

Early Literacy Tips for Parents

Early literacy is **much more than reading** with your child. It is the beginning of all forms of communication, with interactions beginning the moment you welcome your child into the world. Every look, smile, touch, word and song shared between you builds your child's brain synapses – the learning highways that will support your child's future learning and development. So, jumpstart your child's cognitive development by **talking, singing, engaging in nursery rhymes, clapping games, and more** – all while **smiling, holding, touching, and gently bonding** with your precious one.

Some literacy growth expectations are listed below. Please be aware that all milestones are dependent on maturational and experiential differences between individual children. Behaviors may include:

- **Squealing and vocalizing while still in a crib.** This is the beginning of hearing and expressing the ebb and flow, the rhythm of your native language. It leads to enjoyment of rhyming language, nonsense word play, and more.
- **Engaging in “conversation” with caregivers.** Before children can speak, they communicate by exchanging facial expressions, sounds, squeals, and more. Tune in to your child's noises and expressions, and respond with encouraging words and language.
- **Enjoying the sharing of books with primary caregivers.** Reading together is more than preparing to read – it involves holding your baby close, encouraging a connection between the security of your presence and the interest found on the pages of a book. The bonds you build through shared storytimes will last a lifetime.
- **Listening to stories.** Your child will signal her/his enjoyment of the reading experience with sounds, facial expressions, and body movements. Very young children may “hit” the book – that's okay! Until babies gain full muscle control their movements are erratic, so just respond by encouraging their excitement and enthusiasm during shared reading time.
- **Developing a shared storytime routine with caregivers.** You'll know you've successfully started your child on the road to literacy when s/he fusses and demands a regular reading habit.
- **Pretending to read books.** Once your child is mobile, s/he will begin to seek out books and “pretend” to read. In fact, looking at the pictures and deciphering the story is the first step towards reading!
- **Recognizing specific books by cover.** From a very early age your child will determine her/his favorite stories, dragging them to you to demand the all-important shared storytime.
- **Understanding that books are handled in particular ways.** The conversation about proper book
- **Looking at pictures in books and realizing they represent real objects.** As you read together, point out and name objects seen in the pictures. Talk about things in your own environment that are similar. As your baby begins speaking, s/he may point to a picture and name the objects, making verbal connections to familiar things.
- **Commenting on characters in books.** Children's imaginations are fully engaged in the story when they feel compelled to talk about characters' emotions, behaviors, activities, etc. Try to follow up your child's comments with a question: *“Yes, I see Winnie the Pooh looks worried. Why do you think he's worried? What do you think will happen next? Let's read on and see!”*
- **Beginning to notice symbols and logos that represent objects or destinations.** Children who aren't speaking in sentences will recognize the golden arches as a place to eat, the man/woman symbols that adorn public restrooms, the red sign at the corner where you stop the car, etc. These pictures communicate without language and can be found all around us. Play guessing games and call out signs you see and identify together.
- **Beginning to recognize specific print, such as the letters in her/his name.** It's an exciting step in literacy development when your child realizes that the squiggly black marks on the page have meaning! Slowly she/he will understand that each squiggle has its own identity: a name (“M”) and a sound (“Ehm”) of its own. When that begins, look for words in your daily travels and routines: street signs, store names, as well as writing on food containers, people's shirts, trucks and more.
- **Using increasingly purposeful scribbling.** Long before children can form letters or pictures, they begin exploring with mark-making. Their abilities will develop more quickly with each experience they get with writing tools. Be sure to give your child lots of time using crayons instead of markers – children's hand and finger muscles must work harder to produce a pleasing mark with crayons. Using markers doesn't require the strength and control children need to develop to be ready to write. Working with play dough and clay are also wonderful tools for building control for writing.
- **Beginning to distinguish between drawing and writing.** As your child explores making marks, s/he will develop an understanding between a scribble representing an object, versus a scribble intended to be written language. Encourage ALL scribbles!
- **Producing some letter-like forms and scribbles.** A huge breakthrough comes when your child produces (to her/his eye) a “letter.” Although you may not recognize the letter, believe your little one when s/he says, “Look! I made a P! Just like my name!” Your encouragement will propel further exploration and practice which will, in time, produce recognizable letters.