

It's Never Too Early



Promoting early literacy skills in the infant and toddler years

Early literacy and the foundation for beginning to read begins at birth and is a developmental process that occurs through-out life. The first cry, the first coo, the first “da-da” and “ma-ma,” the first words are proof that children have a desire to communicate. Adult reading for whatever purpose—information or pleasure—has its basis in how well or how poorly young children learn to read. —“Early Literacy and Beginning to Read,” A Position Statement of the Southern Early Childhood Association

Talk with your child.

Those smiles, coos, cries, and other vocalizations are your child’s way of starting a conversation with you. Keep the conversation going and talk back to your child—even if it seems a little silly!

Fill your home with books.

Place age-appropriate books where your child can see them and reach them. Infants and toddlers like bright colors, sharp contrast, rhythmic “sing-song” writing, and simple yet engaging plots. As they grow, introduce “peek-a-boo” or “lift the flap” books that encourage them to use their developing motor skills.

Let your child explore books freely.

Forget about how you think books “should” be used. A six-month-old may like to mouth or chew on books, and that’s just fine. A one-year-old may prefer to stack or scatter books across the floor—and that’s fine too!

Make reading part of your routine.

Many parents find that reading a story in the evening helps their child calm down and make the transition into naptime or bedtime.

Give everything a name.

Say the word for each object you encounter with your child, or even place large labels on objects at your child’s eye level to encourage vocabulary development.

Point out written words everywhere.

Show your child that written words appear in places other than books, such as on signs or in their toy magnetic letters.

Encourage early writing skills.

Let your older toddler explore writing instruments such as pens, crayons, and markers; and provide other toys and activities, such as pouring water, to help develop the fine motor skills needed for writing.

Sources:

George Morrison and Lesley Mandel Morrow, “Early Literacy and Beginning to Read,” A Position Statement of the Southern Early Childhood Association, 2002.

“Tips on Encouraging Literacy in Your Infant-Toddler Program,” Zero to Three, <http://main.zerotothree.org/site/PageServer?pagename=ter_key_language_literacytips>, accessed on July 23, 2012.