

More than reading and writing

PARENTING BABIES, TODDLERS AND YOUNG CHILDREN

ParentLink guides use 'he' and 'she' in turn. Change to suit your child's sex.

Most parents know that reading and writing is so important for children. How words help us to understand our world and make the most of opportunities is much more than reading and writing. This is called literacy.

The word literacy often makes people think of school and many parents expect that literacy will be taught to their children once they start school. Children do not wait until they start school to develop literacy skills. From birth, babies and children are learning all the time.

Literacy is a part of everyone's daily life. The experiences that are given to children influence their knowledge and understanding of their world. Children need opportunities to practise the skills they know and are able to do in order to become confident learners.

In everyday activities and in your relationship with your children, you have a wonderful opportunity to help them develop literacy skills.

What is literacy?

Literacy was once seen as reading and writing. Now literacy is seen as much more; it is language we use in:

- speaking and listening
- reading and watching
- drawing and writing

Literacy development begins in the family and continues in families and communities as well as in children's services and schools.

Literacy can be developed in any language. The examples in this guide of what you and your child might say are all in English, but they could be in any language your child regularly hears and uses.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2006 census, over 100 different languages are spoken in homes in the Canberra region.

Giving children a strong foundation in their home language can help them learn English. Similarly, learning a second language can enhance the English literacy skills of children whose first language is English.

Parents teach by **example** and provide **experiences** (things for children to do) and opportunities for children to practise what they learn. Parents can also provide valuable **resources** (things to use).

How do you know your children are developing literacy skills?

You might see them:

- **talking** to family members and people, taking turns in conversations, listening to others and replying, and answering the phone
- **carrying out instructions**—from simple 'Please put your cup on the table' to more difficult instructions such as 'Please put your toys away and go to the bathroom and brush your teeth'
- being able to **talk about themselves** and their own actions, for example, 'Me good boy today' or 'I'm eating a banana'
- **watching and listening to adults** and other children so they can find out what to do
- **telling people how they feel**, for example, 'I feel cross' or what they need, 'Please may I have a drink?'
- **listening to or telling** rhymes, riddles, stories or jokes
- **asking questions**
- **recognising problems** and possible solutions, for example, 'The rope keeps falling down. You tie it up?'
- **choosing** their own book or asking for a story
- **talking** about stories and saying what they think might happen
- **playing** card or board games
- **scribbling, drawing and painting** with crayons, textas, pencils, paintbrushes
- **making** letter shapes with play dough or mud
- **writing** some of the letters of their name
- **starting to use** the words 'write' or 'draw.'



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Speaking and listening

Families provide examples

Families teach by their own use of language:

- chatting
- explaining and instructing
- asking and answering questions
- talking about what has happened
- listening to what others have to say, listening for sounds in the environment
- planning and predicting, for example, 'I wonder if it will rain and if we should take an umbrella?'
- storytelling, singing songs and jingles, saying rhymes and chants
- problem solving, for example, 'You want the car to go to sport and I need to visit a friend, how can we work this out?'
- thinking out loud, for example, 'I am nearly ready for work, now have I forgotten anything, oh yes, I must put the dog out'.

Families provide experiences

Encourage children to listen to sounds and words:

- sing songs and say rhymes with babies and young children
- imitate sounds they hear, for example, corks popping, motors revving, dogs barking
- listen together to stories, books and tapes
- share jokes and jingles
- listen to the wind in the trees, the waves of the sea, birds and aeroplanes
- whisper or use a different voice
- help them to work out what sound they hear at the beginning of a word.

Teach children about:

- names for things and people, actions, numbers, shape, size, feelings
- words for getting along with others—'Sorry', 'Can I join in?'
- polite titles—Mr, Mrs, Miss, Ms, Aunt.

Talk about:

- what has happened—the past
- what is happening right now—the present
- what will happen—the future
- people—what sort of job they do, where they fit in the family or community, what is their relationship to your child.

Point out:

- how people talk and listen, for example, you have to be very quiet to listen
- how talk can be used in different ways, for example, when people are cross sometimes they talk very loudly, when they are afraid they may talk very softly
- words from other languages, for example, 'Did you know that cappuccino really comes from Italy?'

Children need adults who enjoy being with children, as well as brothers, sisters, cousins and friends to:

- listen, talk and take an interest
- tell stories and share experiences
- answer questions
- agree and argue with
- learn from.

Play word games:

- 'What does the cow say?' ... 'Moo'
- 'Why did the chicken cross the road?'
- 'Knock, knock'. 'Who's there?'

Talk to babies and children about what you are doing:

- at bed time, bath time, change time
- helping in the house, the shed, the garden
- feeding animals
- planning a trip or a party
- watching a parade or pageant.

Show children that their learning is important

- Speak clearly.
- Listen with interest to what children have to say.
- Give them lots of time to find the words they want.
- Help them if they really get stuck.
- Take their questions seriously and help them find answers.
- Teach social rules—when and how to talk, when to listen and how to behave in certain situations.

Reading and watching

Families provide examples

Let your children see you reading and watching:

- TV guides, magazines, newspapers
- recipes, instructions, letters, labels
- signs, maps, ATM screens, traffic lights
- television, computers, movies.

Talk about what you read and watch:

- 'I'm going to try this new recipe.'
- 'This program is about how people live in China.'
- 'I enjoyed reading that book about machines.'
- 'That man in the wheelchair looks as if he is in a hurry.'
- 'This diagram shows me how to work the video.'

Families provide experiences

Play looking games to help children notice details:

- 'Look for the person wearing red shoes.'
- 'Find the mouse in the picture.'
- 'Find a word beginning with "s".'
- 'Find a number plate with a 'three' in it.'
- 'Let's look for writing as we walk to the shops.'
- 'Let's follow this trail of footprints in the sand.'

Play:

- games which involve imagination and pretending
- board games such as *Snakes and Ladders*
- card games such as *Snap*
- matching games with real objects, shapes, pictures or words
- jigsaws and puzzles.

Point to print when you go out:

- road signs, shop windows, T-shirts, posters, food and drink containers, letterbox numbers, bus and train stops.

Stories—told or read:

- at bedtime or any time.

Time:

- to share and talk about letters or cards from family and friends
- to share and talk about favourite books and stories
- to share and talk about television commercials and programs
- to enjoy reading or watching without questions or interruptions.

Support your child's attempts to read:

- notice their efforts and encourage them to keep trying.

Things to use

Around the house you can find materials of all kinds to read, study and play with:

- old magazines, calendars, catalogues, blank forms
- boxes and packets
- old cards and wrapping paper
- books—pop-up books and lift-the-flap books, books with interesting pictures, books about children's interests, books of rhymes, poetry and music, storybooks and books about facts
- technology—magnifying glasses and binoculars.

Use libraries and shops, for:

- books, tapes, videos and games
- pictures, posters and catalogues.

Show children that their learning is important

- Talk about the importance of your child's name, what it means, how you chose it.
- Help children to recognise their names and the letters it contains, especially the first letter.
- Look for letters from their name in other words.
- Show you value their efforts to read and write.

Questions (to help children think about what they see and read):

- 'Which way should we go?'
- 'Which baked beans do we usually have, this kind or that?'
- 'Can I park here?'
- 'What happened? What will happen next?'

Drawing and writing

Families provide examples

Let them see you:

- doodling, drawing or painting
- signing documents, paying bills, filling in forms
- writing lists, cards and letters
- doing crossword puzzles.

Use and talk about:

- pictures of people, things, animals and places
- magnetic letters, for example, fridge magnets
- construction manuals, cookbooks and recipes
- books about art, musical scores.

Talk about reasons for writing and drawing:

- 'I'm writing a shopping list so I'll remember what to buy.'
- 'Ahmed loves to draw. Perhaps he'll be a famous artist one day.'
- 'Peter has written a note to say he'll be home late.'
- 'Jenny has drawn a picture to decorate her book.'
- 'Anna has drawn a map to help us find our way to her house.'

Families provide experiences

Help children to develop hand/eye coordination by:

- pouring water
- making and using real dough for baking
- doing puzzles
- painting, hammering and threading.

Teach by:

- helping children to solve drawing problems, for example, 'How can I make a straight line?'
- showing children how to hold pencils or use the computer
- showing children how to form letters, especially the letters in their name.

Make books (using a scrap book or a few sheets of paper stapled together):

- about your child, about family, animals, birthdays, shopping—about anything
- using drawings, pictures, photos
- writing down what your children say.

Encourage children to draw and write and talk about their work by:

- drawing a picture about something they have seen or done
- illustrating a story
- writing their names
- making a shopping list.

Things to use

Families can provide:

- mud and sand, dough and clay, for squeezing, shaping and drawing in
- paper—lined and blank, old envelopes, letters and cards
- order forms from catalogues, old diaries and cards
- crayons, chalk, pens, pencils and textas
- a ruler and eraser
- a computer
- a typewriter.

Show children that their learning is important

- Give them time to experiment and practise.
- Notice and appreciate their achievements.
- Accept their efforts as they begin to draw and write.
- Help them when they get stuck.
- Encourage them to keep trying.
- Put their drawings on the fridge and get them to tell you about their drawings and writings.

Parents, teachers and carers working together

It is important as a parent to get to know and develop good relationships with those people who care for and/or educate your children. These people may be childcare workers, family day carers, preschool teachers, teachers at schools and others such as speech pathologists or your family doctor.

- They need to get to know your child's needs and interests and to plan better your child's literacy learning.
- They can share your child's progress and what your child needs with you.

This may mean that you are asked for information about your family. This information should be kept confidential.

To help build a good 'working together' relationship you might:

- share your child's interests, activities or fears with them
- ask questions about how your child is going and how you can help
- be as involved as you can in activities in children's services, for example, childcare centre, preschool or school
- join decision-making groups, for example, a management committee at preschool or childcare, a school council or parents' group
- visit the service or school
- help at the service or school when you can and contribute as much as you feel comfortable with, for example, talking to children, reading stories to children, cooking
- talk briefly to staff when you take your child to the service, for example, 'Jack didn't sleep very well last night, so he might be a bit tired today'
- collect ribbons, greeting cards, empty cereal boxes etc, that children can use for pasting and take them to the service
- let staff know when you are pleased about something that has happened at the centre or school as well as when you are unhappy.

Reminders

- Children are learning from birth—they do not wait until they start school to develop literacy skills.
- Enjoy spending time with your child—talking, playing and sharing together.
- Parents who teach by setting examples, providing experiences and opportunities for children to practise what they learn do it well.
- Allow time for children to play on their own and with others—don't make everything a lesson.
- Don't force young children into reading and writing ... children will participate when they are developmentally ready and see a purpose for reading and writing.
- You do not need to spend a lot of money on toys and books—you can join toy and book libraries.
- Seek help from an early childhood educator or teacher or from a professional if you are concerned about your child's literacy development.

Contacts

Child and Family Centres (parenting information and support)	9am–5pm Monday–Friday: Gungahlin	6207 0120
	9am–5pm Monday–Friday: Tuggeranong	6207 8228
	9am–5pm Monday–Friday: West Belconnen	6205 2904
Maternal and Child Health	8am–5pm Monday–Friday	6207 9977
Parentline ACT	9am–9pm Monday–Friday, except public hols	6287 3833

Websites

www.censusdata.abs.gov.au	ABS 2006 Census Data
www.cyh.com	Parenting and child health information
www.det.act.gov.au	Education and Training Directorate
www.library.act.gov.au	ACT Libraries
www.parentlink.act.gov.au	Other parenting guides, including Growing and learning in the family, Learning to talk, Starting school, Television, Why stories are important
www.raisingchildren.net.au	Raising Children Network—covering topics for parenting newborns to teens

This guide's content has been produced by Parenting SA and adapted by the ACT Government 10/09 to reflect the application to laws of the Australian Capital Territory.

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Revised 07/10

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