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## New study shows children's book series has a positive impact on parenting practices

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**75% of parents report a change in how they deal with behavioral challenges after reading Free Spirit's ParentSmart/KidHappy™ series**

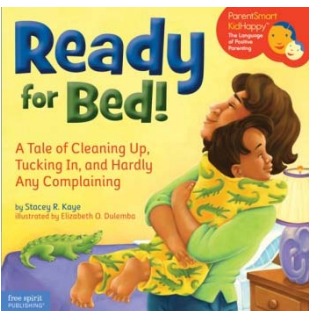
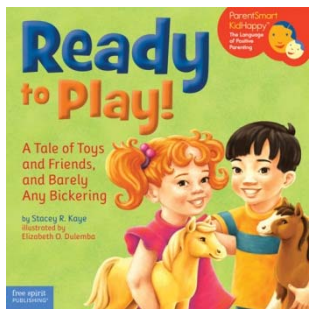
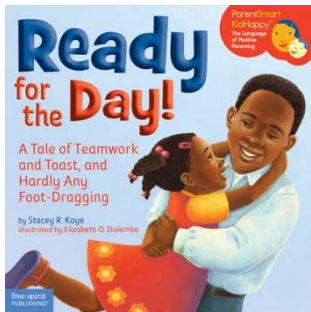
A study published in the *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics* shows that children's books may be an effective tool in educating parents on how to foster appropriate behavior in children. In "[A Pilot Study Using Children's Books to Understand Caregiver Perceptions of Parenting Practices](#)," researchers report that the [ParentSmart/KidHappy](#) series by Stacey Kaye (2008 and 2009, Free Spirit Publishing) was used to evaluate if children's books can help pediatricians deliver parenting support and advice. The results show that parents who read one of the three picture books, which use specific language and illustrate positive parenting strategies, were more likely to report changes in interactions with their children one month after.

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Every parent of a young child has experienced moments of exasperation in trying to get a child to sleep or ready for school in the morning. Where can parents turn for advice? While well-child visits are an ideal time for pediatricians to discuss parenting practices and offer support, time constraints and the complex nature of children's behavior issues make it difficult for them to do so effectively. Dr. Nerissa Bauer, a behavioral pediatrician, assistant professor at Indiana University School of Medicine, and the lead author of the study, wanted to test a possible way to overcome these challenges. In the study, one of the three ParentSmart/KidHappy books (*Ready for the Day!*, *Ready to Play!*, or *Ready for Bed!*) was read aloud to the parent and child by a research assistant while waiting for the pediatrician, then given to parents to take home. Parents were called one month later to find out if they used the books and if they perceived any changes in interactions with their child.

The research team chose the ParentSmart/KidHappy series for the study because the books illustrate everyday scenarios that can challenge parents and young children: getting ready in the morning, sharing toys, and going to bed at night. Along with simple dialogue and full-color illustrations, the books include color-coded text to cue parents about positive language to use with their children. The ParentSmart/KidHappy series teaches four positive parenting techniques: (1) how to validate a child's feelings, (2) how to offer choices, (3) how to promote problem-solving skills, and (4) how to encourage alternative behavior. While most health and educational brochures are written at a reading level of grades 6 to 16, the ParentSmart/KidHappy books have a reading level of early second grade, making them more accessible for adults with literacy barriers and making it easier for caregivers to pass the skills on to others in the family.

Although pediatricians routinely distribute children's books to families as a part of literacy programs such as Reach Out and Read, prior to this study no research has been done to understand how children's books with parenting content might improve a parent's knowledge of healthy parenting practices.

The pilot study was conducted in three pediatric clinics serving lower-income families living in central Indianapolis. The 100 caregivers enrolled in the study were primarily young, single mothers of 4- to 7-year-old children.

**PARENTSMART/KIDHAPPY  
SERIES BY  
STACEY KAYE**

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When they entered the study, 91 percent of parents reported having concerns regarding their child's behavior. One month later, 75 percent reported a change in how they interacted with their children and in how they dealt with the behavioral challenge using a technique or example they had seen in the book. One parent reported that what she learned about offering choices in *Ready for the Day!* helped ease the morning routine, noting that her daughter "picks out her own hair accessories now—it helps get the flow of the day going. . . . It goes faster now when I give her that option to choose." Another parent said the problem-solving technique in *Ready to Play!*, which models empathy and conflict resolution, helped her son and daughter reflect on their feelings, stop arguing, and play cooperatively. A third parent reported that reading *Ready to Play!* helped her daughter get along better with peers, commenting, "She's playing with other kids and playing differently than she did before. I explain things to her when I read the book, so she knows how to act when she plays."

Parents also reported learning to handle their own emotions in the midst of behavior challenges. Said one, "It showed me as a parent how you can talk it out with them instead of ripping the toy out of their hand and putting them in time out. [It] showed me new parenting techniques that I'm really trying to use."

Seventy one percent of parents said they learned something new from the children's book after hearing the book read aloud. Of those, 66% were able to identify a specific technique or provide an example illustrated in the story. "Parents often fall back on their own childhood experiences—'what they know,'" said Dr. Bauer. "These books helped parents learn alternate techniques that were simple to use and helped to diffuse common behavior challenges."

The pilot study concluded that distributing children's books with parenting content is a practical and innovative way for pediatricians to positively influence how parents deal with common behavior challenges and warrants further study. The ParentSmart/KidHappy series has since been used in a second study, which builds on these findings. The results are forthcoming.

Of parents studied:

- 91% reported concerns about their child's behavior
- 61% reported a definite intent to change how they handled the behavioral challenge with their child
- 71% reported learning something from the books and of those, 66% identified a specific technique illustrated in the story
- After one month of reading the book, 75% reported a change in how they interacted with their children and in how they dealt with the behavioral challenge using a technique they had seen in the book

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### **About Free Spirit Publishing ([www.freespirit.com](http://www.freespirit.com))** **Meeting kids' social, emotional, and educational needs since 1983**

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