

Young children are naturally curious and receptive to the world around them, making the pre-school years a great time to learn about geography. I would like to briefly touch on what geography is and how adults can help young children learn geographical concepts.\*

**Geography** - a way of thinking, asking questions, and observing, and appreciating the world around us. It looks at: location; special aspects of place; patterns of movement of people, ideas, and products; and how the Earth can be divided into regions for study.

### **Ways we can help young children learn geographical concepts**

**Location**-You can help your child understand positional and directional words by using them when you talk to your child during natural activities. For example: "We are driving **east** on Speedway. We are going to turn **left** here." Please put your toys **into** the basket **on top** of the table." Other words to use include: above, below, right and left, as well as color, shape, and size words. Children will also enjoy drawing their own maps of familiar places as well as fanciful treasure maps. Mazes and puzzles are also simple ways to work on the skills needed for interpreting maps.

**Place**- Take walks in your neighborhood and city and talk about what you see. What physical aspects make your neighborhood and city unique? Hikes in our beautiful Sonoran Desert at different times of the year will beautifully illustrate what is unique about Tucson. Weather is an important part of what shapes a place. Talk about weather conditions in Tucson and what the people and animals here do to adapt to the intense heat here.

**Movement**- Talk to your child about where your ancestors were from. Did your family always live here? If they came here from somewhere else, why did they and how did they get here? When you see trains, trucks, bridges, planes and other ways people and materials move from place to place talk about what you see with your child.

**Regions** - Expose your child to stories, music, and friends of different cultures. Use words like highway, desert, river, climate, weather. Explain terms such as neighborhood, city, state, country, and continent.

Another great way to illustrate all the above concepts is to have maps, atlases and globes in your home. That way you can refer to maps naturally and your child will see them as tools to be used to help answer questions. For example, if you are going out to eat Chinese food, you can locate China on the map. If you are going to take a walk, you can look at the atlas to plan your route. If your child hears about news happening somewhere in the world, you can find it on the globe.

\*from Helping Your Child Learn Geography, U.S. Department of Education.