

Learning at home: Supporting early literacy



Remote Learning

Literacy is the way that we communicate with each other using symbol systems. This includes reading and writing as well as a number of other ways of communicating such as drawing or using our bodies to create and convey meaning. Literacies vary in different cultures and languages, and children learn to communicate in ways that reflect their family and their culture. The development of literacy begins from birth, well before children formally learn to read, write or experience other forms of media. Parents, siblings and other family members play a very important role in helping their children to develop literacy through everyday activities at home.

What can you do to support your child's early literacy development at home?

1. Play together

Join in play with your child, following the things that they are interested in - this will vary for different ages but all children (even young babies) will indicate their preferences. Involve other family members at home with you too.

Ideas to try: Young children of all ages love activities like bubbles, playdoh, hide and seek, ball games, building with Lego or empty boxes, dramatic role play (such as dress-ups, shopping, being a doctor), and pretend play (such as playing with small toy dolls, animals or cars).

How does playing together support early literacy? Through interactive play, young children learn about listening, taking turns and expressing themselves using their bodies, gestures, facial expressions, words, and printed pictures or words - these are all symbolic forms of communication that support literacy! Pretend play and dramatic role play provide children with the opportunity to take on roles and make up stories, linking characters to actions or events as their stories unfold in the play.

2. Stop and listen

Encourage your child to stop and listen to the sounds in their environment while you play and interact together.

Ideas to try: Stop what you are doing every so often for at least 10 seconds and ask your child to listen - what can you hear? You can do this while you are inside or out for a walk. You might hear traffic noises, people talking, the wind, someone mowing the lawns, birds singing, music playing...

How does listening support early literacy? Being able to locate and identify environmental sounds in the presence of other background noise is a playful way of introducing the notion of listening to sounds in words. Listening and speech sound awareness are a key building block for literacy, particularly for reading and spelling.

3. Sing songs and rhymes

Engage in songs, rhymes and poems together – this is an activity that is free and available anytime, anywhere, and needs no additional equipment although you can use props if you want to!

Ideas to try: Young children particularly enjoy actions song and rhymes with silly noises, words and lots of repetition. Examples are 'Willoughby, wallaby woo', 'A Slippery Fish', 'There was an old lady who swallowed a fly', or 'Old MacDonald' - you can Google these and others! Make up actions or funny voices/ noises and make it fun.

How do songs and rhymes support early literacy? Songs and rhymes are not only enjoyable, but they also support early literacy by providing children with opportunities to listen and express themselves using rhythm, rhyme, gestures, sounds and words.

4. Telling and reading stories

Stories are one of the most common and well-loved forms of literacy that benefit children socially, emotionally and academically. The sharing of stories with young not only includes reading books, but also stories that can be told, sung or acted out.

Ideas to try: Talk with your child about stories of everyday things they have experienced, using photos or videos if you have saved them on your phone or camera (for example, 'Do you remember yesterday when we walked to the beach? Look at all the shells you found...'). Tell true or made-up stories with your child as the main character. Many songs contain stories too, such 'The other day I met a bear' or 'Little Bunny Foo Foo' (you can Google these too). Find books that you and your child enjoy reading together - this might be picture books, lift-the-flap books, Dr Seuss-style rhyming books, books about characters or even your family photo albums.

How do stories support early literacy? Telling stories and reading books together not only allows for snuggling up together and bonding but can also enhance children's listening, imagination, language comprehension and use, as well as their print awareness (understanding the conventions associated with books like reading from left to right) and their understanding of narrative (or how stories are structured).

5. Have conversations about everyday things

Make the most of the opportunities to communicate with your child that are present during everyday routines and activities at home and in your immediate environment.

Ideas to try: Mealtimes, bedtimes, bath times and getting dressed or changed are all regular routines that provide opportunities for communicating with your child (such as 'Time for a bath', 'Turn on the taps', 'Time to hop in!'). Outings like a walk to the park also offer a lot of opportunities to talk about what you see ('Let's go down the hill', 'Look at the big bus!', 'Can you see the fluffy black dog?'). Comment about what is happening, adapting your language to what you feel your child can understand. Use your body language, actions and tone of voice to help emphasise key words as you communicate together. Watch and listen carefully so you don't miss your child's efforts to take part in the conversation. Don't do all the talking - expect that they will take turns too!

How do everyday conversations support early literacy? Conversations allow opportunities for children learn the meanings of words, as well as how to use those words within familiar, meaningful situations that involve them. A child's vocabulary (the words that they can understand and use) is one of the key building blocks for literacy to develop.

PREPARED FOR THE EDUCATION HUB BY



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