

Helping Your Child to Learn and Grow in the Early Years: A Guide for Parents

Literacy

A Guide for Parents

What Is Literacy?

Basically, it's reading and writing and everything that goes along with them, such as spelling, handwriting, comprehension, sentence skills, punctuation and grammar. Early literacy skills are some of the most important skills your child will acquire during their first year at school. The English language is one of the most complicated and difficult to learn in the world, as there are so many different ways of spelling the same sounds - just think of the 'ee' sound in 'bee', 'bead', 'key' and 'lucky'.

Reading

Early Learning Goal - Children read and understand simple sentences. They use phonic knowledge to decode regular words and read them aloud accurately. They also read some common irregular words. They demonstrate understanding when talking with others about what they have read.

Set a reading example. Let your child see you reading - anything at all. Studies have shown that it is particularly important for boys to see their dads or other key male figures reading, as boys can become disengaged with books and reading without positive role models.

Find out what's happening at school. If your child's school offers parents' sessions explaining how literacy skills are taught, do all you can to attend. If you can't make it, ask for any handouts, or speak to your child's teacher at another time.

Teach good listening. Most children learn to read by 'sounding and blending' - learning letter sounds then saying them together to make a word, e.g. 'c-a-t - cat'. Continue to develop your child's listening skills (see this [Guide to Communication and Language](#) for ideas) to help them develop this skill.

Talk, talk, talk with your child - as much as you possibly can. Studies show that children from families where talk features regularly, read earlier and have better attainment in school overall.

Reading is not just about knowing what the words on the page say. It's about developing a love of books, and about being able to understand what you are reading. Make sure there are books in your home that your child can access. Join your local library and visit regularly. Encourage your child to look at different books - not just stories, but information books, poetry and comic



Talk to your child about print in the world around them. If there's a sign that says, 'Caution - wet floor' for example, point it out to your child, tell them what it says and discuss why it's there. Do the same with billboard advertisements, signs in the supermarket, words on road signs etc. Later, see if your child can spot and read any letter sounds or even actual words in the world around them. This gives children a strong message that reading is an important skill.

Share books – every day. It is likely your child will bring home a daily reading book from early on in their time at school. Share this with them, read it to them, discuss the plot, characters and settings. Share your child's own favourite books too. Daily reading with your child is one of the biggest ways in which you can influence their progress at school.

Practise letter sounds. Your child will begin to learn the letter sounds and how to blend them together early on. If they bring 'sounds' work home, practise with them in a fun way. Say the sound in different voices, play 'Splat the Sound' (where you have to find the sound on a page of print), help your child to gather a collection of objects which begin with the sound. Once your child has a collection of new sounds under their belt, you can play bingo, matching games or snap.

An Explanation of the Jargon!

Phonics – A method for teaching reading and writing by developing a reader's understanding of the sounds of the letters of the alphabet, both single letters and also sounds made from multiple letters, such as 'ay', 'sh', 'ee', 'igh'. Children learn the sounds and then learn to 'blend' them together to make words - 'c-a-t makes cat', 'sh-ee-p makes sheep'.

Decoding – The ability to read a word by sounding and blending as above.

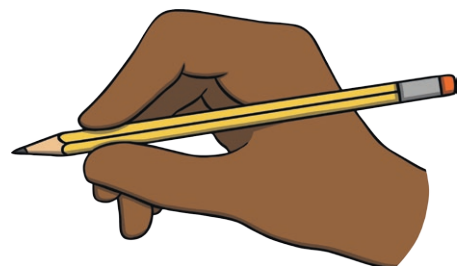
Irregular words – Words that cannot be read by sounding and blending individual letter sounds. Examples include 'the', 'my', 'because', but there are many more. Depending on the phonics scheme used by your child's school, these may also be known as 'tricky' words or 'red' words.

Writing

Early Learning Goal - Children use their phonic knowledge to write words in ways which match their spoken sounds. They also write some irregular common words. They write simple sentences which can be read by themselves and others. Some words are spelt correctly and others are phonetically plausible

Later, your child will continue to 'write' but instead of squiggles will use letters they know and have learnt - in any order! Often these are the letters in their name, or new ones from school. Continue to praise and encourage these emerging writing skills.

Let your child see you writing. Let them help you write a shopping list, a packing list for a holiday, or a postcard home.



Find out what's happening at school. If your child's school offers parents' sessions explaining how literacy skills are taught, do all you can to attend. If you can't make it, ask for any handouts, or speak to your child's teacher at another time

Once your child has begun to learn some sounds, they will want to use them to write words, but these will often be misspelt, though still readable. For example they may write 'hows' instead of 'house', or 'lighc' instead of 'like'. Don't panic – this is an essential step in your child's developing confidence as a writer. Once they have learnt the correct spelling for the different sounds, they will begin to use them. Praise these initial efforts at writing, don't correct them, unless you know that your child should know the correct spelling. If in doubt, ask the teacher.



Practise letter formation. Alongside learning the sounds that the letters make, your child will be learning to write them. Developing the correct letter formation now is so important, as children find it hard to 'relearn' this when they come to try and join their writing. Most schools have a handwriting scheme and children are taught little rhymes or other ways of reminding them how to form a letter. If you're unsure how this has been taught, ask your child's teacher.

Let your child write everywhere! Not just on paper with a pencil. Other great ideas are to write on a wall with water and a paintbrush, to write with a finger in sand or shaving foam on a large tray or plate, and to use a range of different writing tools such as chunky crayons, chalks or felt tips.

Develop your child's physical skills. Children's strength and control begins in the centre of their body and gradually develops along their limbs as they grow and develop. 'Gross' motor skills – big movements such as walking, jumping, lifting – come first, followed by 'fine' motor skills – involving smaller movements of the hands, wrists and fingers. See this [Guide to Physical Development](#) for some great ideas)

Children's first writing means a lot to them, if very little to you. If your child produces a page of squiggles, but solemnly tells you it is a shopping list – praise them! They truly believe this is writing, and this is an important step towards learning to write 'properly', for they are seeing the purpose of this skill.

The most important thing you can do is make time to listen to your child. Switch off the TV, radio and mobile phones and really listen to them!