

**FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
REMARKS FOR CHILDREN'S MERCY HOSPITAL ANNOUNCEMENT
KANSAS CITY, MO
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Thank you. I'm delighted to be here and to join all of you for this important announcement. I'd like to thank Children's Mercy Hospital -- especially Mr. Oliver, Dr. Kilo [KY - low] and my old friend Rand O'Donnell -- for inviting me to be here today. I'm also glad Adele Hall, who has long been a generous and committed patron of this hospital, could be with us today.

The initiative we are here to announce and support can make a tremendous difference in the lives of the children of Kansas City. As many of you know, new research has shown that talking and reading to infants and toddlers is vital to their neurological, intellectual, and emotional development. Time spent sharing a favorite book not only strengthens the bond between a parent and child, it enriches a child's vocabulary, prepares him or her for reading, and literally helps a baby's brain grow.

Unfortunately, too many children are still missing this early stimulation. That's why I'm delighted that Children's Mercy Hospital is making its program to prescribe daily reading to parents, infants and children a hospital-wide and community-wide effort. I thank Dr. Wendy Turnbull for pioneering this program.

Doctors are often the first professionals our infants and toddlers see on a regular basis. While parents may not take a child to a library or a preschool program until he or she is three, they will most likely take that child to a doctor or nurse for vaccinations and checkups. These regular visits present doctors with important opportunities to instill good reading and learning habits -- along with good health habits -- in parents and children.

The initiative at Children's Mercy, inspired by the American Library Association's Born to Read and the national Reach Out and Read programs, will make reading a part of every visit to the doctor. Doctors and nurses can use the authority and influence of those white uniforms and stethoscopes to encourage parents and children to read aloud as often as possible. And research has shown that these prescriptions are followed: Parents and children who are given books by their doctors are more likely to read aloud at home.

I am pleased the Kansas University Children's Center will also be starting its own Reach Out and Read program.

And I thank the libraries of Kansas City for being an important partner in Children's Mercy's effort, from providing applications for library cards in clinic waiting rooms to encouraging everyone in the community to take advantage of their immense resources. For this effort to succeed and reach every child, it will take the participation of everyone in the community. It will require volunteers to read to children in waiting rooms, individuals and

businesses to donate books to the program, and of course, more and more pediatricians in the community to join Children's Mercy in its efforts.

This Spring, the President and I will be hosting a White House Conference on Early Learning and the Brain to explore how parents and educators can best use new research on early childhood development.

Over the years I have met parents who have told me they never really talked to their babies because they thought the infants were too young to understand what they were saying. I've met parents who believed that they could not read well enough to read a book to a child.

Children's Mercy's initiative will help parents who want to improve their reading skills enroll in local literacy programs. But we have to help parents understand that, no matter their educational level or reading ability, they can stimulate their children's intellectual potential by talking to and reading to their children, even when they stumble over a few words here or there. Most likely, their children won't even notice. But they *will* notice the power of reading and books to take them on fascinating adventures and introduce them to interesting ideas.

Just recently, I announced a nationwide effort to make sure that initiatives that encourage early reading touch every city and every household in our country. And I want to thank the American Library Association and Reach Out and Read, which is the brainchild of Dr. Barry Zuckerman, for being leaders in this task. There are few efforts that I believe could make a more dramatic difference over the next 10 years in this country than to persuade parents of all educational and economic backgrounds to take this mission of reading to and talking with their babies seriously.

And if we can encourage every pediatrician in this country to begin prescribing as many books as they do medicines and to create waiting rooms where, instead of worrying about upcoming shots, children will be engrossed in tales by Dr. Seuss and Maurice Sendak, then our future will indeed be bright.

I thank all of you for doing your part.

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