

Children and Families Commission of Orange County Early Literacy Development Guidelines for Children Ages 0-5

Orange County children deserve the best. To get a good start in school and life, they must be good listeners, speakers, readers, and writers. The Children and Families Commission of Orange County convened the Early Literacy Task Force in 2003 to examine current research, national/state reading initiatives, and local resources in order to develop literacy guidelines and descriptions of best practices.

Best Practices for Early Literacy Development for:

- Parents and Day Care Providers
- Early Childhood Teachers
- Physicians, Nurses, and Other Health Care Providers
- Kindergarten Teachers
- Community Organizations

are available at
www.occhildrenandfamilies.com



The Commission offers the following Guidelines for those interacting with children ages birth to five. Early Literacy development efforts should:

1

Be comprehensive and age-appropriate for young children. Literacy includes listening, speaking, writing, and reading activities that are appropriate for a child's age. Literacy development also includes activities to foster children's social, emotional, and physical development.

2

Acknowledge that young children learn in different ways but all build on prior learning. Each child is unique, with an individual pattern and timing of development influenced by family and life experiences; however, new understanding builds on prior understanding.

3

Individualize decisions about next steps for listening, speaking, writing, and reading. Observations of young children's literacy activities enable parents and educators to plan future literacy actions.

4

Support the use of home language for children and families and, if needed, acquisition of English. Young children who have rich language experiences, regardless of the language, will more easily acquire English and learn to read fluently.

5

Base literacy activities on research and best practices in early childhood education. When adults use proven and effective methods, children will become good listeners, speakers, writers, and readers.

6

Create positive, secure, and engaging learning environments. Children's desire to be literate for their own enjoyment, information and communication should be nurtured and promoted.

While infants and toddlers do not read, they eagerly acquire listening and speaking skills that will help them become readers. Three- and four-year-olds expand their literacy skills as they converse, enjoy words and stories, and write pretend letters. Adults encourage children to be good readers by practicing the six early literacy guidelines shown above.

When we are clear about what we should do, and why we should do it, it is more likely that we will accomplish our goals. When children expand their language skills and become socially, emotionally, physically, and intellectually developed, their adjustment in elementary school will be easier and their success more assured. When all adults who interact with young children work together on early literacy, children will be the better for it!

Best Practices for Early Literacy Development for Parents and Day Care Providers



These descriptions offer some ways you may support young children’s literacy development. The Background Section offers information about why these activities are important. Please refer to the Endnotes for noted numbers or letters.

Although Josh is only three months old, reading to him is part of his mother’s daily routine.^A Libby picks books with simple, large pictures or designs. The stiff pages are made of cardboard so the book can be stood up. When Josh is a little older and can grasp objects with his fingers, she will change to cloth and soft vinyl books so he can pick them up. Libby reads for a minute or two from the book and talks about the pictures and then she places it nearby for Josh to see in his crib. As she does her household chores, Libby frequently holds Josh close to her in a cloth carrier so she can respond to him immediately. She elevates her pitch, varies her tone, exaggerates some syllables, and observes him intently.^{B,C} While feeding Josh, she sings a nursery rhyme and “explains” what she is doing in simple words.

Cindy’s parents point out familiar objects and people to their daughter.^B The eleven-month-old baby’s gestures, facial signs, and vocalizations are becoming more understandable to her parents. When she opens and closes her hand pointed at a nearby object, her parents realize she wants to be handed her nearby teddy bear.^{C,D} “Her father says, “You want your teddy bear. I will get it for you.” Cindy is interested in a book’s pictures when they are familiar objects and actions. She turns the cardboard pages herself while her parents read and talk about it. “Look at this picture of the kitty. Do you know what sound the kitty makes?” her mother asks. If Cindy responds, she gives her feedback. If she does not respond, her mother tells her, “Yes, the kitty says meow.” Her parents

help her practice words without Cindy having to say them yet.^{B,D,E,6} “Where is your nose?” “Give me a kiss.” “Let’s find your shoes.”

Katrina is two years old. She has recently begun speaking two words at a time, “Baby sleep.” Her mother, who models good language and conversation, responds, “Yes, your doll baby is sleeping in your bed.” Frank and Ivana sing, recite nursery rhymes, and talk about what Katrina sees and experiences.^{B,C} Their conversation, although not in English, is complex, rich, varied, and grammatically correct.⁴ Katrina’s vocabulary grows when her parents or family child care provider talk with her about her experiences, such as her rolling in the colorful autumn leaves. Her parents tell their daughter stories and read from short books with clear drawings or simple photographs. Katrina most likes books that mirror her life^{A,D,E,2}: missing mom and dad when they are away, going to bed, playing with her dog. Katrina loves the story’s repetitive lines and even joins in by chanting the refrain. Her parents realize they do not always have to finish a story as Katrina’s interest lags and she moves on to another learning adventure.¹ At her family child care home, there is a book nook with a rug to lie on and read. The caregiver sometimes sits in the nook’s rocking chair to read to one or more of the children.⁶

Maria loves to make books out of paper bags for her little brother Adam. On one, the three-year old draws pictures and his sister writes words that rhyme with “seal.”^{G,1} At bath time, Adam chants rhyming words to his mother: “meal, deal, feel, wheel.”^G Sometimes Adam pretend reads to his grandmother from books his family has previously read to him.^A Even though his grandmother does not read well, she listens intently and asks Adam questions about the book.^D Frequently she tells him stories about her homeland and childhood.^{C,D} When they watch television together, she talks with Adam about the show, helping him make sense of what he sees and hears.^{C,E} Sometimes the program triggers an interest that his parents extend with library books and other activities.²

Every evening at bedtime, Annie cuddles in her father or mother’s lap for a story or book.^A When Annie was an infant, her parents, Trung and Cho, started with cloth, plastic, and cardboard books that they shared with friends.^{1,6} Cho used different tones for the characters in

the books and sometimes she even sang the story.^{G,5} They read some stories many times, knowing that Annie enjoyed it. Now that Annie is four, they read library books. They usually get one of the fun alphabet books—there are so many titles from which to choose.^H They also frequently get a book about numbers or shapes.^A Annie and her parents choose a variety of stories, poetry, and factual books about things Annie as experienced or knows about.^{E,2} After visiting the beach, they read a wide variety of books on this topic. Trung points to the print as he reads aloud.^H He calls attention to the author listed on the title page.^F Annie turns the pages when they reach the bottom.^F Sometimes her father talks to her about the new words she hears or asks her what she thinks will happen next.^{D,E,1} When they re-read the story, Trung or Cho may point out letters and repeat the sounds they make. Later they talk about the book or Annie may share what she reads with her brother.^{C,D} Sometimes they play a hunt and seek game with a page from the newspaper as Annie finds words starting with a particular letter.^H

Always supporting her four-year old son Jimmy’s development, Barbara teaches him a simple song and they sing it in the car on the way to the grocery store.^G As they ride, she points out alphabet letters on the billboards and sings or reads them to Jimmy.^H The grocery store offers many learning experiences, as she asks her son to help her look for items on her shopping list, check things of the list,¹ talk about the items they buy,^E and share rhyming words for their foods.^G On the way home, they talk about their day’s adventure.^C

Five-year-old Javier shares a room with his big brother. His belongings are in drawers labeled with a picture and the word.¹ Sometimes his brother plays a game by asking in writing for a toy. Javier compares the word to the labels to find it.^{D,1} He enjoys making puppets about characters in his favorite books. He uses the puppets to tell the story to his friends or family.^{D,1} Javier also uses magnetic letters on the refrigerator to spell familiar words.¹ On the backs of his drawings, he writes what the picture is about and signs his name.¹ His parents save his writing efforts in a notebook to show how his writing is improving.³ They will share it with Javier’s kindergarten teacher.^{2,3} His parents are pleased to see that some of his pretend letters are looking more like real alphabet letters.

Background

Parents need not be especially skillful readers to help their children be successful readers and writers, but they do need to support their children’s learning. There are adult literacy programs that involve reading to children as a way to improve literacy skills of the whole family. Family members who give as much time as they can each day to help their children will find it is an exciting adventure. They work with the local school to improve their children’s literacy skills, even before the child starts school.

Parents understand their children learn important things about reading and writing long before they actually can read and write. Adults and children communicate in many ways—spoken or sung words or sounds, gestures, eye and body movements, and touch—to share thoughts, feelings, and ideas. Family members, caregivers, and teachers help children by encouraging them to listen, interact, and talk with adults and other children:

- With young infants: adults respond to young infants’ sounds, repeat those sounds, offer new sounds, and explain events that are taking place.
- With older, more mobile infants: adults respond by naming familiar objects and people, interpreting their attempts at words, repeating and expanding on what they say, and telling simple stories.
- With toddlers: adults communicate by modeling good speech, helping them expand on what they say, teaching new vocabulary in active ways.
- With 3- and 4-year-olds: adults have increasingly more complex conversations. They model the use of correct and rich language, no matter what the language is. They help children notice things around them and talk about them, thus increasing

their vocabulary and their knowledge about the world. They give these three- and four-year-olds time to play with materials and ideas. There are resource centers that loan toys and play materials but the important thing is to take part in the experience, whenever the adult can. They point out examples of print and encourage children to represent their thoughts in pictures or writing. They understand that children’s early attempts at writing may be scribbles, pretend writing, or invented letters, but it all is part of learning to write. Adults model for children the importance of reading and writing.

- Parents of 3- to 5-year olds also call attention to sounds in their environment as well as sounds in words. They play fun word games, rhymes, riddles, and sing songs together. When children begin to notice alphabet letters, adults may show letters that match the sounds they hear, especially sounds in their names. When they read stories together, parents help children understand what is happening. They help to expand their knowledge about vocabulary and become involved in the story or narrative. They occasionally point out the structure of the story, such as many stories beginning with “Once upon a time....”

Parents realize that when young children spend too much time watching TV and using computers and DVDs, it takes time away from other important activities they must develop such as language skills, vocabulary growth, social and emotional skills, physical development, muscular control, and learning concepts about materials and the world around them in a hands-on way. Brain research shows that young children’s active learning, rather than passive learning, stimulates nerve development in the brain.

Endnotes

Literacy skills or concepts utilized:

- A. Reading to/with/by children from a variety of fiction, nonfiction, poetry
- B. Listening for a purpose or to understand detail
- C. Shared conversations
- D. Fluency and Comprehension
- E. Vocabulary
- F. Concepts about print
- G. Phonemic awareness (sounds and rhythms of words and letters)
- H. Phonics (sound-symbol relationships)
- I. Writing for a purpose
- J. Knowledge of story structure and narrative structure

Early Literacy Development Guiding Principles utilized:

1. Be comprehensive and age-appropriate for young children.
2. Acknowledge that young children learn in different ways but all build on prior learning.
3. Individualize decisions about next steps for listening, speaking, writing, and reading.
4. Support the use of home language for children and families and, if needed, acquisition of English.
5. Base literacy experiences on research and best practices in early childhood education.
6. Create positive, secure, and engaging learning environments.