

A, B, C...

# LITERACY



**"The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more you learn, the more places you'll go."**

Dr. Seuss

# Literacy

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## Parent's Guide to Early Literacy Development

*A child's ability to read and write begins to develop long before entering Kindergarten. Infancy through age eight is the most important time in a child's early literacy development as they learn and develop the skills needed to be successful in school and later in life.*

According to the joint position statement of the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), most children learn to read at around age six or seven, some children learn to read at age five, and a few at age four. In order for children to develop healthy dispositions toward reading and literacy, experiences in the early years must engage children actively in the process of learning.

Early Literacy is what children know about reading and writing before they actually read and write. Research shows that children arriving at kindergarten with the following early literacy skills are more likely to be successful in learning to read and write.

- **Vocabulary Development** -- Knowing the names of things
- **Narrative Skills** -- Being able to describe things, events, and tell stories
- **Letter Knowledge** -- Understanding that each letter is unique and has a name and sound
- **Print Awareness** -- Experience with different forms of print; knowledge of how to handle books and how to follow words across a page
- **Print Motivation** -- Interest in and enjoyment from books
- **Phonological Awareness** -- Ability to hear and play with the small sounds that make up words

## What You Can Do at Home

Family members play a fundamental role in helping their children develop early literacy skills. You are your child's first teacher. Every time you interact with your child, he or she learns about communicating, listening, and working with others.

Make the most of everyday moments by talking to your child about what is happening (narrate the experience) and asking open-ended questions.

Families do things together and children learn best by doing things. Show your child that reading is a year-round activity by making reading fun and interesting. Let your child see you read. If your child views reading as a pleasant and relaxed activity, chances are he or she will

be eager to read on his or her own.

### **Infants**

Infants are learning to use their voice to communicate by crying, cooing, and babbling as well as learning to use nonverbal communication such as facial expressions, gestures, and body language. Infants learn language and communication skills from their environment and the ways people around them communicate.

- Model language and help your child understand what is happening by talking to her during all caregiving routines, such as diapering.
- Encourage your child to vocalize by imitating and repeating the sounds he makes.
- Motivate your child to communicate by making eye contact when talking to her.
- Help your child learn and respond to his name by using his name often.
- Help your child learn vocabulary by reading to her often.
- Sing songs. Music is a fun and interesting way for infants to learn language.

### **Toddlers**

Toddlers are in an exciting stage of language development. They repeat and imitate what others say, understand more when spoken to, and begin to put words together into short phrases. Vocabulary development and comprehension are most important at this stage.

- Help your child learn language in a meaningful context by talking to her about what she is doing.
- Acknowledge your child's use of language by repeating the words and phrases he says.
- Help your child learn how to build on language she knows by expanding her words into phrases and sentences.
- Help your child learn the names of things by labeling objects in his environment.
- Help develop your child's vocabulary by reading a wide variety of books together.

### **Two-Year-Olds**

Most two-year-olds expand their vocabulary from about 200 to 1000 words during this year of development. They begin to understand words, repeat words, and put words together to form sentences. Literacy and language skills emerge rapidly, so it is important for children this age to be exposed to spoken and written language on a daily basis.

- Encourage your child to talk and express ideas by engaging him in conversations.
- Model good communication skills by listening attentively and responding purposefully to your child.
- Expand your child's vocabulary by demonstrating how to add new words to familiar ones to make phrases and short sentences.
- Select books that contain movements and sounds your child can imitate or that introduce concepts such as colors, counting, and shapes.
- Provide a variety of writing tools for your child to use to experiment with writing skills.

### **Preschoolers**

A typical three-year-old is able to express herself easily using words. This increase in language and communication skills is also related to cognitive and social skill development because with

more vocabulary words, preschoolers can formulate their thoughts before speaking and talk with others more easily. Three-year-olds enjoy learning new words and typically have over 1,200 words in their vocabulary by the end of their third year.

- Talk together about why people read and what they do as they read so your child understands the purpose of reading.
- Use speech that is clear and simple for your child to model.
- Show your child you understand her by repeating and expanding on what she says.
- Develop sight-word vocabulary by pointing out print in your environment, for example, on book covers, cereal boxes, and advertisements.
- Sing simple songs and recite nursery rhymes to show rhythm and patterns of speech.
- Encourage your child to create stories with real or imaginary characters.

### **Pre-Kindergartners**

Four-year-olds' vocabularies are ever-increasing; children this age are usually able to experiment with language easily, which can add dramatic flair and personality to everyday experiences. New sounds, funny words, and easy conversation make this stage in a child's language and communication development exciting.

- Invite your child to experiment with language through active play by participating in rhyming activities and dramatizing stories.
- Encourage your child to create and tell stories to help develop new and interesting vocabulary and expressive skills.
- Promote your child's enthusiasm for reading by being aware of his attitude toward reading and encouraging him to practice pre-reading skills at his own pace when he is ready.
- Provide a wide variety of literature for your child; take a trip to your local library and invite her to select some books of interest.
- Exercise your child's imagination and listening skills by telling him stories without books or pictures.

### **School-Agers**

The language and communication skills of school-age children are continuing to grow rapidly. Younger school-age children can understand and talk in simple, short sentences. Older school-age children can understand and interpret abstract language and write complex sentences. Overall, this age is marked by a tremendous increase in vocabulary.

- Develop your child's alphabet awareness by inviting her to go on a "Letter Hunt." Provide her with a newspaper, have her select an alphabet letter, and encourage her to locate that letter where it appears in print.
- Increase your child's awareness of books and pre-writing skills by creating a blank book for him and encouraging him to draw or write in the book each day.
- Encourage your child's love of reading by providing her with a variety of appropriate fiction and non-fiction books and magazines of interest.
- Expose your child to new vocabulary and different styles of writing by reading to your child often.
- Take exploratory walks or trips together. Talk about what you see. Ask questions. Highlight any new concepts or vocabulary.

## Reading Activities at Home

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Children spend a lot of their time at home. You can support your child's learning while you do daily chores. You can invite your child to help you, or you can provide an activity for your child to do close to you. That way, you can talk and listen to your child while you work.

### Baby/Toddler

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**Pretty Picture.** Make sure your baby has interesting things to look at while you are busy around the house. A colorful picture or a vase of flowers in front of her will get her attention. Her favorite thing to look at is you! As much as possible, place her where she can see you and hear you as you work. Talk to her about what you are doing using simple language like "Watching baby, watching baby, washing dishes, watching baby!"

**Pots and Pans Music.** While you work in the kitchen you can keep your baby close. Give her some light pots and pans of different sizes. Then give her a wooden spoon. She can make music while you use words like *loud*, *soft*, *bang*, and *tap*. Show her what the words mean by using your body and voice too. For example, when you say "That's so loud!" cover your ears. When you say "That's so soft!" speak in a whisper.

**Recycle Problem-Solving.** Toddlers love to create and solve problems using simple materials. Give your child some clean recycled items like cans of different sizes. Make sure there are no sharp edges. He will spend a long time fitting the cans inside of each other. As he works, introduce words like *small*, *medium*, *large*, *inside*, and *fit*.

### Preschooler/Kindergartner

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**Super Shadows.** Place a large sheet over a table so that it hangs down around the table. Show your child how to use a flashlight safely. Invite him to go into his cave under the table to make shadows. Use words like *dark*, *light*, *bright*, *night*, *shine*, and *shadow*. Notice words that rhyme like *light*, *night*, and *bright*. Add small toys and encourage him to make shadow shapes in his cave. Notice words that start with the same sound like *shine*, *shape*, and *shadow*.

**Making Boats.** Your child can use recycled materials to make boats. Collect items like foam meat trays, small pieces of cloth, toothpicks, craft sticks, tape, bottle caps, paper, and crayons. You will also need scissors. Help your child think about how he can use these materials to make a boat. "What will you use for the *bottom* of the boat?" "Will you make a *sail*?" Then, help him to make the boat. Later, he can use it in the bathtub. "Do you think it will *float*?"

**Reading Corner.** Make a small reading corner for your child. Put pillows and a soft blanket in a corner of the room where you are working. Add some of your child's favorite books, or some new books, for him to look at. Ask him to choose a book, look at the pictures, and tell you the

story *in his own words*. Give him lots of encouragement for looking at books independently.

**Pretend Party.** Children love to play pretend. Invite your child to have a pretend birthday party. Provide paper and markers or crayons so she can make the *invitations*. "Who will you invite?" Write down the names of the friends she wants to invite. She can copy these names onto the invitations. Then decide on the *menu*. Explain that the menu means what food she will have at the party, just like the menu at a restaurant. "What will you wear to the party?" If possible, let her dress up. Then have a special snack and a party for two!

## **First-Grader/Reader-Writer**

**Scrubbing bubbles.** Older children love to help with washing dishes. Provide a stool for your child at the sink. Give him the dish soap and read the label together. For example, one phrase may be "Avoid contact with eyes." Explain what that means. Then, tell him and show him the steps for washing a dish (remove fragile items). For example: 1) Put water in the sink; 2) Add dish soap; 3) Scrub the dish; 4) Rinse the soap off; and 5) Place the dish in the drainer. Later, during a family conversation, encourage him to explain the steps for washing dishes.

**Sorting Socks.** While you fold laundry, put your child in charge of matching the socks. "Now you can match the socks in pairs." Invite him to make a plan to do it. "How do you think we should start?" Tell him and show him how to *separate* different colors and *sort* them into piles. Next, tell him and show him how to put socks together that look the same. Remind him to compare the *size* and the *design* of each sock as he puts them together.

**Make a Book.** Give your child some paper and markers or crayons. Invite her to write a story about a favorite activity, for example, playing at the park. First, talk with her about what she did. "First you played baseball with your friends. Then we looked at trees and collected leaves." Then help her put each activity into the story. Use words like *begin* and *end*. "How will you *begin* the story?" When she is finished encourage her to number the pages and decorate the cover. Help her to write her name on the cover using the words *author* and *illustrator*.

Resource:

<http://www.pbs.org/parents/education/reading-language/reading-activities/reading-activities-at-home/>

For more ideas visit: <http://www.pbs.org/>