

## How to Create a Literate Home: Young Child and Kindergartner

The "literate home" for this age child only needs a few inexpensive materials, but parent involvement is key. Your kindergartner continues to build his/her language base (understanding and using language) in preparation for learning to read, so s/he still benefits from lots of talk with adults that help him/her learn new words. Young children and kindergartners are beginning to figure out how the written word works, and s/he is starting to use reading and writing in his/her daily lives. At this age, having a wide variety of books and writing materials available is crucial.

### Items to Help Create a Literate Home

#### **Children's Books:**

For young children, nursery rhymes, ABC books, informational books and storybooks are most appropriate. Kindergartners will enjoy longer stories or chapter books, and some will be able to read very easy books by themselves by the end of the year. You can look for bargain children's books at used bookstores and yard sales, or purchase books at great prices through monthly book clubs offered through child care centers or schools.



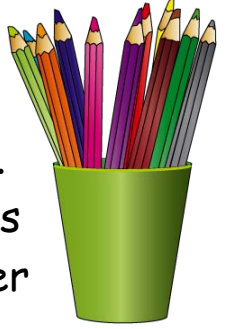
#### **Letters:**



Young children and kindergartners learn to identify the letters. In your home, it is important to have a number of types of letters that your child can move around. Alphabet blocks, foam letters for the bathtub, ABC puzzles, magnetic refrigerator letters, ABC cookie cutters, letter stamps and letter stickers are all ideal materials for children this age. Many of these items can be created at home using everyday materials.

## Writing Materials:

Thick markers, paint brushes, pencils and crayons are ideal for the youngest writers since they are still developing the small muscles in their hands that help them hold tools. Likewise, large paper is best for young children. Your kindergartner will be able to use standard-sized writing tools and paper. S/he may also enjoy it if you make a "book" for him/her to write in by stapling paper together. Having a model of all the letters available for young writers allows them to refer to it if they have trouble remembering letter formations.



## Reading and Writing Materials for Parents:

When children see the adults around them using reading and writing in their everyday lives, they're more likely to become readers and writers themselves. Simply having a bookshelf full of books, reading the local newspaper, and having a notepad on which you write grocery lists and phone messages shows your child that reading and writing serve valuable everyday purposes.

## Props for Pretend Play:



Props such as dress-up clothes and play dishes encourage your young child or kindergartner to pretend, and pretend play actually contributes to literacy skills. Make props for pretend play from materials you already have at home.

Empty cereal boxes, mom's old necklaces and an old pot and wooden spoon make ideal items for countless make-believe scenarios.

## CDs:

Books and children's music on CDs are another way for your child to enjoy stories and music. Most public libraries have extensive collections of audio books and children's music CDs to borrow.



## Videos:

Videos can help your young child or kindergartner learn basic concepts and information. They are also another way to expose your child to quality children's literature. For children this age, concept videos such as ABCs or rhyming are appropriate, while young children and kindergartners will also enjoy watching videos of familiar books.

## What You Can Do

### **Organize a bookshelf for your child's collection.**



A sturdy bookshelf located in an area accessible to your child is ideal. This way, he can reach books and use them without asking your permission. Having a special place for his books will demonstrate to your child that books are valuable.

### **Set up a writing area for your child.**

Having all of her materials in one accessible spot will encourage your young child or kindergartner to write. Having a special writing box or even a writing table or desk will help your child to see writing as an important activity.



### **Talk together about things that interest your child.**

Ask genuine questions, ones to which you do not already know the answer. Ask questions that help children think about *why* and *how* and not just *what*. When you talk, be sure to listen to your child's response and build upon what he has to say.

### **Introduce new vocabulary words when you talk with your child.**

When you use a new word, make sure to explain its meaning to your child and encourage your young child or kindergartner to ask when she does not know the meaning of a word.

## **Continue your daily read-aloud routine.**



Continue the routine that you established earlier in your child's life. Reading at the same time each day and in the same comfortable place, such as in bed or on the couch, make read-aloud a time to anticipate.

## **Point to the words when you read aloud.**

You need not do this for every page but pointing to the words in the book's title, or to the words of a repeated phrase in a picture book, is a good idea. When you point to the words, you show your child that there is a correspondence between spoken and written words and that print goes from left to right.

## **Listen to your child "read."**

By the end of kindergarten, most children will be able to "read" some very easy books aloud by relying mostly on the pictures and their memory of the story. Make sure to set aside some of your read-aloud time to listen to your child read as soon as he is ready. Avoid pushing your child to do this until he shows interest, however.

## **Incorporate literacy into outings.**



Visit your local library, bookmobile or bookstore to find new read-aloud ideas for your child. Many libraries feature free song and story hours that young children and kindergartners may enjoy.

## **Be a reader and writer yourself.**

One of the most effective ways to help children become readers and writers is to show them through your own example that you value literacy and that reading and writing have useful purposes. Make sure that you have a variety of printed and writing materials in your house that you use them on a regular basis, and that you talk to your child about what you are doing when you read and write.

## **Seven Tips for Early Literacy Learning: From Knowing Your ABCs to Learning to Read**

Hooray! Your child can sing the alphabet like a pro! Now what? Once your child has mastered letter recognition, what can you do to help her get on the path to literacy? Here are seven important tips to consider after your child has learned the letters of the alphabet, but before she's reading fluently.

### **Focus on the letters of your child's name.**

Names are the most important words for children, so it makes sense to begin literacy learning with the child's name. Acknowledge the "child's letter"—the first letter of his or her name—by pointing it out whenever and wherever you see it. Then do some letter scrambles using blocks, magnetic letters or letters on index cards. Mix up the letters of the child's name and work together to put them back in the proper order. Repeat this often with your child's name, and then introduce "Mom," "Dad," and the names of siblings, friends, family and pets.

### **Recognize each letter and know their sounds.**

It's one thing for the child to know the letters in order, but it's a bit harder for her to recognize each letter individually. When you see "her letter" on a sign, cereal box, or book, remember to point it out. Say, "Hey! Look here! I found your letter, Maddy! Here's an M for Maddy. Mmmm, mmmm, Maddy!" Talk about the sounds that letters make and return frequently to easily relatable objects or things that interest the child. For example, say: "There's a letter B for 'blankie.' I know you love blankie and sleep with it every night. Blankie begins with the letter B, like 'ball' and 'butter' and 'baby bear.' What else can you think of that begins with the B sound?"

### **Introduce uppercase and lowercase letters.**

Your child will not likely be reading books that have all uppercase letters, so it's imperative that you talk about uppercase and lowercase letters early on.

Play games that involve matching uppercase and lowercase letters and spell her name using both cases.

### **Practice early writing techniques.**

If children practice creating several simple letters, they will most likely be able to write the majority of the alphabet. Begin with X and O and then move on to a square and a triangle. Encouraging kids to “write” on sand, paint with water, or use their finger in shaving cream will make creating these shapes fun, and before you know it, they’ll be ready to move on to the letters of their names.

### **Connect objects with words.**

Since reading involves creating meaning by combining words, pictures and prior knowledge, early readers lean on illustrations when reading—and that’s okay. Label everyday objects and point to the word as you say it. Play games where children connect simple words with pictures, like “cat” with a photo of a cat and “dog” with photo of a dog, etc. Model how to do it by pointing out the first letter of the word and saying the sound that the word makes, followed by the word, and then pointing to the picture.

### **Practice print referencing.**

Print referencing is a simple yet meaningful way to enforce early literacy skills. It involves pointing out print elements in texts: pointing to the title of the book as you read it, running your finger under the words as you read the text on a page, or talking about anything related to the text. This helps children learn the basics: every book has a title and an author (and sometimes an illustrator), and we read from left to right, followed by a sweep down to the next line. Later, consider touching on basic grammar conventions and punctuation marks, differences between fiction and nonfiction texts, and different genres (news, magazines, poetry, short stories, etc.).



## Read, read, read!

Read with your child every day, many times a day. Read books, signs, posters—anything with words. Read in the morning, in the afternoon, and at night. Read at the park, in the living room, at the pool. Read print everywhere you can find it!

Most importantly, make an effort to celebrate your child's successes, because learning to read is something to smile about!

## Reading Activities

### At Mealttime:

Mealttime is a time for families to come together. Some parents however, may feel too busy to sit down at the table. If you can't sit for the whole meal, try to sit and talk with your child for a short time. Remember to use the times preparing the meal, and cleaning up, for conversations too.



***What Does the Recipe Say?*** Ask your child to help prepare the meal. If you use a recipe, show your child the words. Explain that the *recipe* gives *directions* for how to make the meal. Read the name of each *ingredient* out loud as you put it on the table. "Let's see. The recipe says we need spinach; we have spinach. It says we need cheese. We have cheese." Read each direction out loud. Tell and show your child what you want her to do. "The recipe says to *mix all the ingredients*. Will you *mix all the ingredients* like this?"

***Family Conversation.*** Mealttime is a great time for children to learn about group conversations. Ask your child a question like "How was your day today?" Then ask questions that invite your child to say more like "Tell me more about your new friend at school. Does he like to play baseball too?" Encourage everyone to join in. Says things that help your child listen to

other people like "Did you hear what your brother said about the mall? Do you want to go too?"

***What's On the Menu?*** When you go to a restaurant, look at the menu with your child. Explain that the *menu* shows what food there is to *order*. If there are pictures on the menu, name some items in the pictures. "It's a hamburger with cheese, pickles, and tomatoes on it." Then match the picture to the words for that item. "Let's see. Can we find those words on the menu?" When you find it, talk about the words. For example say, "*Hamburger* is a really long word. How many letters does it have?"

***Can I Help You?*** Children love to play "restaurant" at home. At a family mealtime, let your child pretend to be a *waiter* or *waitress*. First tell your child what is *on the menu* for dinner. Then give her a small pad of paper and a pen to take *orders* from the *customers*. Let her serve the food and then she can leave *the bill*. To extend the play, invite your child to use paper and markers to make real menus for the next meal.

### **In Front of the TV:**

The television and computer can be great teaching tools for your child if you connect what your child sees on them to real life experiences. You can also teach your child good T.V. viewing habits and computer skills.



***Numbers.*** The remote control for the T.V. has numbers on it and so does the computer keyboard. Use these items to help your child recognize numbers in a meaningful way. For example, when his favorite show is on T.V. he can help you find the correct channel number on the remote control.

***What Happens Next?*** Make a plan with your child for T.V. watching. Connect this plan to other events in his day and introduce words that describe time. For example tell him "*First*, we are going to the grocery store. *Next* we are going to eat lunch. *Then* you can watch your favorite T.V. show. *After that*, we are going to turn off the television and go to the park."



***What Was It About?*** After your child watches a T.V. show, talk to him about it. What was his favorite part? Who was his favorite *character*? Help your child relate the story to his own life. "Did something like that ever happen to you?" "Did you feel the same way the character on the show did?" and "Did you do the same thing the character in the show did, or did you do something different?" Remember to give your child plenty of time to think about the questions.

***What's That Letter?*** You can use the computer keyboard and a word program to help your child learn letters and letter sounds. Remind your child that on the computer the letters are all mixed up. They are not in the same order as in the *alphabet*. Help him find the letters in his name. Then encourage him to type his name one letter at a time. Remind him to be gentle when he pushes the keys. Then you can let him experiment with typing on his own.

### **In the Car:**

Most of us ride in a car, or on a bus or train, as part of our daily routine. This can be a nice "together-time" for you and your child. Children love to look out the window. They also like to feel the motion of the car, bus, or train. Turn riding time into talking, singing and playing time!



***Reading Signs.*** Even very young children will recognize signs and symbols for favorite places like fast food restaurants and toy stores. As you ride, point out large signs that are not as familiar. Name the pictures and read the words. For example, say "Look at that sign! It says there's a sale on fruit at the grocery store. Can you see the word apple?" Then talk about the words and spell them together. "A-P-P-L-E spells apple!"

***License to Ride.*** License plates and signs are great things to use for learning letters and numbers. Go on a letter hunt and invite your child to spell a word that he knows, like his name. Start by looking for the first letter. "The first letter in your name is a 'J'. Let's look for a license plate or

a sign with a 'J' on it." Then find the next letter. "Can you find an 'O'?" Continue until you find all the letters in the word.

***When Does the Bus Come?*** You can get bus schedules for many different busses at the bus station. Show your child the bus schedule for the bus that you take. Explain that a *schedule* shows what time the bus comes or *arrives* at the stop. It also shows what time the bus leaves, or *departs*. "A bus schedule helps us know what time we need to walk to the bus stop so we can catch the bus!"

***Ride and Read.*** Keep some familiar children's picture books in the car for your child to look at. Your child can look at the pictures and tell you the story in his own way. You can ask questions that invite your child to explain the story to you. For example, ask "Why was the little boy mad at his brother?" Ask questions that invite your child to compare stories. "Do you like this book or the other book better? Why?"

***Radio Ride.*** Listening to music is a great way to spend time together in the car. Find a radio station with music that you and your child both like. If you can't find one, take turns choosing. Listen to the music, and sing along if there are words. If not, talk about how the music sounds and how it makes you feel. "This music sounds like elephants trumpeting. It wakes me up!" Try different types of music- *country, rock and roll, jazz, and classical.*

### **At the Grocery Store:**

Shopping for groceries is a routine activity that is sometimes boring for children. You can make it interesting by asking your child to help you pick out items, put them in the cart, and check them out at the register.



***Make a List.*** Your child can help you make a shopping list by writing the names of some items. As you say the name of the item out loud, say each sound slowly, for example "M-I-L-K." Ask your child "What letter do you think starts the word milk?" "What letter do you think comes next?" It is not important for your child to spell the word exactly right. The idea is

to help your child make a connection between the letter and the sound it makes. "Yes, MMM, the letter 'M' makes that sound."

**Food Rhymes.** In the produce section your child can learn the names for many foods. It's fun to learn the names for some fruits and vegetables he may not know. "This is called *bok choy*." You can help your child learn new words by playing a rhyming game. "What are some words that sound like *bok CHOY*?" Have fun making up rhymes like *bok toy* and *bok boy*. Compare the new food to a food your child is familiar with. For example, "It's a type of *cabbage*." Then take home the new food and try it!

**How Heavy Is It?** Ask your child to help you weigh fruits and other *produce* and teach her some related words. Your child will also learn about how scales work. "Let's *weigh* these peapods on the *scale*." As you place the items on the scale, show your child how the arrow moves to show the weight. "The *arrow* moves to the *number* that shows how *heavy* the peapods are." Remind your child of other experiences with scales. "Remember how the nurse weighed you on the scale at the doctor's office?"

**How Many?** Food shopping is a good time to learn vocabulary about how much and how many. As you select items that interest your child, use vocabulary like *a lot*, *many*, *some*, *a few*, *fewer*, *more*, *less*, and *enough*. "We have *a lot* of beans! Do you think we need that *many*? I think *fewer* will be *enough*. Let's put some back."