



Early Literacy: Parents Play a Key Role

From the moment babies are born, they start developing literacy skills through their relationship with their parents. By talking, reading, singing, and playing with your infant or toddler, you provide the foundation your child will need to develop language and reading skills.

Early literacy skills include listening, speaking, reading, and writing. For children with disabilities or developmental delays, those skills may mature more slowly than they do in typically developing children. Whatever your child's level of ability, here are some things you can do every day to help your baby develop those important skills.

Encourage Listening

- Respond to your infant's cooing
- Talk to infants and toddlers
- Increase vocabulary by naming things in the child's environment (i.e., body parts, colors, clothing, food, toys)
- Sing songs and recite rhymes daily
- Make sounds of the animals you see in books
- Give simple directions to your child
- Listen to music, and move or clap to the beat
- Read stories and talk about illustrations

Encourage Speaking

- Respond to your infant's cooing
- Encourage young children to ask for what they want, not point to it
- Ask children questions about their day and about stories you read to them
- Teach children to use manners and greetings (i.e., please, thank you, hi, goodbye)
- Sing together and say rhymes
- Explain new vocabulary encountered in books or conversation
- Show interest in what children have to say
- Share storytelling time with your child
- Use communication boards or other technology with children who cannot speak
- Increase vocabulary by reading to your child daily

Encourage Reading

- Teach your child about book concepts (i.e., right-side-up, front to back, turn one page at a time, read left to right, beginning to end)
- Read daily to your children from the time they're born
- Have your child "read" a story to you
- Read, then reread, the story as often as your child requests

- Put your children’s names on their belongings so they learn to “read” their names and understand that squiggles (letters) say something important
- Teach children to read symbols and signs (i.e., McDonald’s arches)
- Read predictable books so children can join in
- Have print materials visible throughout the house (i.e., books, magazines, recipes, coupons)
- Keep a variety of children’s books accessible
- Expose your children to the many books at your local library or bookstore
- Be sure your children see you read and realize that reading is important and enjoyable
- Support the importance of reading through positive attitudes and actions
- Use Braille or talking books with children who have vision impairments
- Talk about illustrations in books

Encourage Writing

- Encourage play with toys that develop grasp and fine motor development, (i.e., puzzles, clay, beads)
- Provide daily opportunities for young children to draw or write with different instruments, (i.e., crayons, pencils, markers, pens, paintbrushes)
- Recognize the importance of drawing, coloring, and scribble writing
- Help children learn colors, shapes, sizes, names of letters
- Have children help you make grocery lists, sign birthday cards, enter events on the family calendar
- Display children’s scribbling, writing, and art work at the child’s viewing level
- Provide adaptive writing instruments, computers, or other accommodations for children who have fine-motor disabilities

Daily Activities Promote Literacy

You can incorporate these activities naturally into things you do with your young child every day. Here are some ideas to make daily routines a great time to promote literacy:

- Dressing/undressing: Name body parts, clothing, colors, numbers, concepts such as soft/scratchy or big/little
- Meal times: Name foods, talk about how food grows, the colors of food, numbers of vegetables on the plate, concepts such as hot/cold or sweet/sour
- Diapering: Tell your child what you are doing, name items you are using, such as diaper, ointment, wipes
- Bath time: Tell stories, sing songs, say rhymes, and have some bath toys related to literacy—vinyl books, tub letters, shapes, numbers
- Bedtime: Tell or read stories every night, talk about illustrations, ask older children what they think will happen next in the story
- Playtime: Talk and listen to your child, read and provide opportunities for your child to do fine motor activities and writing, sing songs
- Car time: Identify what the child is seeing (rain, snow, sunshine, trees, truck, bus, colors, signs, symbols), talk about where you are going, sing songs, say rhymes, play word games with older children
- Support the importance of reading through positive attitudes and actions
- Involve children in selecting programs from the TV listings (with parent guidance)
- Sit down with your children to look at and read their work from school

PACER's Simon Technology Center

Depending on your child's need, you may want to check out assistive devices that can help build literacy skills. PACER Center's Simon Technology Center offers free consultations by appointment to explore devices, hardware, and software that can open the world of reading and writing to your child. For example, you and your child may benefit from:

- "Page fluffers," small felt discs that separate the pages of a board book for easier turning
- Multimedia software that allows you to create digital books specific to your child's interests or needs
- Hardware tools such as alternative keyboards that allow a child with limited motor skills to more easily use the computer
- Voice output devices to help a nonverbal child communicate with others
- Workshops to explore various technologies

Remember, you are your child's best teacher. Opportunities for learning early literacy skills are everywhere you and your baby go!