:** We provide safety and routine to children by offering meals at the same time, in the same place, with the same people. These routines and scheduled meals and snacks provide awareness of the sensations of fullness and hunger.

**Social Modeling:** Children learn by watching others. Having regular family meals where everyone eats the same foods offers children a chance to interact with family members and a variety of foods in a supportive environment.

**Positive Reinforcement:** Children who have issues with eating have often had unpleasant or even frightening experiences while eating. We want to create a positive, supportive environment for all children. Praise any and all interactions with foods by clapping, cheering and/or offering verbal praise. Positive reinforcement avoids the negative effects caused by punishment (such as the loss of appetite) and decreases attention seeking through negative behaviors.

**Making Foods Manageable:** Provide food in small pieces or thin strips that can be easily held and chewed by toddlers. Toddlers can be visually overwhelmed fairly easily. We want to limit the number of food presented to the child by offering no more than 3 different foods on one plate. Include foods that the child likes and eats all the time, along with at least 1 challenging food at each meal and snack. Present the food repeatedly – it takes 10 to 15 different interactions, on separate occasions, with the same food, for that food to become familiar to the child.

**Accessing Cognitive Skills:** Use lots of language and descriptive words to describe the food – crunchy, chewy, cold, etc. This provides information about the food before the child touches it or tastes it. This increases familiarity with the food (and provides language stimulation, too!).

**Key Phrases:** Provide clear instructions to the child – this avoids the battle of wills at the table. Avoid the words “no,” “stop” and “don’t” at the table and provide acceptable, alternative behavior. If the child throws food on the floor, you could say, “food stays on the table” or “you can push your plate away if you are done.”

If you are concerned about your child’s feeding skills, please contact Bright Beginnings, LLC at (901) 309-3077. We will be glad to answer your questions and discuss any concerns you may have.

**References:**

Mary Fleck is a developmental specialist at Bright Beginnings. She has been providing support and education services to children and their families for over 11 years.

Mary received her Master’s degree in Special Education with a primary focus on Early Intervention in 2004. Since then, she has worked with numerous children individually and in a classroom setting.

She started working at Bright Beginnings in September 2010. At Bright Beginnings, Mary provides individual developmental therapy to children from birth to elementary school ages. She is also the Potty Training ™ consultant and offers behavior modification and shadowing services.

Mary administers developmental assessments and provides support to parents during IFSP and IEP meetings when requested. She also assists families through the completion of the intake process.

You can contact Mary Fleck by calling the Bright Beginnings office at (901) 309-3077. Her e-mail address is: mary.fleck@bbmemphis.com.