What’s Buzzing with the National Federation of the Blind?

The National Federation of the Blind’s annual National Convention is coming! The convention will take place July 10-15 in Orlando, Florida. There will be workshops for families, sponsored by the National Organization of Parents of Blind Children, all day on Monday, July 10. Some of the workshops geared specifically for families with young children include:

* Orientation and Mobility for Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers
* You are Your Child’s First Teacher: Helping Your Child Learn about the World in Early Childhood
* It’s Recess Time: Encouraging Your Child to Participate in Recreational and Social Activities

There will be many other workshops offered as well.

On July 11, there will be two cane walks; pair up with a qualified instructor and learn how to help your child become a more confident cane user, or explore the cane with your child for the first time.

There are many other events for families throughout the week including choosing free Braille books at the Braille Book Fair, networking with other parents at the annual meeting of the National Organization of Parents of Blind Children, children’s activities at NFB Camp (convention child care), workshops on creating goals for an Individualized Family Service Plan, a make and take session about ways to incorporate Braille easily into home and school, and so much more!

Convention gives you and your child opportunities to connect with other families, and equally as important, to meet and learn from hundreds of successful blind adults who are living the lives they want. It is truly a one-of-a-kind life changing experience.

For more convention information, please visit <http://www.nfb.org/convention>.

I hope we will see you in Florida!

Literacy Hints from the Hive

April showers do bring May flowers but they can also cause a lot of boredom in the process! It is no fun being stuck inside on a rainy day. Here are two activities you can do to stop the boredom and help your child with literacy skills at the same time.

Create a Pasta Box -This is a fun activity for toddlers, preschoolers, and may even be fun for children who are school age. You will need a storage bin with a tight fitting lid. I prefer a bin that is long and low; bins that are designed to slip under a bed are a perfect size and height. You will also need a large quantity of different types of uncooked pasta. Wagon wheels, bow tie, spiral , or tube shaped pasta is great, but whatever you can find, and the more variety, the better. Pour all of the pasta into the bin. Then, encourage your child to play in the pasta. You can provide wooden spoons, bowls, buckets, small shovels, or other tools to increase the fun and play. As your child plays, talk about the different properties of the noodles. Talk about the different shapes, textures, sizes, and even colors of the noodles. You can also have your child sort the different types of noodles into different containers, and/or create patterns with the noodles. “Please give me a wagon wheel, a bow, and a spiral. Then another wagon wheel, bow, and spiral.”

Although they are playing, this activity does a lot to help prepare young children for reading or reinforce reading concepts. It helps with fine motor skills, distinguishing different attributes of an object by touch, pattern creation and recognition, and may help with hand strength if your child does a lot of digging and scooping.

Play Bathtub or Water Braille-You will need six cups and water for this activity. I invented this game with my daughter during bath time but it can also be played using water in the kitchen sink, or on sunny days, with water from a water table or wading pool. Arrange the six cups in the shape of a Braille cell—two columns of three cups each. Take turns with your child filling containers with water to form different Braille letters. For example, if you wanted to make the letter B, the first two cups in the left hand column should be filled with water. To make a letter W, the second cup on the left should be filled, and the three cups on the right should be filled.

Even older children can enjoy this game. Ask them to create contractions such as ST, GH, or ED.  
Use a larger number of cups in order to make more complex contractions or even longer words.

Travel Tales

One of my favorite children’s’ songs is “Fast and Slow (The Rabbit and the Turtle)” by The Laurie Berkner Band. If you’re not familiar with this song, you can listen to it here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oZgHeJ6yO1c>

This song always reminds me of my mom. When I was growing up, my mom had a saying she used often, it was: “Do this quick like a bunny!” This is the kind of person my mom is. She is an early riser. She always has a project to do and she always likes to do as many things as she can as fast as she can. Luckily for me however, my mom could, and still can, slow down (like a turtle). This was extremely important for me as a blind child. My mom always made time to show me things in my world when I was young. She showed me flowers growing, lifted me up to feel buds on the trees, and let me touch moss and other plants when we walked in the woods. She also showed me man-made objects, such as fire hydrants, bike racks, corner mailboxes, pay phones, and even let me touch a sewer drain or two. While my mom showed me these things, she would explain what they were, talk about their color, and answer any questions I had about them. Of course, she couldn’t take time every day to slow down like a turtle. I am the youngest of four children, so there were many days when we all had to go “quick like bunnies” from one activity to another. But she certainly made an effort to show me things at least a couple of times a week, and if I had a question about something, even if she couldn’t show and explain something to me at that moment, my mom usually remembered my questions, and when we had time to truly explore, she would take me back to show me what I had been asking about.

Now that spring is here, I hope you will take some time to take “slow turtle walks” with your blind child. I know often we all need to get places “quick like bunnies,” but all kids need time with us when we slow down and really let them explore the world around them. Take the time to let your child touch things. Talk about their color, texture, and all of the different parts of each object. Also, talk with your child in order to find out what questions he or she has about the world. A friend of mine recently shared that her blind daughter was curious about how an ATM worked. My friend had never realized her daughter had questions about this, so they went to the ATM, she let her daughter explore it. These “slow turtle walks” will make very special memories for both you and your child. And, more important, your child will gain so much knowledge about the world they cannot receive in any other way. You are your child’s first teacher. Take time when you can to slow down and watch your child learn. And, as the song says, “other times you can go fast!”

A Taste of Honey

Here’s a fun spring craft to do with your child—scented spring ornaments. You will need

1 cup salt

1 cup water

2 cups flour

Essential oil. Vanilla or some other type of baking extract may also work to provide the scent

Spring themed cookie cutters—egg, bunny, chick, tree, or anything else that you would like.

One straw

Ribbon

Paints, markers, stickers, or anything else that will add texture and decoration to the ornaments

Directions: Mix salt, water, and flour to make the dough. If the dough is sticky, you may add a bit more flour so it is easier to work with. Let your child help you measure the ingredients, pour them into the bowl, and mix the dough. Add two drops of essential oil. Roll out the dough on a cookie sheet and let your child use the cookie cutters to cut out the ornaments. Use the straw to make a hole in the top of each ornament. Bake at 350 degrees for 10 to 15 minutes. Add a drop of essential oil on each ornament so they will retain their smell. When the ornaments are cool, let your child paint them, color them with markers, put stickers on them, or decorate them in any other fun and creative way. Put a ribbon through the hole in each ornament so they can be hung on a door knob, a hook, or wherever you need some color. Have fun!