



Developing early literacy skills goes beyond the ABCs!

Did you know?

- Reading proficiently by the end of the third grade can be a “make or break benchmark” in a child’s educational development.
- Eighty-three percent of children who are not reading by the fourth grade are at risk of failing to graduate from high school on time.
- Michigan ranks 43 out of the 50 states in meeting national reading standards by the fourth grade.
- Preschoolers, whose parents read to them, tell them stories or sing songs with them, tend to develop larger vocabularies, become better readers and perform better in school.



Emergent literacy = getting ready to read

Parents should watch for and encourage these “emergent literacy” skills, which children need to develop before they actually begin to read.

1. **Oral language.** Children use verbal communication patterns, or speech, to express themselves.
2. **Experimental writing.** A child makes these first attempts at writing, which are often scribble marks, but they also include attempts to write letters or his or her name. Children without access to writing materials may not even know how to hold a pencil or crayon.

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3. **Print awareness.** A child will begin to understand that print on a page stands for something. A child with print awareness skills will hold a book correctly even if given the book upside down and backwards, will know that text is read from left to right and will know where the story begins by pointing to the text.
4. **Vocabulary.** Developing a vocabulary begins with oral language, that is, the child's ability to communicate with others through verbal interactions.
5. **Alphabetic principle.** Children can associate letters with sounds and sounds with words. A child will know that the letter B makes a "buh" sound.
6. **Letter knowledge.** A child knows letters of the alphabet and can also recognize letters in print. Children will know that letters are different from each other and have different names and sounds.

What can parents do?

Literacy activities are more than just reading. They can include:

- Talking about a book
- Having a general conversation with both parent and child participating
- Asking questions and listening to the child's answers
- Helping the child learn the alphabet through books, signs, labels and the alphabet song
- Helping the child learn colors
- Playing rhyming games
- Reading or saying nursery rhymes
- Playing word games and finger plays, such as "Itsy Bitsy Spider" and "Where is Thumbkin?"
- Singing songs with or to a child
- Allowing the child to read to you even if the child can't actually read
- Teaching shapes to the child
- Visiting the library or bookstore

Literacy activities can take place anytime, anywhere. Thirty minutes of reading can be a daunting task (most of us don't even exercise for 30 minutes a day), but it can be broken up into 5- or 10-minute chunks that could include looking at labels together at the grocery store, singing a song together in the car and reading a short bedtime story. Activities should never feel like work. They should be fun so families are likely to repeat them.

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