



## ***What Is Family Literacy?***

### ***Getting Involved in Your Child's Literacy Learning***

***Family literacy*** takes place during daily routines in life as parents, children, and family members use literacy at home and in their community. Because children develop reading and writing skills as they grow, you are your child's first teacher. Research tells us that young children who participate in conversations, are read to regularly, have books in their home, and develop print awareness have a head start on reading and literacy skills when they enter school. When you read interesting books that your child can understand, including those about similar families and cultures, reading becomes meaningful and engaging. Talking with your child about books and sharing your own stories can foster imagination and open the door to new worlds.

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### ***Family Literacy Programs***

There are many government programs available to assist families in developing literacy skills and gaining an understanding of what is expected of children once they enter school. Often your child's school has literacy programs that involve all family members, as well.

Programs for young children include Even Start and Head Start, funded by the U.S. government, and programs in your local community that are sponsored by schools, businesses, and libraries. Community programs usually serve families with children of all ages.

Even Start provides support for family-centered education to help parents and guardians learn literacy and parenting skills to help their young children reach their full potential as learners. This program serves families with children ages newborn to 7 years old.

Head Start Programs offer services such as education, healthcare, family involvement, and social services for children ages 3–5 in low-income families and for children with disabilities. Early Head Start provides similar services to low-income pregnant women and families with infants and toddlers.

In addition to taking part in a more formal family literacy program, there are also many activities that you can do with your child at all ages to help him acquire, maintain, and improve literacy skills. Following are some activities and suggestions for practicing family literacy at a variety of ages to encourage your child's journey to becoming literate.

### ***Infants***

Infants learn from listening, observing, and following actions. Talk with your baby often, and answer his sounds. Play simple talking and touching games with your child, such as peek-a-boo and pat-a-cake. Infants should be encouraged to play with books specially designed for them. Reading to your baby is a time to become close and to start him down the path to becoming a good reader.

### ***Toddlers***

It is important to continue to talk to your toddler often. When you feed or bathe her, ask her to name different objects or clothing. You can point out colors, sizes, and shapes. When you read together, point to pictures, identifying them and asking your child to do the same. Ask your child questions that require more than a yes or no answer. Answer her questions, too, because by questioning, your toddler is asking to learn. If you do not know the answer, look it up in a book together so she will see the importance of books for finding information.

## Preschoolers

Preschool teaches your child about letters, numbers, and making sense of text. Because children learn to recognize the shapes of letters and link them with sounds, sharing the alphabet with your preschooler is important. Teach your child the alphabet song, look at alphabet books together, and practice writing his name.

Remember to continue reading together. If read to early, children will play with language at a young age. Soon your preschooler will begin to scribble his first form of writing and “pretend read,” which is an important first step in learning to read. Encourage these natural beginnings.

## Kindergartners

When your child enters kindergarten, a whole new world opens, but you are still an important part of how your child learns. Find out what your child is learning in school, and encourage her to use the same skills at home. Read together books in which words are repeated and the story is easy to predict. Talk to your child about the stories, allowing her to “pretend read” the familiar phrases. She will begin memorizing the words and want to read it to everyone. Encourage this because the excitement of becoming a reader is important.

It also is important to write with your kindergartner. You can make an alphabet book or a storybook together. Talk about your writing so she understands that writing means something and has many uses. Your child will begin to write words the way they sound. For example, she might write “frn” for *friend*. This is the first step in becoming a writer, so praise your kindergartner for all her writing efforts.

## Elementary School Years

Continue to know what your child is learning in school, and provide experiences that show how reading and writing play an important part in everyday life. Create opportunities in your home in which you are reading, writing, and learning together as a family.

Read school newsletters and let your child’s teacher know that you are interested in his progress. Take family trips to the library or search the Internet together for more information about what your child is learning in school. As he becomes a reader, help your child find interesting books on his reading level. Make trips to the library and bookstores a special time, and get books for yourself. Research tells us that children who see their parents read learn to read more successfully.

Provide many opportunities for children to read during everyday activities. Let your child help cook by reading recipes and make crafts using directions. Read the newspaper together to find sales, to see how your favorite sports team did, or to enjoy the comics. Read

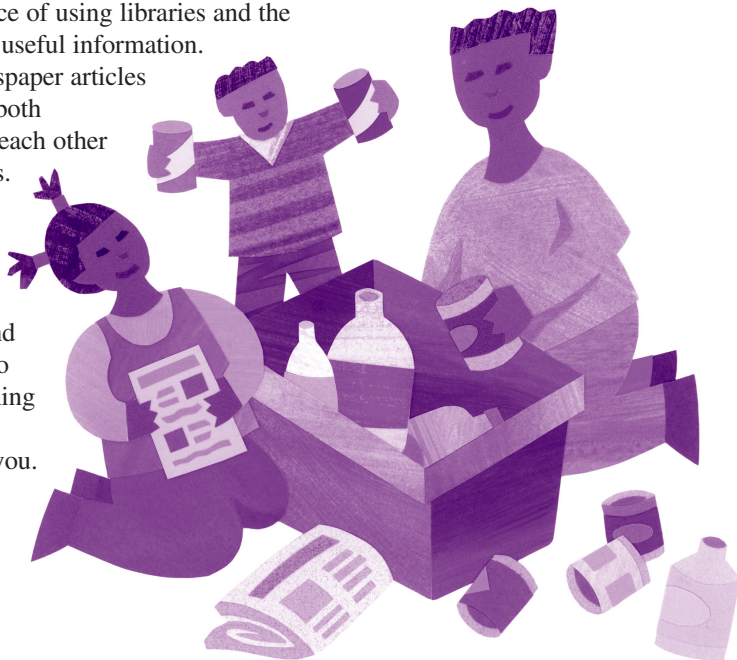
about where you are going on vacation before you visit. Leave your child notes and send him cards.

Writing also needs to be part of family literacy activities during your child’s elementary years. Write books and letters together. Keep a memory book for each school year with pictures and your child’s writing about the experiences. Show his writing in the home. Encourage your child to keep a journal. Give him writing materials and books as gifts.

## Middle School and High School Years

The middle school and high school years are when your child really becomes a competent reader, writer, and learner. Be active in your child’s school learning and provide opportunities that continue learning in the home. Find your child’s strengths and encourage her to use and build on them. Participate in school activities, and talk to your child about these experiences.

Continue to give your teenager gifts of writing materials and books that interest her, and remind her of the importance of using libraries and the Internet to gain useful information. Talk about newspaper articles and books you both read, and write each other letters and notes. Communicate to your teen about the importance of education, and encourage her to share both learning successes and problems with you.



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***Becoming literate is one of the most important journeys that your child will ever take, and you are the person who shares most of this journey with your child. You can start him on the right course by providing language, reading, and writing experiences from the earliest years of life all the way through high school and beyond. Go to your child’s school. Ask questions. Work with teachers who can help you to provide your child with resources, encouragement, and support.***





### Books for Parents

Beaty, J. (1997). *Building Bridges With Multicultural Picture Books: For Children 3–5*. New York: Prentice Hall.  
Butler, D. (1998). *Babies Need Books*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.  
Miles, B. (1995). *Hey, I'm Reading*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.  
Trelease, J. (1995). *The New Read-Aloud Handbook*. New York: Penguin Handbooks.

### Books for Children About Families

Bunting, E. (1990). *The Wednesday Surprise*. New York: Clarion.  
Garza, C.L. (1993). *Family Pictures* (bilingual Spanish and English). San Francisco: Children's Book Press.  
Greenfield, E. (1993). *She Come Bringing Me That Little Baby Girl*. New York: Harper Trophy.  
Joose, B. (1991). *Mama, Do You Love Me?* New York: Chronicle.  
Loh, M. (1991). *Tucking Mommy In*. New York: Orchard Books.  
Morris, A. (1994). *Loving*. New York: William Morrow.  
Soto, G. (1996). *Too Many Tamales*. New York: Paper Star.

### Web Sites for Parents

Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC):  
[www.ala.org/alsc/parents.links.html](http://www.ala.org/alsc/parents.links.html)  
Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy:  
[www.barbarabushfoundation.com](http://www.barbarabushfoundation.com)  
Family Education Network: [www.familyeducation.com](http://www.familyeducation.com)  
Parent Soup: [www.parentsoup.com](http://www.parentsoup.com)  
Partnership for Family Involvement: [www.ed.gov/PFIE](http://www.ed.gov/PFIE)

### Web Sites for Children

Arthur: [www.pbs.org/wgbh/arthur](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/arthur)  
Between the Lions: [www.pbs.org/wgbh/lions](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/lions)  
Children's Television Workshop: [www.ctw.org](http://www.ctw.org)  
Clifford the Big Red Dog: [www.pbs.org/clifford](http://www.pbs.org/clifford)  
Dr. Seuss: [www.randomhouse.com/seussville](http://www.randomhouse.com/seussville)

### Additional Resources from IRA

#### Books

Thomas, A., Fazio, L., & Stiefelmeyer, B.L. (1999). *Families at School: A Handbook for Parents*.  
Morrow, L.M. (1995). *Family Literacy Connections in Schools and Communities*.

#### Parent Booklets

*Beginning Literacy and Your Child: A Guide to Helping Your Baby or Preschooler Become a Reader*  
*I Can Read and Write! How to Encourage Your School-Age Child's Literacy Development*  
*"Books Are Cool!" Keeping Your Middle School Student Reading*  
*Parents, Teens, and Reading: A Winning Combination*

#### Parent Brochures (available in English and Spanish)

*Get Ready to Read! Tips for Parents of Young Children*  
*Explore the Playground of Books: Tips for Parents of Beginning Readers*

*Summer Reading Adventure! Tips for Parents of Young Readers*  
*Making the Most of Television: Tips for Parents of Young Viewers*  
*See the World on the Internet: Tips for Parents of Young Readers—and "Surfers"*

*Library Safari: Tips for Parents of Young Readers and Explorers*  
*Understanding Your Child's Learning Differences*  
*Making the Reading-Writing Connection: Tips for Parents of Young Learners*

#### Videos

*Read to Me*  
*Becoming a Family of Readers*

### Family Literacy Programs, Contact Information:

#### Even Start

U.S. Department of Education  
Office of Elementary and Secondary Education  
400 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, DC 20202  
800-USA-LEARN  
[www.evenstart.org](http://www.evenstart.org)

#### Head Start

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Administration for Children, Youth and Families  
Washington, DC 20202  
202-205-8572  
[www2.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/hsb](http://www2.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/hsb)

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