

Developing Reading and Writing Skills

Information for parents of children, newborn through preschool.

What is Literacy?

Literacy is the ability to read and write. Before children learn to read and write they develop emergent literacy skills. These skills begin to develop at birth and are built on when children enter school. (Hoff, 2014, p.360). It is important for children to develop emergent literacy skills, as this sets them up to be successful learners.

Spoken language and literacy are connected. As a parent, you can encourage the development of talking and listening skills.

An important skill connected to early reading and writing is phonological awareness. This is the knowledge that distinct speech sounds make up words (Roth et al., 2006).

Phonological Awareness

- ◇ detecting rhyming words
- ◇ distinguishing words that start with the same sound from other words
- ◇ giving the first sound of a word. (This is not the same as giving the first letter. eg. 'fish' and 'physics' both start with the same sound (f), but are written with different letters)

Other skills connected to literacy development

- ◇ recognizing and naming the letters of the alphabet
- ◇ knowing the sounds that letters represent (letter-sound awareness)
- ◇ understanding that print represents words and sentences (print awareness)
- ◇ having an adequate vocabulary

Some of these skills develop before a child learns to read and others develop as they learn to read. This is because trying to figure out the sounds of words makes him/her think about language in a new way (Hoff, 2009, p.360).

Milestones

SAC, (n.d.)

- 1 year of age: shows an interest in picture books
- 2 years of age: knows how to hold a book the right way up and turn the pages
- 3 years of age: understands that printed words have a function (on menus, lists, signs etc.)
- 4 years of age: can think of simple rhymes (e.g., toy and boy)
- 5 years of age: knows all letters of the alphabet

Warning Signs

Roth et al., (2006)

- ! baby talk continues on for longer than expected
- ! not interested in nursery rhymes or shared book reading
- ! cannot follow simple directions
- ! has a hard time learning the letters of the alphabet
- ! unable to recognize the letters in their name



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How Speech-Language Pathologists (SLP) Help

Research suggests that trouble with reading is mainly language based. If your child is experiencing reading difficulties an SLP may be able to help. SLPs identify at risk children and provide intervention and treatment programs (SAC, n.d.). SLPs may work in preschools and schools to “support oral language development” or with the families directly (SPA, n.d.). Support may include improving letter-sound awareness, helping children build their vocabularies, and/or providing specific strategies to help with early reading skills (SPA, n.d.).

How to Promote Emergent Literacy

- Introduce new words during new experiences, such as holidays or outings.
- Teach them the alphabet and the sounds the letters represent.



- Draw your child’s attention to print in everyday settings to increase their exposure to writing. Try reading road signs, office signs and restaurant menus.
- Read books that use rhyming, alliteration (words that begin with the same sound) and manipulation of sounds (e.g. nursery rhymes).
- Point to the words and pictures as you read. This helps your child follow along, build print awareness, and use pictures to recognize unfamiliar words.
- Encourage your child to draw and scribble. Have them tell a story about what they’ve drawn and write their words for them.
- When reading, describe where something is on the page (e.g. top/right/corner).

- Ask open ended questions and expand on what your child is saying.
- Talk during daily routines. While you are cooking or getting ready for bed, describe what you are doing (“Now it’s time to brush our teeth. Back and forth.”).
- When reading, pause to ask questions and encourage comments. Relate the story back to a personal experience (“This is like when we went camping.”).
- Tell them why you are writing. For example, “I want to remember this, so I am writing it down”. This helps children learn the function of writing.



Additional Resources:

The Hanen Centre

- What early literacy skills do children need?
- Building Literacy at Home
- How to Introduce Books to Toddlers and Babies

Information Gathered from:

Hoff, E. (2009). Language development (5th ed.). Wadsworth, OH: Cengage Learning.

Roth, F., Paul, D., Pierotti, A. (2006). Emergent literacy: early reading and writing development. Retrieved from <https://www.asha.org/public/speech/emergent-literacy.htm>

Speech-Language & Audiology Canada (SAC). (n.d.). Language and Literacy Skills. Retrieved from https://www.sac-oac.ca/sites/default/files/resources/literacy_info_sheet_en.pdf

Speech Pathology Australia (SPA). (n.d.). Literacy. Retrieved from http://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au/spaweb/Document_Management/Public/Fact_Sheets.aspx#anchor_lit

July 2018

Getting Help

If you suspect a problem, consult a Registered Speech-Language Pathologist (R.SLP). To find a practitioner:

- Contact HEALTH LINK - Health Advice 24/7 at 8-1-1 or visit: www.MyHealth.Alberta.ca
- Enquire at a Public Health Centre or your child's school.
- Find a private practice SLP:
 - Search the Yellow Pages
 - Contact the Alberta Speech-Language Association of Private Practitioners (ASAPP) website at www.asapp.ca.



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