

“Talking Is Teaching: Talk, Read, Sing”

Talk, Read, Sing Intervention at UCSF Benioff Children’s Hospital Oakland

SO SMALL TO FAIL



July 2016



ABOUT TOO SMALL TO FAIL

Too Small to Fail, a joint initiative of the Clinton Foundation and The Opportunity Institute, is leading a public awareness and action campaign to promote the importance of early brain and language development and to empower parents with tools to talk, read, and sing with their young children from birth. Today, almost 60 percent of children in the United States start kindergarten unprepared, lagging behind their peers in critical language, math, and social-emotional skills. Through partnerships with pediatricians, hospitals, faith-based leaders, community based organizations, businesses, entertainment industry

leaders, and others, *Too Small to Fail* is meeting parents where they are to help them prepare their children for success in school and beyond. Whether at the pediatrician's office or the playground, *Too Small to Fail* aims to make small moments big by creating opportunities for meaningful interactions anytime, anywhere.

Learn more at toosmall.org. Find resources for parents and caregivers at talkingisteaching.org or on Facebook (facebook.com/2smalltofail), Twitter ([@2SmalltoFail](https://twitter.com/2SmalltoFail)), and Instagram (instagram.com/2smalltofail).

Too Small to Fail is a joint initiative of the Clinton Foundation and The Opportunity Institute.



“Talking is Teaching: Talk, Read, Sing” is a public awareness and action campaign led by *Too Small To Fail*. This evaluation was conducted by UCSF Philip R. Lee Institute for Health Studies, based on a partnership with UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital.

UCSF Philip R. Lee Institute for
Health Policy Studies


UCSF Benioff Children's
Hospitals

INTRODUCTION

“Talking is Teaching: Talk, Read, Sing” is a public education and action campaign intended to equip parents and caregivers with the tools they need to increase early brain and language development among 0-5-year-old children. One strategy of the campaign is to enlist the help of trusted messengers to spread information about early literacy and brain development, and to motivate parents and caregivers to engage in language-rich interactions like talking, reading, and singing more with their young children starting at birth. This report presents evaluation findings from a partnership between the *Too Small to Fail* initiative and UCSF Benioff Children’s Hospital Oakland to bring positive messages, prompts and materials to low-income families in Oakland. The evaluation, conducted by the UCSF Philip R. Lee Institute for Health Policy Studies, suggests that hospitals and clinics are promising settings in which to influence parent and caregiver behavior and provide critical information related to the early brain development of young children.

Over the course of 2015, parents and caregivers of children under 24 months of age who visited the pediatric primary care clinic at UCSF Benioff Children’s Hospital Oakland were invited to participate in a study of early literacy. Consenting individuals were interviewed before their child’s doctor visit about their awareness of early literacy development and their regular activities with their child. During the medical appointment, their child’s pediatrician relayed messages and gave them tote bags with a range of conversation prompts and materials focused on early brain and language development. A second interview was conducted with these parents at the conclusion of the visit. Finally, a third interview was conducted several weeks later. See appendix for more information about the survey sample and the methodology of this research.



PERCEIVED IMPORTANCE OF TALKING, READING AND SINGING

Even before pediatricians introduced the campaign materials, **almost all parents reported it is important to talk, read, and sing to children:** 57% described these activities as “extremely important,” 37% as “very important,” and 6% as “important.” No respondents described talking, reading and singing as not important.

When asked to describe why these activities are important, parents and caregivers offered a wide variety of reasons. The most frequent responses had to do with learning and academic skills, suggesting that parents and caregivers have some awareness of the importance of brain development at the earliest ages. (This question was open-ended; responses were categorized in the analysis of findings.) See figure 1 below.

Pre-Intervention Frequency & Onset of Activities

Prior to meeting with the doctor, parents and caregivers were asked to describe how frequently they talk, read and sing to their child. Talking and singing are behaviors these families engage in most, according to these results; reading was the behavior engaged in the least. Over a quarter of interviewed parents said they read rarely or never to their young children.

Fig 1. Why is it important to talk, read and sing?

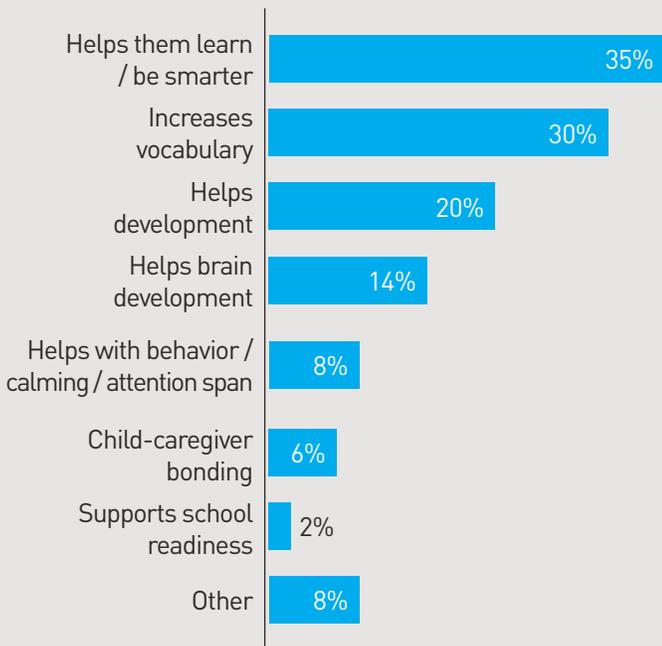


Fig 2. On average, how often do you talk, read or sing to your child?

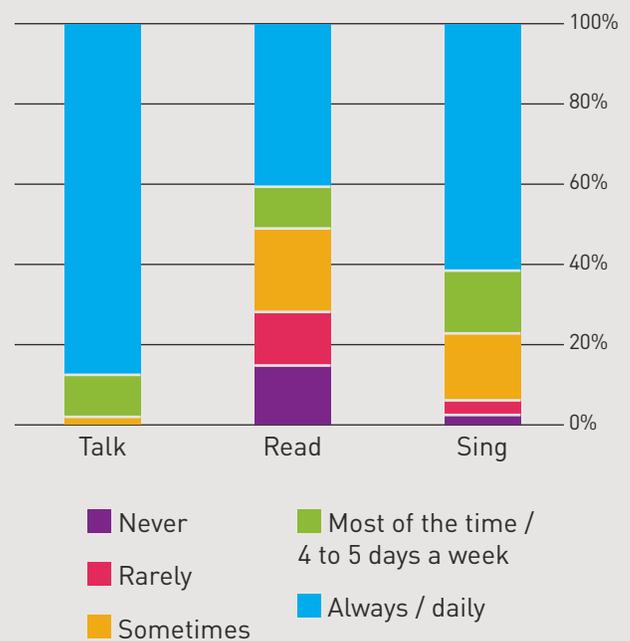


Fig 3. What was the earliest age you remember starting to talk, read & sing with your child?

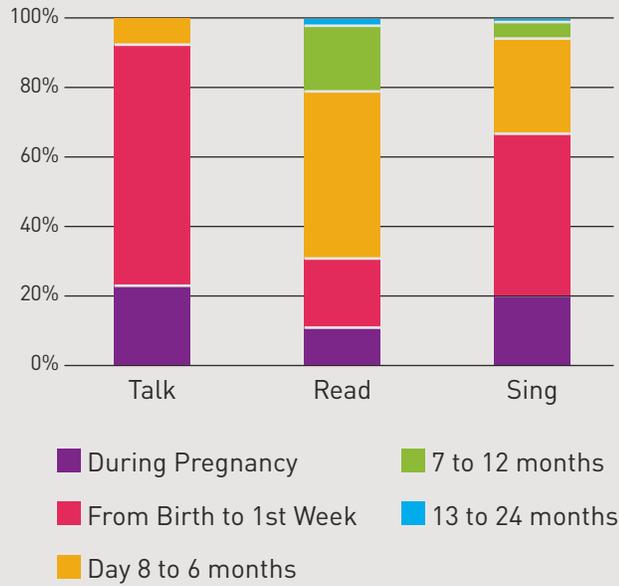
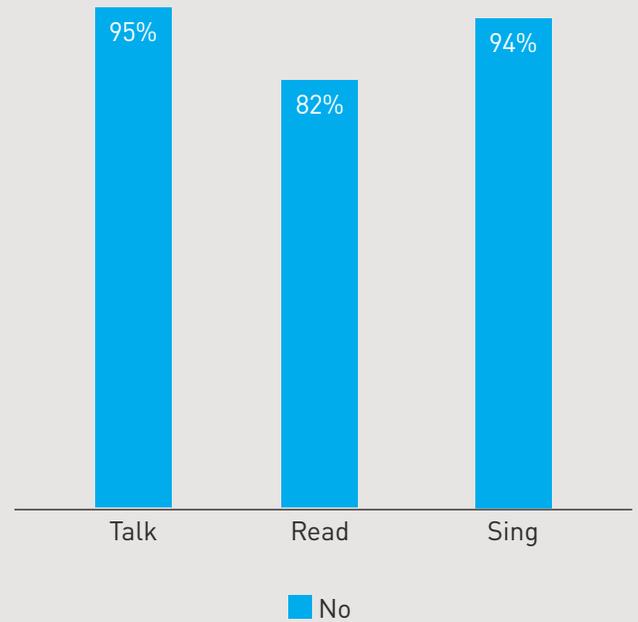


Fig 4. Is it hard to talk, read or sing with your child?



Consistent with these findings, parents and caretakers seem to be comfortable talking and singing to their young children more than reading. Ninety-two percent of parents and caregivers said they began talking to their infant, and 67% said they began singing to their infant, in or before the first week of life. Reading seems to begin later for most parents.

Respondents were asked whether there are challenges that prevent them from talking, reading or singing. The overwhelming majority of respondents said no. Of those who indicated there were such barriers, the most frequent was related to other obligations (such as work, school, chores or other children). Other barriers identified included the behavior of the child, and the caregiver feeling stressed, tired or unavailable.

PREVIOUS EXPOSURE TO TALK, READ, SING MESSAGES

Doctors were trained to provide messages about the importance of talking, reading and singing, as well as model those behaviors, and to distribute the tote bag materials. (For more information about the materials and the trainings, see appendix.) At the conclusion of the visit, **over half (61%) of all respondents reported that they learned something new from the visit.** Latino and Spanish-speaking parents and caregivers were more likely to say they learned something new from the doctor than other groups (76%).

Most respondents who said they had learned something new described the new content as information related to the importance of talking, reading and singing, and the link between those activities and early brain development and language acquisition.

Fig 5. Did you feel like you learned anything new from the doctor?

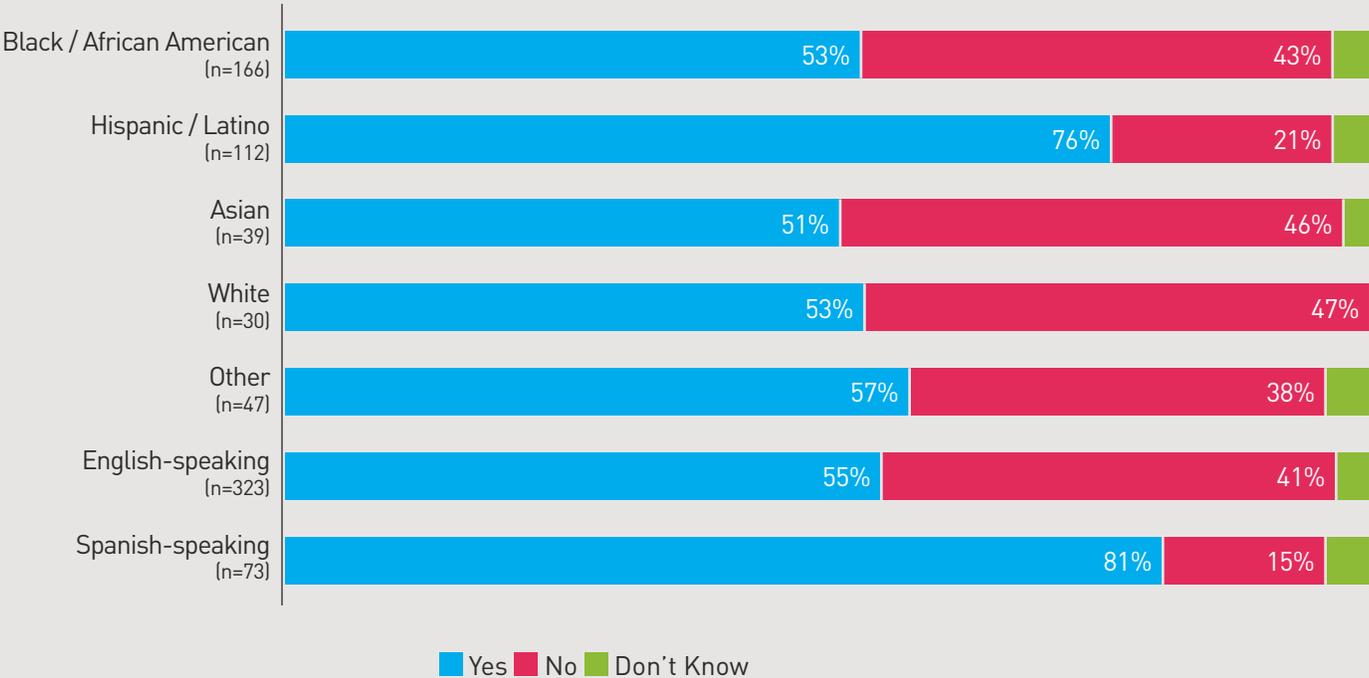
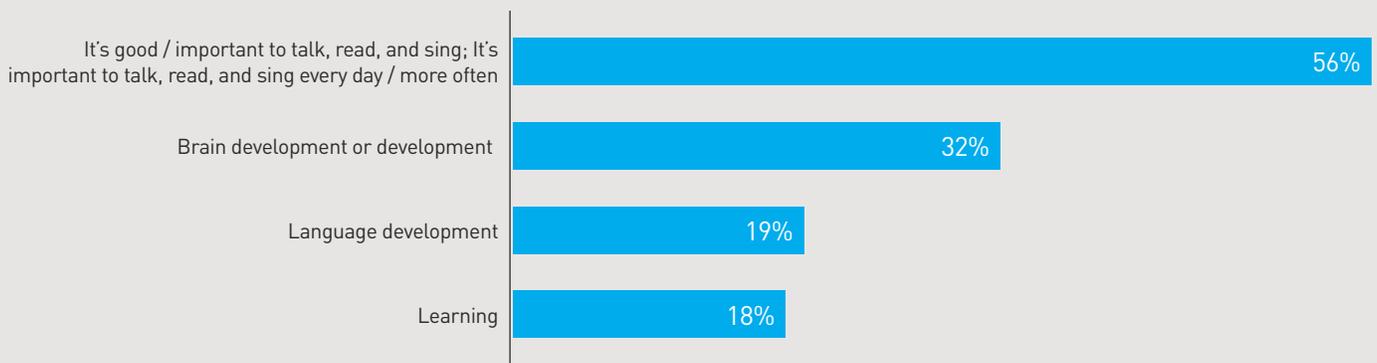


Fig 6. What did you learn that was new?



Almost two-thirds (65%) of respondents said they had heard about the importance of talking, reading and singing to children prior to the doctor's visit. This rate was somewhat higher among the Spanish-speaking respondents (71%). The most common sources of information included commercials on TV (41%), family and friends (31%), The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, or WIC (22%),

and daycare or school (19%). Spanish speakers were more likely to identify commercials on TV as the most common source of other information on this topic, whereas African Americans and Whites reported they heard this information from family or friends. The numbers of participants divided by racial and ethnic group are not large enough to ensure that these results are generalizable, however.

EFFECTS ON BEHAVIOR

The Talking Is Teaching: Talk, Read, Sing campaign seeks to affect behavior by supplying parents and caregivers with information, tools and nudges. Interviews conducted just after the visit with the pediatrician and those conducted several weeks later provide some indication of behavior change related to this intervention.

Respondents reacted favorably to the materials provided in the clinic setting: 100% of respondents reported they would use at least some of the items when they got home, with the children's book (76%) and CD (66%) being the most popular.

Just after receiving the messages from the doctor, 65% of respondents reported they planned to act differently based on the information they had received. Spanish-speakers and Latino respondents were more likely to report they planned to act differently compared to other groups. Parents who said they would change their behavior were most likely to say they would read more often (69%).

The interviewers asked respondents if there were other resources that would help them talk, read or sing more to their children. Just over half (52%) said additional books or materials, 16% said more time, and 13% said more parent resources.

Respondents were contacted several weeks after the doctor's visit for a third interview.

Responses to these questions suggest that parents and caregivers had retained and were using campaign messages in their everyday lives. Almost all (96%) respondents replied that they remembered the doctor talking about the importance of talking, reading and singing to children. When asked to describe those messages, almost 40% of respondents independently recalled that it's good or important to talk, read and sing. **All parents and caregivers interviewed said they expected to talk, read, and sing more to their children in the future.**

The materials provided to families are valuable to them. Ninety-eight percent of respondents said they were still using items from the tote bag with their children, and 57% of respondents were using the items from the tote bag with other children in the household, as well.

Finally, respondents clearly see a connection between talking, reading, and singing, and their relationship with their child. Ninety-three percent of respondents reported that their relationship with their child had been positively affected by talking, reading, and singing. See figure 9 for more details.

Fig 7. Which items will you use when you go home?

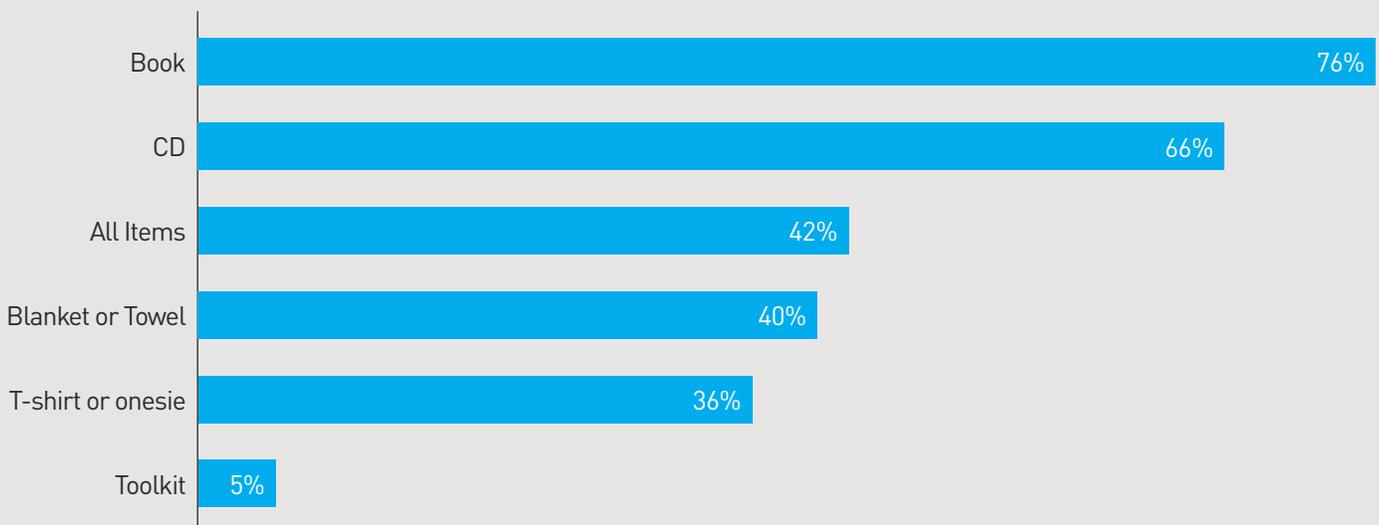


Fig 8. Do you think you will do anything new or different based on the information the doctor provided?

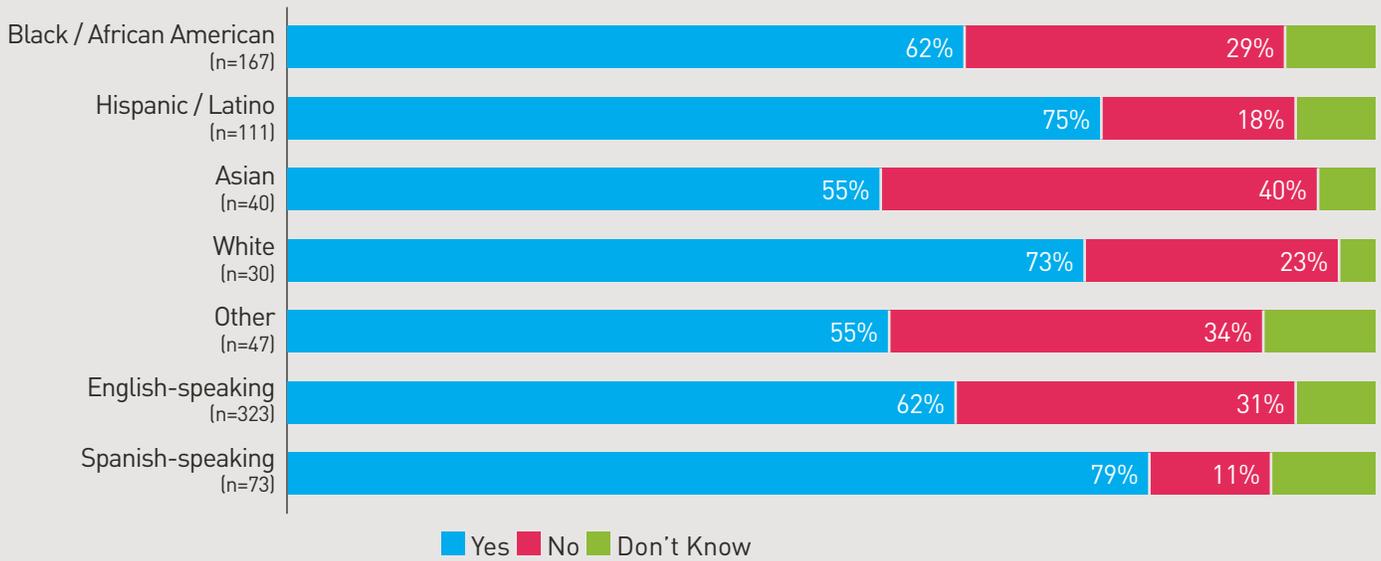
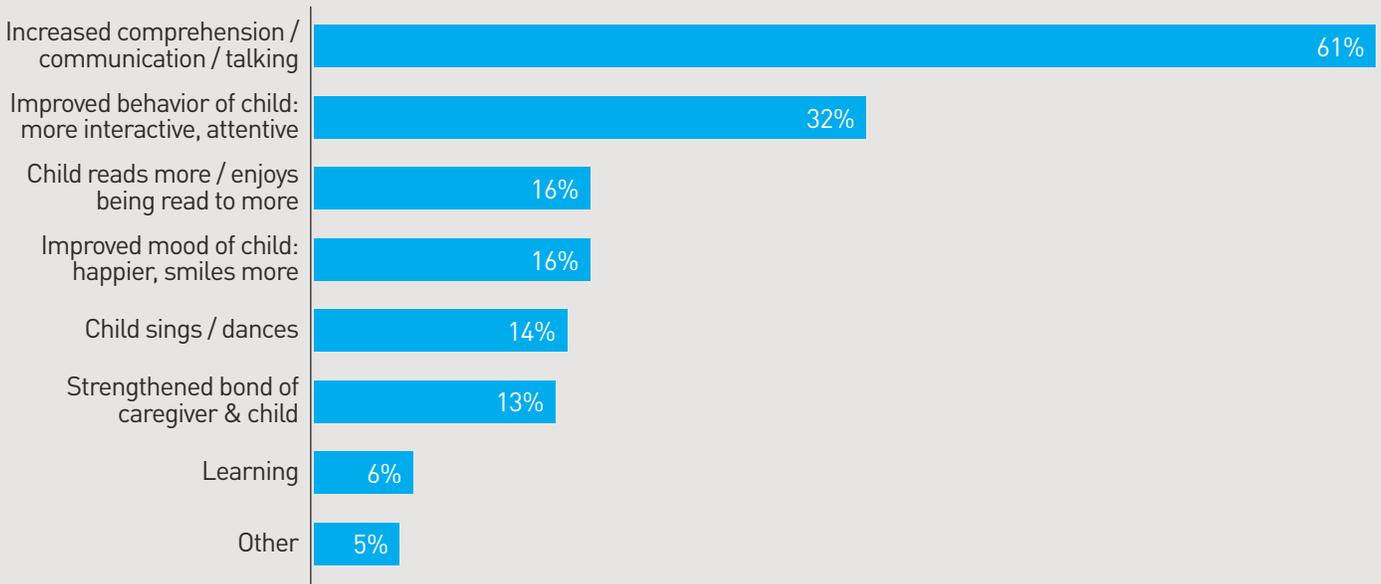


Fig 9. How has your relationship changed since talking, reading, and singing?



CONCLUSION

These evaluation findings suggest that parents and caregivers have begun to learn the message that talking, reading, and singing to children is important, though they still need more information about how those activities prepare their children for future learning experiences. Families found books the most used item among those distributed, and in other responses, many families described wanting more books. According to their own reports, parents begin reading to their children later than they begin talking and singing. Combined, these findings suggest that offering families with newborns books along with prompts about talking and singing is a promising method for increasing these behaviors and fills a real need that will promote early literacy skills among children in low-income families.

Among this sample of families, the responses of Latino and Spanish-speaking parents and caregivers are distinct from other groups. They were most likely to say they had learned something new from the doctor's visit, and most likely to say they would behave differently as a result. Ironically, Latinos were also the most likely group to say they had heard about the importance of talking, reading and singing prior to this intervention. National research suggests that Latino parents are less likely to talk, read or sing to their children than other racial/ethnic groups.¹ These findings provide some insights about how and where to target similar efforts to increase early literacy interactions.

The *Too Small to Fail* campaign is conducting studies similar to this one in other communities, and will release additional evaluation reports to add to the body of knowledge about how best to reach families with positive parenting messages that motivate parents and caregivers to engage in developmentally appropriate early literacy activities. These findings suggest that a hospital clinic setting is one in which parents and caregivers are receptive to learning new information, appreciate receiving resources that promote early literacy, and are willing to act on information provided by a trusted messenger.

Acknowledgements:

Sincere thanks go to all those who supported the work involved in conducting the "Talking is Teaching: Talk, Read, Sing" campaign and evaluation. This would not be possible without the dedicated leadership and residents at UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital Oakland (BCHO), researchers at Philip R. Lee Institute for Health Policy Studies (IHPS), and the participating families whose children received care at BCHO. We are especially grateful to the following people for their commitment and support: Dr. Bert Lubin, Dr. Dayna Long, Dr. Gena Lewis, Dr. Patricia Chase, Dr. Kelley Meade, Susan Greenwald, Mindy Benson, Christine Schudel, Maoya Alqassari, Rigo Del Toro and their team at BCHO; and Dr. Claire Brindis, Dr. Dana Hughes, and Jasmine Pettis at IHPS. We are extraordinarily grateful for the generous gift from Lynne and Marc Benioff. Without their support, none of this would be possible.

APPENDIX: DETAILS ON INTERVENTION AND SURVEY SAMPLE

Hospital leadership and *Too Small to Fail* staff jointly presented a training on the “Talking is Teaching; Talk, Read, Sing” campaign, along with Reach Out and Read, to medical residents at UCSF Benioff Children’s Hospital Oakland (BCHO).² The training included information about the underlying research base for early literacy and talking, reading and singing; the research on the role of pediatricians as trusted messengers for families; as well as Oakland-specific data on the amount of talking, reading and singing that Oakland families reported engaging in, based on a phone and internet survey conducted by Lake Research in 2014. Campaign organizers unveiled and described the toolkits, and prepared doctors to act as messengers with families during their regularly scheduled visits. Key messages included: acknowledging families’ strengths and encouraging the talking, reading and singing they are already doing with their children; making the brain research accessible and emphasizing the importance of engaging during the earliest years; and emphasizing the power that families have to make a difference in their child’s early learning.

BCHO project assistants ensured that medical residents knew which patients qualified for the study, and had tote bags and talking points ready for each eligible well-child visit.

Talking is Teaching toolkits included:

- A reusable tote bag, branded with the Talking is Teaching logo and a brief message on the bag about the critical period of the early years
- Infant and toddler clothing (onesies and t-shirts), branded with the Talking is Teaching logo and messaging
- A branded blanket and/or bath towel
- Age-appropriate book(s), provided by Scholastic and Highlights
- Sesame Street tools:
 - “Talking is Teaching” Family Moments Resource Guide
 - “Word on the Street” cards
 - Silly Songs CD
- A postcard to sign up for Text4Baby (a free text message service for pregnant mothers or parents with infants under one year of age that offers three free text messages per week with tips relating to a baby’s developmental stages).

The sample for this research included 396 respondents in total, though not all of these respondents provided answers to every question. Three hundred and twenty-two of the interviews were conducted in English; 73 in Spanish. Ninety-two percent of respondents were female; 42% were Black or African American; 28% were Hispanic or Latino, 10% were Asian and 8% were White. The average age of the respondents was 29.7 years.

Sample Demographics

Race / Ethnicity	N	%
American Indian or Alaska Native	2	1%
Asian	40	10%
Black or African American	167	42%
Hispanic or Latino	112	28%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	11	3%
White	30	8%
Other	33	8%
Elected to be interviewed in Spanish	73	18.4%
Elected to be interviewed in English	322	81.5%

NOTES

1. Child Trends DataBank. (2012). Reading to young children. Retrieved from <http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=reading-to-young-children>.
2. Attending physicians, social workers, and other hospital staff were also briefed about the purpose and materials throughout the course of the project.